

GET MORE DONE! A PRODUCTIVITY WORKSHOP WITH THE EMAIL COACH

“**S**ave three weeks a year!” shouts the “Email Coach” Mike Song as he begins his presentation at HSMAI’s Affordable Meetings® National in Washington D.C. in September 2009. Dressed in a sweat suit and with a whistle around his neck, the “Coach” enthusiastically exhorted his audience to “cut email time by 20%, boost quality by 35%, and share what you learn today with at least two colleagues so it will ripple out.”

Mike Song is the author of two books, *The Hamster Revolution* and the *Hamster Revolution for Meetings*, and is passionate about



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helping to rescue people from the email glut plaguing most people’s work days.

Song asked the session’s attendees what bothered them about email, and they answered with the frustrations that bother most people today – spam, “reply all” when it’s not necessary, forwarded messages with long strings to read through, bcc’s, unnecessary email, and “GTP” – get to the point (or emails that fail to do that).

According to surveys Song has conducted, people average 29,000 emails per year, and the first tip he offered was “send less, get less.” For every five emails you send, you get three back. Ask yourself before you send if it is:

- Needed?
 - Timely?
 - Relevant?
 - Complete?
 - Appropriate (would you want to see it on the front page of a newspaper)?
 - Targeted (ramp down the “reply to all” by 20%)?
 - The best channel (would a phone call be better)?
- Song listed four “D’s” for overcoming inbox overload:
- Delete (sort by date, person, thread).
 - Do It Now (if it’ll take less than two minutes).
 - Defer it to a specific time (if it’ll take more than two minutes, click and drag it to your Calendar or Tasks).
 - Delegate (to a specific person and give a specific time – by 5 p.m. January 10, for instance...not by C.O.B., or worse, ASAP).

“Your brain is like a train,” Song advised. When you’re getting up speed on a project, don’t let yourself be distracted by dinging email. Turn off the sound.

After dealing with quantity, Song stressed the need for elevating the quality of email communication. Email action should be first and clear. Remember A-B-C: Action/Summary; Background; and Close (thanks, let me know any questions, etc.). Address the email to action takers and copy stakeholders.

Strengthen the subject line – make it five or six descriptive words so it can be easily retrieved in crowded email boxes. He suggests beginning each subject line with the purpose of the email:

- Action: (what you are asking them to do).
- Info: (what they need to know).
- Request: (what you need).
- Confirmed: (meetings, action to be taken, etc.).
- Delivery: (giving them what they've asked for).

Among other valuable hints, Song offered: Limit and explain attachments and use links where possible. Use bullets and clear, bold titles over paragraphs. Include next steps in the close.

“Sculpt the body,” he advises, humorously striking a body builder pose. “Pare it down, be concise, give a brief, warm greeting and open with calling the recipient by name.” Try to be clear – “Sounds good” is hazy; “Agreed, we will meet on October 10th” is clear and avoids misunderstandings.

Remember email etiquette. All caps is shouting, no caps decreases comprehension, and avoid emoticons – not everyone understands ;-). Text messaging abbreviations and colloquialisms are not appropriate and often not understood in business email. And please, Song asked jokingly, “join AAAAA” – American Association Against Abuse of Acronyms.

In addition, the “Coach” gave some invaluable tips for using Outlook:

- Control U – marks an already read email as unread.
- Highlight and right click to create a rule for similar incoming email to go directly to a folder. This is useful for segregating messages by people – all your boss’ emails could go directly to one folder so you can answer them immediately, or emails from people you know you don’t have to answer right away could go directly to a different folder.
- Highlight and click F12 to take the email into My Documents, saving the attachment too.
- Get used to click and drag – to Tasks, to Calendar, and to Contacts. It’s an easy step to save time and get better organized.



The Hamster Revolution, Song’s book, offers details on these suggestions and a lot more, and is well worth your time. You’ll be surprised at how much time it will *save* you!



Mike Song, CEO, *Cobesive Knowledge Solutions, Inc.*, is one of America’s leading experts on email and meeting effectiveness. His best-selling business productivity book, *The Hamster Revolution*, has sold over 125,000 copies and has been translated into 11 languages. A sought-after corporate trainer, consultant, and keynote speaker, Mike has helped millions of professionals save time, reduce stress, and get more done. Mike’s has been interviewed by CNN, Good Morning America, NPR, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, Fortune, Entrepreneur, Inc., The Washington Post and the New York Times. His clients include industry leaders such as CapitalOne, Pfizer, GE, P&G, Novartis, Fox, Sprint, General Mills, and HP. They know firsthand how Mike combines hard-hitting research, humorous stories, and hundreds of best practices to produce results. His second book, *The Hamster Revolution for Meetings*, was published in June of 2009. Contact: mike@hamsterrevolution.com.