

15 Tips for Reducing Distraction/e-Distraction

By Randy Dean, MBA

The E-mail Sanity Expert®

(As featured in his May 2018 **Timely Tips** E-Newsletter – see information on how to subscribe below.)

I now lead a very popular keynote and workshop program called “From Distracted to Productive: Finding Your Focus in a Hyper-Interrupted, e-Distracted World.” At the end of this program, I provide this list of 15 tips below for reducing your overall distraction and finding your focus and productivity again. Just integrating a few of these tips may help you find much more sanity in your work day and life!

1. Set special notifications/sounds for your most important e-mailers, phone callers, and texters. *Here’s a YouTube tutorial I created on doing this:* <https://youtu.be/K8zSp0RLnUw> Don’t get distracted by everything coming in, but only by the most important things/people.
2. Check the rest of your inputs (e-mail, voice mail, documents & e-docs, etc.) on a time-based regimen throughout the day that you decide is right for you and your job! *Here is another YouTube tutorial on how to process those new inputs using Outlook:* <https://youtu.be/YMhkNcBt9k4> and *here’s one for Gmail:* <https://youtu.be/5Y4cxK4ap-Y>
3. Stop checking e-mail first thing each morning! Instead, check your calendar for today and a few days ahead to prep for what is coming, and then build a smart, prioritized task list for the day that reflects your key responsibilities and projects. (This should only take 3-5 minutes.) Have a plan for your time and your tasks before checking your inputs.
4. When transitioning between active project/activities/events, before leaving something for something else, make a note of what you need to do next on the FIRST THING before giving your full attention to the NEXT THING. This way, you can easily remember where you left off on that first thing when you come back to it. Actively add items throughout the day to your task list, calendar, and/or sticky notes before you transition to something new.
5. Related to that, if you get an unexpected phone call or “stop by”, ask for a “quick second” from that interrupting party so that you can once again take a quick note (grab that sticky note!) of what you need to do next *before* giving them your full attention on their new matter. (This will actually help you with also being a better listener and customer servant.)
6. Take advantage of mobile technology (laptops, tablets, smart phones, mobile hot spots, etc.) to find places and times when you are much less likely to be interrupted. Periodically get away from where people can easily find you so you can get your most important work done. Remember, *sometimes the worst place to get things done is where people know they can find you!*
7. Consider the layout of your office/workstation/desk. Does it make it easy for people to interrupt? If so, periodically physically position yourself and your equipment to reduce easy distraction/interruptions. (Or, just close the door if you have one!)
8. Own your phone and apps rather than letting them own you. Manage your settings and notifications to turn off the incessant “blinging” and push notifications from your apps and devices. Watch to see which apps are bugging you the most, and silence or delete them! (My life improved dramatically the MINUTE I turned off notifications from Facebook and Twitter!

9. Put your most distracting apps “out on the wings” of your phone/tablet, while putting your productivity tools (e-mail, calendar, contacts, documents, task list, notes app, etc.) on the “center panel” of your device. Make it easier to be focused and productive.
10. Or, don’t even download distracting apps. Check to see if there is a good mobile web site option from that content provider. Then, just bookmark it in your mobile browser, so you only get that content when YOU go to look for it (I did this for both CNN & ESPN.)
11. Consider a social media diet/regimen. Evidence shows that those that check social media the most are more anxious and/or depressed. But those that check it only occasionally are actually more productive. Limit your exposure to social tools/media, and keep it positive in nature. Block or delete those people/organizations that are too intrusive and/or negative.
12. Also, consider reducing your social media channels. Pick one or two that you will use as your primary apps, and don’t bother with the rest. The more social media apps/tools you use, the more time you will waste just trying to keep up with everything and everyone.
13. Consider a clutter clean-out. If you often find yourself looking for stuff on your computer, on your desk, or in your office (and not finding it quickly!), that means your clutter may be killing your productivity. One of the best things you can do is clean up and clear out your clutter. Here is an article I wrote on clearing up your physical clutter:
http://www.randalldean.com/Paper_Office_Clutter_Reduction_Article.pdf
14. Similarly, consider an e-mail inbox clutter reduction. The less you have in your inbox and the better organized you have your saved e-mails, the easier it will be to be efficient when managing your inbox. I usually have 10 or less e-mails in my inbox proper, but I actually have literally thousands of e-mails at my quick disposal in my related e-mail file structures, and I know how to find them quickly! Here’s another article on efficient e-mail inbox cleanup: http://www.randalldean.com/Efficient_Inbox_Cleanup_Process.pdf
15. Set up hands free driving tools on your phone. My phone now automatically switches to driving mode once it senses I’m going over a few miles per hour. It then announces phone calls, including who is calling me if they are in my contact database, giving me the option to answer or ignore, and also gives an option to hear and respond to any text messages received – ALL WITHOUT HAVING TO LOOK AT THE PHONE! Don’t be a statistic (3,000 deaths per year and more than 30,000 injuries *in the U.S. alone* due to distracted driving!)

Just referring to the checklist above (both for bad and best practices), and possibly sharing it with others in your work group or team, might help greatly reduce your overall distraction and e-distraction. Remember to own your devices, own your software, own your e-mail, and own your attention!

And if you’d like to learn more about my program, “From Distracted to Productive” and my other programs, as well as see a little video snippet of one of my presentations, please visit my web site: <http://www.randalldean.com> You can even get access to recent full-length webinar replays on many of my programs (for a fee) here.



Randy Dean, MBA, *The E-mail Sanity Expert*®, has been one of the most popular expert speakers on the conference, corporate, and university training and speaking circuit for several years. The author of the recent Amazon e-mail bestseller, *Taming the E-mail Beast*,

Randy is a very popular and engaging time, e-mail, and technology management speaker and trainer. He brings more than 25 years of speaking and training experience to his programs, and has been very popular with programs including Taming the E-mail Beast, Finding an Extra Hour Every Day, Optimizing Your Outlook, Time Management in "The Cloud" Using Google and Other Online Apps, and Smart Phone Success & Terrific Tablets. Learn more at <http://www.randalldean.com>.

You have permission to reuse, reprint, and/or edit this article for space if you include the paragraph above.

NOTE: You can subscribe to Randy's monthly **Timely Tips** e-newsletter – where he features one time-saving tip and one smart phone/tablet featured app each month – by simply sending him an e-mail at randy@randalldean.com and putting "Subscribe" in the subject line.

You may also want to check out or even subscribe to **Randy's YouTube Channel** at <http://www.youtube.com/user/JanaRandyDean> where he often posts some of his favorite technology tips, snippets from program sessions, info about popular programs, and more.

You can join Randy on LinkedIn at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/randydean>

You can follow Randy on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/timelyman>

Like Randy's Taming E-mail Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/tamingemailbeast/>

(Wait, did I just break my tip above about having too many social media channels???)

Randy Dean, MBA

The E-mail Sanity Expert ®

<http://www.randalldean.com>

Everything E-mail!



I thought you might find this compilation of my PDF tip sheets and videos very useful for all of your e-mail activities. They cover e-mail processing/efficiency and several e-mail etiquette/composition issues. Enjoy!

Quick Tips for Outlook & E-mail Excellence (Including YouTube Video Tips):

http://www.randalldean.com/Randy_Dean_Quick_Tips_for_Outlook_Excellence.pdf

Quick Tips for Gmail & Google Users (Including YouTube Video Tips):

http://www.randalldean.com/Randy_Dean_Quick_Tips_for_Gmail_Google.pdf

The Three Key Ways You Abuse Your E-mail Inbox:

http://www.randalldean.com/3_Ways_You_Abuse_Your_Inbox.pdf

How I Start My Day (My Daily/Weekly Routine):

http://www.randalldean.com/How_I_Start_My_Day_Daily-Weekly_Routine_Article.pdf

My Top Ten E-mail Timesavers: http://www.randalldean.com/Top_Ten_Email_Timesavers.pdf

My "Efficient" Inbox Cleanup Process: http://www.randalldean.com/Efficient_Inbox_Cleanup_Process.pdf

Better E-mail Subject Lines Article: http://www.randalldean.com/E-mail_Subject_Lines_Bonus_Article.pdf

Writing "Saner" E-mails Article: http://www.randalldean.com/Sane_Written_E-mails_Article.pdf

"Who Owns a Sent E-mail? Article: www.randalldean.com/Who_Owns_a_Sent_E-mail.pdf

How to Receive Fewer E-mails: http://www.randalldean.com/Ten_Tips_for_Fewer_Emails.pdf

Handling CC's, Replies, Forwards, FYI's and "Reply All's":

www.randalldean.com/CC_Forward_Reply_FYI_Article.pdf

Top Ten Outlook E-mail Tips: www.randalldean.com/Top_Ten_Outlook_E-mail_Tips.pdf

15 Ways to Reduce Overall Distraction (Including a Few E-mail Tips):

http://www.randalldean.com/15_Distraction_e-Distraction_Reduction_Strategies.pdf

NEW VIDEO: Cleaning Up a Messy Inbox: <https://youtu.be/yEyxLPSg6g8>

Most Popular YouTube e-mail video – converting e-mail into task & calendar in MS Outlook (20K+ views!):

<https://youtu.be/YMhkNcBt9k4>

My Three Favorite Gmail Tips: <https://youtu.be/5Y4cxK4ap-Y>

My "Taming the E-mail Beast" Full YouTube Playlist (16 videos!): <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3CBCCF1FB04D4031>

Subscribe to my YouTube channel or join me on LinkedIn to get notices when new videos and articles are posted:

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/janarandydean> | **LinkedIn:** <http://www.linkedin.com/in/randydean/>

Randy Dean, MBA

The E-mail Sanity Expert ®

<http://www.randalldean.com>



My “PDF of Productivity PDFs”

Rather than have you click through individually to a number of different PDF files, I have put them all on a single list in this one document. Just click the related link to launch the PDF in your browser and/or download for your own use. And yes, you can share this file with others! Enjoy!

Quick Tips for Outlook & E-mail Excellence (Including YouTube Video Tips):

http://www.randalldean.com/Randy_Dean_Quick_Tips_for_Outlook_Excellence.pdf

Quick Tip for Gmail & Google Users (Including YouTube Video Tips):

http://www.randalldean.com/Randy_Dean_Quick_Tips_for_Gmail_Google.pdf

The Three Key Ways You Abuse Your E-mail Inbox:

http://www.randalldean.com/3_Ways_You_Abuse_Your_Inbox.pdf

How I Start My Day (My Daily/Weekly Routine):

http://www.randalldean.com/How_I_Start_My_Day_Daily-Weekly_Routine_Article.pdf

My Top Ten E-mail Timesavers: http://www.randalldean.com/Top_Ten_Email_Timesavers.pdf

My “Efficient” Inbox Cleanup Process: http://www.randalldean.com/Efficient_Inbox_Cleanup_Process.pdf

Smart Phone/Tablet Configuration: http://www.randalldean.com/Smart_Phone_Success_Bonus_Article.pdf

Writing “Saner” E-mails Article: http://www.randalldean.com/Sane_Written_E-mails_Article.pdf

“Who Owns a Sent E-mail? Article: www.randalldean.com/Who_Owns_a_Sent_E-mail.pdf

How to Receive Fewer E-mails: http://www.randalldean.com/Ten_Tips_for_Fewer_Emails.pdf

Handling CC’s, Replies, Forwards, FYI’s and “Reply All’s”:

www.randalldean.com/CC_Forward_Reply_FYI_Article.pdf

Clearing Out Your “Stacks & Piles/Clutter” Article:

http://www.randalldean.com/Paper_Office_Clutter_Reduction_Article.pdf

“The Tech Doesn’t Matter – It is the System” Article:

http://www.randalldean.com/Time_Management_Tech_and_Infrastructure.pdf

Five Tips for Better Staff/Team Meetings: www.randalldean.com/Five_Tips_For_Better_Meetings.pdf

Top Ten Outlook E-mail Tips: www.randalldean.com/Top_Ten_Outlook_E-mail_Tips.pdf

Top Ten Tips for Your Other Outlook Functions:

http://www.randalldean.com/Top_Ten_Outlook_Function_Tips.pdf

Killer Keystroke Shortcuts for Windows Users (note: this file is a few years old, but most still work!)

http://www.randalldean.com/Randy_Favorite_Keystroke_Combos.pdf

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/janarandydean> | LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/randydean/>

Randy Dean's Quick Tips for Gmail & Google

- 1. In Chrome Browser settings, set up so your Gmail opens automatically and logs you in.**
And this will help automate the very next step for you ...
- 2. Use “Shortcuts for Google” app from Chrome Store to Set Up Productivity Suite:**
Select apps for Gmail, Google Calendar, Contacts, Tasks, Keep, and Drive. Push button start up for the day. Can also add Search, Translate, Maps, Store, YouTube, more!
- 3. E-mail Decision Tree:** Quick ones now, longer ones: task or calendar, then file or delete!
- 4. Use the “More” button in open e-mail to convert e-mails into task and calendar items:**
Simply click on “More” and then “Add to Tasks” or “Create Event”
- 5. Mouse over the Sender’s address to add to Google Contacts:** With an open e-mail, simply mouse over the sender’s address – pop up window will let you add to Contacts
- 6. Use Canned Responses as an “Auto-E-mail-Tool”:** This is in the Settings under Labs. Enable Canned Responses, and then you can create automated responses to FAQs
- 7. You could also add your automated responses to Google Keep:** Once you save a note in Keep, when open, lower right corner, you have options to share, including by e-mail
- 8. Get Notices when Your “Most Important Senders” send an email:** First, under Settings, create a filter off that sender’s e-mail address and then mark those important – hit save. Then, turn on notifications ONLY for important e-mails under Settings General tab.
- 9. Get in Your General Settings Tab.** Set up your automated signature, set up your picture, turn on your “stars”, reduce notifications, and learn Keystroke Combos.
- 10.SPAM?** Select checkbox next to likely spam messages coming into your Gmail inbox, and then use the “Stop Sign” button at the top. Those messages will now go to spam.
- 11.Don’t start your day in your e-mail!** Instead, start your day for a couple minutes in your calendar, reviewing back a few days, and forward a week or so, then ...
- 12.Build a smart task list for Today!** ... a task list that matches your available time for today and focuses on key projects, priorities, clients, and customers ... this is a **5-minute drill!**
- 13.Too much going on?** Re-file those tasks that aren’t critically urgent/important for today back to Projects/People so your task list fits your day (“effective procrastination”!)
- 14. Remember** – favorite task views are “Today”, “By Project”, “By People”, “Completed” – you can use the last one to track what you got done and when you got it done!
- 15. Work your day after your inbox is clear with the Task, Task, Task, E-mail strategy!**
- 16. Start Your E-mails with Good Subject Lines!** Make sure your subject lines reflect the project, person, client, and/or task they are related to – make it easy for recipient!
- 17. Keep Your E-mails Short and Sweet!** Get to the point, but do it nicely! Identify tasks, owners of tasks, and due dates very clearly
- 18. E-mail is NOT good for complex, difficult, emotional, or hyper-urgent messages.**
Works best: simple info that’s easily understood and acted on & not critically urgent.

19. **If that e-mail is urgent, pick up the phone to make sure it was received.** Remember, some e-mails fail, and some people aren't constantly checking their e-mail!
20. **PUTP** – Pick up the phone! **EOM** – End of message. **NRN** – No Reply Necessary
21. **Go BIG!** Build a “Priority Note” at least once a year that features your key goals, projects, activities, events, and people. Break it down into subprojects and action items.
22. **Refer to Your Priority Note Every Week:** Incorporate it into your task list and calendar as individual task and calendar items to fit your most important “stuff” in your plans
23. **Try to work the majority of your day from your Calendar and Task list, not your e-mail inbox!** This will help you be more focused, more productive, and less distracted.
24. **Have fun, and always look for places to get a little better, smarter, faster.**

**Visit my YouTube Channel for Short Tutorial Videos on
Gmail, Google, Outlook, and More
(Consider Subscribing!)**

<https://www.youtube.com/user/janarandydean>

Three of my Favorite Gmail Tips:

<https://youtu.be/5Y4cxK4ap-Y>

A Useful Chrome Add-On: Shortcuts for Google

<https://youtu.be/TPc-sOmwel8>

Reducing E-mail Distraction in Outlook/Google:

<https://youtu.be/K8zSp0RLnUw>

© Randy Dean, MBA
The E-mail Sanity Expert®
randy@randalldean.com
<http://www.randalldean.com>

Get access to full-length training programs (for a fee) on my website. Click on the e-learning tab for more info.

Randy Dean's Quick Tips for Outlook and E-mail

- 1. E-mail Decision Tree:** Quick ones now, longer ones: task or calendar, then file or delete!
- 2. “Drag & Drop” to create task, calendar & contacts:** Left click on e-mail, hold the click, and drag to Tasks, Calendar, or People. Right click gives options for attachments.
- 3. Use Signatures as an “Auto-E-mail-Tool”:** Best way to access Signatures tool is to open a new e-mail – create as many as you like to speed up your common replies
- 4. Quick Parts are great for FAQs:** Find this under the insert tab in an open message – select text you find yourself always typing and make it a Quick Part instead!
- 5. Get Notices when Your “Most Important Senders” send an email:** Right-click on their message, then Rules – Create Rule to set pop ups and different sounds for them!
- 6. SPAM?** Could create rule to permanently delete repeat spammers, or just click on message to select it, hold SHIFT key, and hit Delete! It is gone!
- 7. Don’t start your day in your e-mail!** Instead, start your day for a couple minutes in your calendar, reviewing back a few days, and forward a week or so, then ...
- 8. Build a smart task list for Today!** ... a task list that matches your available time for today and focuses on key projects, priorities, clients, and customers ... this is a **5-minute drill!**
- 9. Too much going on?** Re-date those tasks that aren’t critically urgent/important for today so your task list fits your day (remember “effective procrastination”?)
- 10. Remember** – favorite task views are “Today”, “By Category”, “Completed” – you can use the last one to track what you got done and when you got it done!
- 11. Work your day after your inbox is clear with the Task, Task, Task, E-mail strategy!**
- 12. Start Your E-mails with Good Subject Lines!** Make sure your subject lines reflect the project, person, client, and/or task they are related to – make it easy for recipient!
- 13. Keep Your E-mails Short and Sweet!** Get to the point, but do it nicely! Identify tasks, owners of tasks, and due dates very clearly
- 14. E-mail is NOT good for complex, difficult, emotional, or hyper-urgent messages.**
Works best: simple info that’s easily understood and acted on & not critically urgent.
- 15. If that e-mail is urgent, pick up the phone to make sure it was received.** Remember, some e-mails fail, and some people aren’t constantly checking their e-mail!
- 16. PUTP** – Pick up the phone! EOM – End of message. NRN – No Reply Necessary
- 17. Go BIG!** Build a “Priority Note” at least once a year that features your key goals, projects, activities, events, and people. Break it down into subprojects and action items.
- 18. Refer to Your Priority Note Every Week:** Incorporate it into your task list and calendar as individual task and calendar items to fit your most important “stuff” in your plans
- 19. Try to work the majority of your day from your Calendar and Task list, not your e-mail inbox!** This will help you be more focused, more productive, and less distracted.
- 20. Have fun, and always looks for places to get a little better, smarter, faster.**

**Visit my YouTube Channel for Short Tutorial Videos on
Outlook, E-mail, Google and More
(Consider Subscribing!)**

<https://www.youtube.com/user/janarandydean>

Converting E-mails into Outlook Task & Calendar Items:

<https://youtu.be/YMhkNcBt9k4>

**Using Signatures & Drafts in Outlook as
“Automated E-mail” Tools:**

<https://youtu.be/zOOGIXMt7xg>

Reducing E-mail Distraction Through Your Settings:

<https://youtu.be/K8zSp0RLnUw>

My Favorite Outlook Task View: The “Today” View:

https://youtu.be/Vbqtd_NQ9FA

Essential Outlook Set-Up Tips:

<https://youtu.be/QgSEo4608Cw>

© Randy Dean, MBA
The E-mail Sanity Expert®
randy@randalldean.com
<http://www.randalldean.com>

Get access to full-length training programs (for a fee) on my website. Click on the e-learning tab for more info.