# How to beat the "back from vacation" blues.

**By Gianni Anchois**

It's that time of the year. Back from a well deserved summer break, a sense of disgust grabs you at the thought of the hundreds emails waiting in your inbox. I call it the "back from vacation blues". It's an illness impacting millions of people around the world.

### Back to work

Vacations are over. Cities and offices are getting back to normal, filling up with people and the usual madness. Traffic gets heavier by the day and before you know it, you'll be back at the same level of stress that you were just a few weeks ago. And it will likely stay that way for the rest of the year, whilst you long and wait for the next break.

You dread the moment you'll launch your email application and stare at the bulging inbox. You fear that maybe spending two weeks completely off the grid wasn't such a great idea (actually, it was!). You open the first few messages and inevitably they intertwine with others you haven't read yet. Your email thread starts growing like crazy. Your head starts spinning...

### Please help!

Don't feel lost. There are many techniques to help you beat the email blues. Lots of people use colours to highlight importance, priority, names

of senders to be read first, etc. But I found that those do not work too well for me. So here's the method I developed and use:

1. Sort your inbox by date and ignore any new message that is flagged URGENT or any subject line starting with URGENT/ACT NOW, and the likes. If somebody's email really is that important, they should have left you a voice mail or sent a text message. Their "urgency" is not necessarily yours. If you work for a large corporation, most of what the company calls urgent is average priority at best. They will email again if they really need you.

2. Sort by the "From" field. This way you can prioritise which sender to read first. People should always come first in your criteria. You could decide to give preference to clients, to your boss, or to anybody you believe is worth your priority attention.

3. Sort by "Subject". This way you can concentrate on what topic seems to be the most urgent to address. You can also easily see which email has been sent on a certain topic across the calendar timeline, and reduce to a minimum the risk of replying to somebody when someone else already has. You can also spot threads and patterns very quickly and focus on the latest message on the same topic.

4. Sort by "date received". This is to make sure that you have not lost or missed anything across the previous steps, and it also helps make sure you have downloaded everything from the email server to your PC, laptop or tablet. Use plenty of flags to mark items completed, those in needs of a follow up and those that require any kind of short-term activity.

5. File everything else away in folders organised by sender's name (1st choice) and major topic (2nd choice).

## Keep your festive mindset

With the email issue done with, you can now concentrate on how to keep your vacation mindset going for the whole year.

No, I'm not talking about quitting your job and spending the rest of your days hanging out on the beach (although that's sometimes a good option).

What I mean is that you can reduce your level of stress by keeping the vacation attitude going for longer than just a few weeks per year. Three simple rules:

1.  Slow down. Purposely take longer to complete any task than you used to. Rushing through the day is certainly the most stress-generation factor in our lives, so don't rush. Take your time to complete things on your own schedule (within common sense limits...).

2.  Don't multi-task. Avoid multi-tasking at all cost. Human minds are not built for complex multi-tasking. Our brain can certainly manage spikes of concurrent activities, but cannot work all the time like that. It has been proven that multi-tasking actually reduces efficiency and opens up the field for more mistakes and errors, together with lower quality output. At work, we tend to believe that having email, Facebook, twitter, instant messaging, and all the technological paraphernalia on at all times makes us more productive. It doesn't. All it does is make us tired and stressed out, hence actually less productive.

3.  Adopt the "who cares" mindset. People and modern society is fundamentally built on bad behaviour. We see it every day, from the lady jumping the queue at the post office to the guy with the flashy sport car cutting in front of you in the traffic mayhem on the way to work. You know what? Who cares. Time is plenty. Yes you hear me right. Everybody will tell you that time is never enough, but they are wrong.

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*Time is just a manifestation of the way you allocate it.*

A good example is when you are given a task to be completed in a certain time. If you are given a day, you will take a day to do it. If you are given an hour, you will take an hour to finish it. And the quality of work won't actually change that much, all that will differ — maybe — is the size and comprehensiveness of your output. But the good news is that in the current business climate, fast beats accurate every time so you're still ok.

Everyday life is exactly the same. If you allocate more time to do something, you will use it up. So don't. Keep mono-tasks simple and prepare to spend just enough time to perform those, considering possible delays caused by other people as in the examples above.

There you go: slow down, avoid multi-tasking and ask "who cares?" more often, I guarantee you will beat the "back from vacation" blues.

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