

# **Terry's Inbox Lifesaver!**

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**Are you drowning in the dozens (hundreds!) of emails in your inbox? Do you scan an email and then leave it for "later"? Do you miss emails that got buried a few days (or weeks!) ago?**

**If you answered "yes," to even one of these questions, then catch my Inbox Lifesaver!**

Last week I looked at my inbox and felt a familiar clutch in my belly. I had over 1000 unopened emails! Most were the "announcement I should read" kind. They were mixed in with ones that I had deemed urgent, opened, and even replied to, but then just left sitting there. I've read enough organizing books to know that things left undone can eat away at our peace of mind without our even realizing it. And I know that's not good for my health or well-being!

What to do? Applying my "Pause" method (see Dec 2009 Tips) of checking in with my Inner Wisdom, and trusting that there is a solution, I found a very simple one! I'm happy to tell you that for 10 days, my inbox has been empty at the end of the day; I joyfully want to keep this up; and I feel great! So I want to share my simple solution with you.

My "Inbox Lifesaver" was inspired by remembering ideas from two great sources, and then tailoring them to my temperament.

One was from organization Guru David Allen (*Getting Things Done*, [davidco.com](http://davidco.com)). Basically he says - handle any incoming piece of mail (both e-, and snail) ONCE. Decide what to do next with it and put it where you can get at it. Then schedule times to take those actions. My favorite part of David's message is, if you can get it done in less than 2 minutes, do it now!

The other source is a column in the *New York Times*, March 2009 by Farhad Manjoo, *An Empty Inbox*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/05/technology/personaltech/05basics.html>

Manjoo suggests (among other tips) that we store everything in one Archive folder; you can always sort to find what you want.

Neither one of these felt quite right to me as a whole, but as I sat quietly, I realized that I agreed with two things:

I need to empty my Inbox daily, and I am willing to spend some time each day doing that. So here's the LifeSaver process I came up with.

There are two parts to the LifeSaver process: Decide on ACTIONS, and Create FOLDERS to support those actions. I'm going to describe my steps. While you're reading, see what feels right to you, and be open to your own version!

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(I use Entourage, which is basically Outlook for Mac's. If you use gmail or other web based programs, you need to explore what they offer in the way of folders.)

**Here are the FOLDERS:** I decided on a combination of ACTION and STORAGE folders that was simple enough for me to keep up with.

The four "most often used" folders are at the top of my folder list. The list arranges itself alphabetically, so you can get these folders at the top by putting the @ sign in front of the names. They are:

**@ ACTION**

**@ ARCHIVE**

**@ AWAIT REPLY**

**@ READ/DECIDE**

They are followed by a very few project folders. These are folders that meet two criteria: 1. I'll be doing a lot of emails with this project that I don't want to have to look for, and 2. The project is ongoing. As soon as the project is complete, I put the folder in @ ARCHIVE.

### **Here is the PROCESS:**

I gave myself permission to think of levels of importance of emails, ranging from "DELETE without even reading to "Must be Addressed in a Very Timely Way." The action I take (and folder I move the email to) will depend on where the email fits on this scale. I'm getting better at deciding that quickly as I scan the email in the preview pane.

So, two or three times a day:

Scan the new emails and answer these questions:

**Can I delete it?** If so, DO IT!

**Does it need an Reply/Action?** If so, can I do it in less than two minutes? Do it!

**Will the ACTION I need to take require more than two minutes?** Put it in @ ACTION to work on later. Plan a block of time for this.

**Once I ACT, will I be waiting for a reply?** Put the original in @ AWAIT REPLY (you can always search for your own reply in your sent folder if you need it.) If I don't expect a reply, put it in its @ ARCHIVE, or its appropriate project folder. Or DELETE if I don't need any more action at all.

**Will I be doing something else about this email, like attending an event?** Put it in @ ACTION so I can look it up for the event.

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**Do I need to read the email more carefully before I can decide what action to take (e.g. upcoming event announcements)?** Put it in READ/DECIDE. This folder is also for emails that just need more time to read, even if no decision is required.

You can find more sophisticated email management programs, involving technology and Rules, but I like manually putting the email in its proper place. And I don't have the patience to figure out the Rules!

The part I'm still working on is making time to go the folders for further ACTION. But I feel so much better throughout the day that I know this will evolve as well.

I hope that this "Inbox Lifesaver" inspires you to rise to the surface and lightly skim over the waves of information that flood in daily!

**Blessings to us all!**

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