

Tips on managing someone else's inbox

Keep on top of the boss's or someone else's inbox with these proven tips from the trenches:

1. Avoid duplicating work to the extent that you can. Admin Chrissy says she used this system: File email in three folders for your manager: Junk, Personal and News. Leave only work-related email in his inbox.

"If this was all I did, it would have been enough to keep him sane when dealing with his inbox," she says.

Once a day, her boss went through his inbox, flagging those for her to follow up on. After she'd handled the flagged email, she flagged the items again, this time in a different color.

And, of course, she cc'd him on any follow-up work she did. "If you don't, it's likely that a week from now your boss will come into your office wondering what happened with a specific issue," she says.



2. Scan for timely actions. For her exec, admin Kelli red flags any emails that need to be processed "today." She and her boss also meet daily to review the calendar and highlight messages that need prompt attention.

Tip: Consider printing out and delivering any hyper-urgent emails for an attention-stretched boss.

3. Customize any system you adopt. Many admins use a folder system, but the folder titles vary. Admin Adlee weeds through her boss's email to find any that she can file into folders titled Urgent, FYI and Delete. Yet another admin uses folders titled Action Required, Expense Reports and Market Reading.

"Everyone has a specific way they want things done," says Chrissy, "and many executives are very particular."

Meet with your executive to get an understanding of what she expects from you. Does she want you to bring urgent email to her attention, or simply handle it yourself? Does she want you to open and review any attachments? Are there certain senders whose emails should be considered private? Should you unsubscribe her from Junk lists? Get clarity on expectations.