4 ways to become master of your email

Email is supposed to make life easier and more efficient, but often it makes things harder and cuts into job productivity. To get more done in less time, you need to take charge of your inbox, technology author Dave Johnson writes.

He offers four tips for doing just that:

1. Put email time on your calendar. Unless your job specifically requires you to monitor and respond to email throughout the day, don't. Instead, put specific email-checking sessions on your calendar and stick to them. "I recommend setting aside three or four 30-minute slots each day," Johnson writes. During these scheduled periods, don't multitask, just focus on email, and "you'll clean out your inbox faster and end up with more time for other tasks throughout the day."

2. Adopt a one-touch rule. It's easy to get into the habit of reading a message, deciding you don't want to deal with it and then moving on to the next—only to have to come back to the original message later. This is hugely inefficient, so make a rule that you will handle each message only once.

3. Install a snooze button. There are exceptions to the one-touch rule. Some messages require additional information or can't be answered until a task has been completed, so you may not be able to answer them immediately. For these it's best to use a "snooze" function, which takes the message out of your inbox and brings it back at a time of your choosing. If you use Gmail on an iPhone, Mailbox is a good choice. For PC users, Boomerang is a similar service. And for a monthly fee of about $6, Sanebox works on any email service.

4. Take advantage of stock replies. While some email certainly does require a personal response, much of it doesn't. Create stock replies or canned responses for the basics and use them to save yourself time.

— Adapted from "Effective strategies to defeat your email inbox," Dave Johnson, CBS MoneyWatch.