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Take Back Your Life!

Workshop transforms simple email into a powerful productivity tool

Is email getting you down? Does it drain precious time out of your day and keep you from completing important tasks? Worse still, does simply launching Outlook fill you with dread? If so, you're in good company: in survey after survey, email has been named a top source of job dissatisfaction for employees.

But, after all these years of battling your inbox, it turns out that it doesn't have to be that way. As several attendees to a workshop called *Take Back Your Life!* attest email isn't just the problem, it's the solution. These converts say your inbox is waiting to be transformed from a necessary evil into a key tool for enhancing personal productivity.

"The course has absolutely helped me take back my life," says Vicki G., sales associate, TSG. "It's a great learning tool for allowing you to be in control and not have email controlling you. Since taking it, I have not had more than 20 emails in my inbox at any given time."

For finance manager Davina R, the greatest benefit has been the ability to re-focus on work and family, the fundamentals most important to her, and organize her days on that basis. "The workshop helped me to develop my strategic objectives in life and prioritize my projects and actions around them so I can focus more on doing the right things."

If you're thinking "come on now, that's a lot to expect from a simple email course," you're right. In truth *Take Back Your Life!* is about more than email, it's about reengineering workflows and daily decision-making using the advanced functions of Microsoft Outlook.

The one-day workshop was first introduced last fall by two members of a small team determined to find a solution to the "email problem." While researching the issue, Karen L., development consultant, Management and Professional Development in Learning and Development, and Leyland B., district sales manager, Commercial, TSG, became personally excited about the *Take Back Your Life!*

approach designed by McGhee Productivity Solutions. After working with the program themselves for a while, they decided to test it out through a small workshop last November.

"I still have people come up to me and rave about that first session, Leyland says. "In fact, every time we've run a course someone has taken the idea back to their teams and wanted us to run another workshop." She and Karen call these enthusiasts "program evangelists."

"One of the reasons people like the program is that it offers lots of simple, practical ideas that are easy to implement -- like opening every email only once and dealing with them using the four Ds: delete; do; delegate; or defer," adds Karen. "If you're not ready to deal with an email when it comes in then don't even open it until you can."

The program makes maximum use of often underutilized Outlook functions like the TaskPad, Calendar and appointment features to provide users with an integrated management system for processing information and scheduling and taking action toward objectives. Who knew that Outlook could convert emails into tasks and appointments, for example? Or that you could link all relevant messages, materials and documents to specific tasks for one-stop access?

"It takes discipline to apply everything we were taught," admits Igor S., practice principle, Consulting and Integration for TSG, "But the benefit is definitely improved productivity. You have more control over what's happening and your email and your days are more focused and more manageable.

The best thing about the program for Sue T. "is a clearer, more organized mind." An executive assistant in Pre-sales, TSG, Sue says that implementing the program is a work in progress, but one that pays off quickly. Sue took her inbox from over 1,000 emails pre-workshop to just 85 today.

According to a post-workshop survey of attendees, soft benefits like more focus and peace of mind also translate into increased productivity. Participants report time savings of just under two hours a day, with time shaved off activities like email "grazing," dealing with interruptions and finding information.

To date, Leyland has arranged four workshops run by consultants from McGhee Productivity Solutions. Upcoming sessions are scheduled for May 1 in Montreal (now fully booked) and May 2 and 3 in Mississauga. Future classroom sessions will be run across the country based on demand with virtual sessions also planned.

For anyone thinking of signing up, Karen has this advice: "You have to be open to it and willing to try something different. If you are, you will be amazed at what you can do with email."

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For more information on McGhee Productivity Solutions and *Take Back Your Life!* please visit www.mcgheeproductivity.com or call 303-573-0723.