

Managing Information Overload: Getting More Done in Less Time

by Tony Buzan, Tony Dottino and Richard Israel

OVERVIEW: MORE INFORMATION THAN EVER BEFORE

Tell the truth: Are you struggling to keep up with the e-mail, calls, meetings and written material on your plate? Are you constantly being interrupted and forced to shift your attention and lose your focus? Do your company's best-laid plans change just when you've gotten underway? Is your current reading speed too slow to get you through all the written stuff you need to understand and follow up? Most business people honestly tell us—YES.

Then welcome to Information Overload and the stress it's bringing to today's workplace. And if you think the overload is bad now, just wait! Bill Gates says it's going to get worse. Much worse. "Business is going to change more in the next 10 years than it has in the last 50."

Are YOU and your organization ready? Susan Ford Collins and Richard Israel have found that like most organizations today, your answer is probably NO. If so, this chapter will teach you how to update your Information Skill Set and to free yourself, and your team, from the stress and struggle of undigested information bombarding you from all sides. This chapter will help you move more from a reactive, crisis driven, to proactive, outcome-oriented environment. It will enable you to move from Information Overload to an ever-expanding Knowledge Base.

WHAT HIDDEN INEFFICIENCIES ARE HOLDING YOU BACK?

Now that you understand all three gears of success and leadership, let's analyze what else might prevent you, and your organization, from achieving the goals and outcomes you have in mind for your business and life. What may be costing you time, money, and profitability? Are there hidden inefficiencies you may not

have noticed until now? First, let's examine the 1st gear areas that have fallen behind. These areas may be putting your business at risk, the risk Marvin and his team faced—the risk of obsolescence.

NEW TIMES, NEW REQUIREMENTS

Instead of making our lives easier, technological innovations like the internet, e-mail, Google, cell phones and Palm Pilots, have generated a glut of information almost none of us can handle.

You may carefully budget time and money to upgrade equipment and technical skills, but are you as carefully budgeting time and money to update the skills you and your people use 80 per cent of the time—the backbone of your business—your human information processing skills? Chances are you're not.

Many of today's business leaders are so paralyzed and fatigued, so caught up in putting out fires that many haven't noticed what's happening to them. Most business people are still relying on skills they learned in school. But chances are your teachers had absolutely no idea what today's information flows would be like. Or how to prepare you to succeed and lead in a 24/7 information-based, global economy.

Today we are bombarded by information—mail (electronic, voice and snail), phone calls (wired, portable and cell), messages (voice, memo and text), meetings, journals, newsletters, manuals, reports, books and e-books, TV, movies, advertisers. Like a frog in a pot of slowly heating water, we are now nearing the boiling point—the point where “what you're not noticing” could do you in!

To reiterate, according Bill Gates, “Business is going to change more in the next 10 years than it has in the last 50.” So if you're pressed already, you need to do something now—something in 1st gear.

Whether you realize it or not, Information Overload costs you Big Money because it:

- paralyzes your analytical capacity;
- increases anxiety and self-doubt;
- results in a tendency to blame others;
- produces a lack of critical thinking and creativity;
- increases errors and accidents;
- makes you and your team less productive;
- throws your life, and your family's, out of balance;
- increases absenteeism and healthcare costs.

**Grass Roots
Tips**
Make a list of
your stresses.
Analyze the
causes.

HIDDEN COSTS: HEALTH, STRESS AND ERRORS

As with any disease, the first step to cure is diagnosis. Dr Nikolai Bezroukov of the UN Sustainable Development Networking Program states:

You have Pseudo-Attention Deficit Disorder if:

- *you find your mind wandering from tasks that are uninteresting or difficult;*
- *you say things without thinking and regret having said them later;*
- *you make quick decisions without thinking enough about their possible bad results;*
- *you have a quick temper, a short fuse;*
- *you have trouble planning in what order to do a series of tasks or activities and are time starved;*
- *you have a hard time waiting your turn in group activities;*
- *you usually work on more than one project at a time and fail to finish many of them.*

From the Information Age, we have moved into the Knowledge Age. So now, instead of struggling to get information, we are faced with a new challenge: what skills do we need to convert the glut of information that is available to us—the piles of stuff on our desks and in our computers, the hours of meetings that chew up huge chunks of our day—into the knowledge we need to skillfully run our businesses and lives? But here is the rub.

BUSY PEOPLE CAN'T LEARN

“It’s true,” says Susan. “They’re stuck in 2nd gear, doing more–better–faster. So instead of slowing down long enough to master 1st gear—to follow instructions exactly, to learn as much as they can from trainers and manuals, to practice the new skills until they can perform them safely and effectively consistently—they put in a little effort and then rush back to their desks.”

“Re-plugged into 2nd gear goals and expectations, they quickly become frustrated because they can’t get up to speed with their incompletely-learned new skills. To meet deadlines and make quotas, to get bonuses and pay raises, they revert to old familiar methods and approaches. And the problem gets worse. (This is the heart of the reactive, going out of business approach at work again.)

“Your challenge is to reward yourself and your team not just for 2nd gear behaviors but 1st gear behaviors as well. OK, let’s gear down and get started.”

HOW TO GET MORE FROM READING IN LESS TIME

Reading requires your brain to convert linear information into a multi-sensory form it can receive, store and retrieve. And it does this rapidly—even though you’ve probably been taught otherwise. To prove this point, read the following note:

I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulaclyt uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg The phaomneal pweor of the hmuan mind. Aoccdrnig to rscheearch taem at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mtttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Such a cdonition is arppoiatly cllaed Typoglycemia.

Amzanig huh? Yaeh and yuo awlyas thought slpeling was ipmorantt!

Yes, your brain is capable of doing much more work much more quickly when you know how.

What is your current reading speed?

“Most people know their weight but very few know their reading speed. How many words per minute are you reading? This information will become more and more important to you, and your organization, in the months and years ahead,” says Richard.

Grass Roots Tip

Know your current reading speed in words per minute.

Before Susan and Richard teach you more, let’s take a few minutes to evaluate your starting point so you can assess your progress and improvement along the way. And so you can reinforce the time and effort you are investing.

Make sure you have a pencil or pen as well as a watch with a second hand or timer for this exercise. When you are ready, set the timer for **3 minutes** and read the following story *at your normal pace*.

Mighty Mike: What a Difference a Leader Makes

Susan Ford Collins and Richard Israel

Phil Johnson was frustrated and worried: frustrated that in his mid 50s with a Masters from a top University and 30 years in PR, he found himself unwanted and redundant and worried that last year he had sent out 150 resumes which resulted in five interviews but no job.

His funds were drying up. If it wasn’t for his wife Audrey’s position as a loan officer, they would have exhausted their savings months ago. “What can I do?” was the question that plagued Phil day and night. Interviewers kept telling him he was too old for a full time corporate → position. But, with 7

years to go until Social Security and Medicare would kick in, he had to find something—and hopefully something with benefits.

Several months ago he had joined a support group looking for guidance. But it was his wife, Audrey, who reminded Phil that he loved working on cars, that he had more skill than their mechanic and, if he followed his passion, perhaps he could find a job in that industry. “What would I do with cars?” he charged back. “Sell ’em,” Audrey concluded. “In good times or bad, people still need to buy cars.”

The → thought of being “a car salesman” was his biggest barrier up front. He and Audrey discussed his feelings at length. “What would my family say if they knew I was selling cars? My poor mother would die—or cry.” “Cry about what?” Audrey fired back. “Cry because you’re out making a living? Put your ego aside and go find a job selling cars. We both know you can do it and God knows we need the money.”

It took less than 20 minutes for Phil to skim the classified section of their local paper and circle six ads that all → said the same thing: “Experienced Car Salesman Wanted. Write your own check. Work your own hours. Commission only.” For a few minutes Audrey and Phil sat in the warm glow of believing they’d found an answer and money would soon be coming in again.

Phil’s background in PR provided the keywords he planned to use in the interview. When his interviewer asked him, “Why do you want to sell cars?” he would reply honestly, “Because I’m hungry to make money.” Walking onto a neighborhood car lot, he quickly spotted a sign that read, “We sell NEW reconditioned cars.” And his → “hungry to make money” pitch hit its mark. The sales manager Mighty Mike’s eyes immediately sparked and he shouted, “You’re hired.”

Mighty Mike was true to his name, all 280 pounds of him. His huge frame shook as he wise-cracked “Give me five and his salesmen slapped their hands against his extended giant paw. At their early Monday morning motivational session, all seven salesmen sat around with drooped shoulders and freshly ironed shirts, sipping sweetened black coffee from chipped enameled mugs. “New day, new man,” said Mighty Mike pulling Phil to his feet. “Give him five,” he roared and they → all went through the motions. Mighty Mike said they were on the “up system” which meant you had to wait your turn to walk up to a customer.

“What do we think when a customer tells you ‘just looking?’” And they all answered in unison, “They’re going to buy, buy, buy.” “Give me five,” shouted Mighty Mike jumping to his feet. Walking out of the sales office with one hand on Phil’s shoulder and the other stroking his glossy silk tie, Mighty Mike chanted, “You’re going to do just great here, yes sir, just

great.” As they ended their conversation →with the obligatory high five, Phil was concerned that this might be all the training Mighty Mike planned to provide. And he was right. Mighty Mike was a hell of a salesman but he didn’t know the first thing about leadership.

Phil’s first day at work consisted of hanging around, shooting the breeze, and waiting for his turn with a customer. Traffic was slow on Mondays and after 10 hours, Phil headed home without so much as a nibble. But he wasn’t discouraged. It had been new and exciting and his associates had told him amazing stories of untold riches →that had been made on this very car lot.

By the end of his first week, Phil had put in 60 hours. He had seen four customers—three just walked off and he’d TO’d (turned over) the fourth to Steve, their “number one closer,” who couldn’t close that one.

Late Saturday night Mighty Mike called Phil into his office. “Philly,” a term of endearment Mighty Mike had made up for him, “Philly, in this business you have to sell, sell, sell and you haven’t sold, sold, sold. But you’re brand new and I’m going to give you another chance. Go →home tonight and thumb through your address book, call your friends and family with money, and get them to come in and buy a car from you.” His frame shook as he chuckled at his own advice. “Philly, give me five.”

Phil hung on for another week with no sales and no paycheck. Then Mighty Mike let him go declaring, “Philly, you’re burning the customer base.” And, according to Steve, that meant he wasn’t closing the walk-ins and so he was taking opportunities away from the real closers like him.

The following week Phil applied to a foreign dealership across →the street, and this time things went far better. International Motors had a 3-day training program for new hires. Their program spelled out the rules and regulations of the dealership—how the various departments worked from service to finance. And, most important of all, it included 2 full days on the basics of selling cars. His new sales manager, Harry Upton, answered all his questions and made him feel at home.

Next Phil was told to shadow (that is, follow around) Sam Spiegel, a high-integrity salesman with 20 years experience. Sam was great. He explained the ins and outs of →the dealership and how to effectively sell their specific brand. He provided constant supervision and walked Phil through the paperwork until he was sure of it. Like a giant jigsaw puzzle Phil, with Sam’s help, put together the pieces of his new job. His confidence was growing. He felt good about the dealership and the quality of the cars and service his customers would be receiving. And by the end of the second week, Phil had sold two cars and earned \$400. It was a start in the right direction and Audrey was delighted.

Who Failed: Phil or Mighty Mike?

→What a difference a leader makes! Phil experienced quite a contrast between the leadership of Mighty Mike and Harry Upton. Mighty Mike expected Phil to “sell, sell, sell” but he didn’t realize that he had to gear down to teach, teach, teach.

The quality of leadership is most important in 1st gear when we’re first starting. Look what happened when Phil headed across the street to work with Harry Upton. Harry started Phil off slowly, teaching him the ins and outs of his company and its divisions as well as the basics of selling cars.

Phil’s wife, Audrey, →played a powerful leadership role in the development of his new career. It was masterful how she shifted gears with Phil. She geared down to face the problem head on: they needed income and he needed to find a job. Then she geared up to devise a creative solution: do something you love. And Audrey recognized that solution was selling cars. Next she overcame Phil’s objections when his ego got in the way. Step by step, day by day, she guided her husband from feeling stuck and confused into sustained goal-directed action and income, even though it was uncomfortable for →him and for her.

Next Sam Spiegel stepped in to provide Phil the additional knowledge and self-confidence he would need. Their gears matched perfectly—the 1st Gear of Success and the 1st Gear of Leadership. Phil was well-prepared to produce in 2nd gear, and he did. This is the kind of leadership that will be needed by millions of Americans who will be starting or restarting their lives and careers in the next few years.

As their coach we sometimes forget how important it is to have someone beside us when we’re brand new at something. Like when you had →your learner’s permit and your dad, mom or driver’s ed instructor sat in the passenger seat next to you answering your thousands of life-saving and car-saving questions: Will this car fit between those cars up ahead? Can I parallel park in that space? Why does that police car behind me have those lights blinking on top? Asking these questions sounds silly to us now, because as experienced drivers, those judgments are programmed in our brains. But when we were learning, they weren’t there and we needed someone experienced to fill in our holes in terms of self-confidence, knowledge and experience, as →well as, to take responsibility for our safety.

When we are leading people in 1st gear, it’s important for us to gear down into our “starting something new” mindset—the mindset you’re in when you’re first learning how to use a computer, surf the Internet or scuba dive. As leaders, if we fail to do that, we mistakenly assume these tasks are as easy for new learners as they are for us. We underestimate timeframes and difficulties. Or we assume that others have the experience and decision-making abilities

we have. We catch ourselves thinking, “Come on, that’s easy” or “What’s →wrong? Are you stupid”? No, they’re not stupid. They’re simply new and inexperienced.

When we’re learning or relearning, we need our leaders to believe in us. If they can’t imagine us succeeding at this job, task or skill, then it will be impossible for us to have confidence in them until we can build our self-confidence. In 1st gear we need to know that our leaders have the time, skill, ability and willingness to get us from not knowing to knowing, from failing to succeeding and ultimately to leading others.

Yes, leaders make a profound difference in the 1st gear of →selling cars or providing customer service. But they have an even more powerful effect when they lead us skillfully in the 1st gear of life. Or if they fail to. When leaders fail, their errors reverberate through the whole leadership chain, especially if those leaders are parents.

- OK, now count the number of arrows in the left-hand margin of the portion you read. Each arrow represents 100 words.
- Next count the number of words you read past the last arrow and add those totals together.
- Divide the final total by 3 to obtain words per minute.

Is your reading speed high enough?

Sad to say, most business people read at 250 words per minute not because their brain holds them back but because years ago their 2nd grade teacher told them, “Always read slowly and carefully, one word at a time.” And they are still unconsciously following these old rules and limits.

In the early grades, you were in the 1st gear of reading so those instructions were appropriate. But they are producing Information Overload now—and stacks of unread stuff piling up on bedside tables and office credenzas around the world.

You must be a variable-speed reader

For technical documents you will need to read more slowly. For pleasure you may want to give yourself lots of time to see, hear, feel, taste and smell what the author is creating for you. But, when it’s reading you need to get done effectively and efficiently, here are some powerful updated techniques you will want to start practicing immediately.

Decide on your outcome and time frame before you begin

Knowing your desired outcome and time frame up front allows your brain to perform more effectively, efficiently and creatively whether you are reading a

Grass Roots Tip

Today you need to be able to read 1 000 words per minute to keep up with work and competition and enjoy a balanced life. There are many excellent speed reading courses available and we urge you to take one in person or online.

book, proposal or e-mail, attending a meeting or leading one, meeting people or listening to the news.

To immediately become outcome-oriented, simply ask yourself: “Why am I doing this? Why is this important to me?” Determining your outcome up front applies to everything you do, at work and at home and is especially important in your leadership. When you delegate an outcome, you need to make sure your team member knows precisely what you have in mind so they can follow through to completion and satisfaction.

Now reset your timer for 5 minutes and reread the article you just read with this outcome in mind: Which gears of success and leadership were the individuals in the story in? Stop working when the timer goes off and move ahead to the next new skill.

RapidScanning

Remember how rapidly your brain comprehended those jumbled, misspelled words! Learn to trust your brain’s ability to work far more quickly and efficiently. RapidScanning significantly reduces the time it takes for you to obtain maximum value from articles, manuals and books.

Most people sit down to read a book from the beginning. But, given today’s pressures and overload, after a few pages they either find themselves dozing or thinking about something they had forgotten to do. When they return to the book, they start over at the beginning again. And again. And never get through it!

Here’s a more proactive approach to getting the outcome you want from reading a book.

RapidScan the whole book first

- 1 When tackling a book, read the Table of Contents first. Authors provide the main branches for your Mind Map up front. In fact, whether authors draw a Mind Map or not, they have the central idea and main branches of their book in mind as they write.
- 2 RapidScan the book all the way through, the way you glance through a newspaper to decide what to read in the time you have. Get a sense of the whole and the outcome you want from reading it. Decide up front how much time you want to spend and set a timer so you stick with that time frame.
- 3 On your second RapidScan, return to the beginning of the book. This time rapidly read the first and last paragraph of each chapter, bold headings and summaries. Glance quickly at charts and graphs. Mark the pages you will Deep-Read with paper tabs or Post-It notes.

Grass Roots Tip

Always know your outcome and available timeframe before you begin reading.

Grass Roots Tip
Practice
Rapid Scanning
for key words
until your
eye/brain
automatically
searches
them out and
increases your
comprehension.

- 4 Now that you have pre-digested the book, Deep-Read the parts that matter to you and enjoy the outcome you had in mind when you purchased, borrowed or added that book to your pile. And take a moment to notice the pile is shrinking.

To increase your comprehension, use the 5-Finger Technique.

If you find yourself zoning out as you read, find 5 KEYWORDS or phrases on each page. Review them on your fingers—1, 2, 3, 4, 5—before turning the page. This technique retrains your brain to pay attention instead of giving over to distraction, fatigue or sleep—ZZZZZZZZZZZZ.

The proof of the pudding

Susan and Richard did an introductory *Managing Information Overload* workshop and one of the participants just happened to be the new publisher of *The Miami Herald*, Jesus Diaz. Afterwards, he asked them to teach these skills to his executive committee at the paper. Unfortunately Jesus could not attend that session, but he heard all about it when he returned and called to tell them how frequently his executive team was using the skills they had taught them—in talks, in meetings and to communicate new ideas.

Several months later, Susan and Richard were invited back to *The Miami Herald*. This time to teach these updated information skills to the next layer of their organization, their top 200 managers. And then after that, there were 2000 additional Grass Roots employees. How could they teach *Managing Information Overload* to all of them most cost- and time-effectively? They spent the next six months creating an e-course to do just this. You can find it at our website www.technologyofsuccess.com. Here is a sample of the feedback comments they received:

To say you guys were a hit would be an understatement. When I returned to town, I asked my executive team, "How did it go?" Twenty minutes later, I was feeling sorry for myself for missing it. So we invited you back to train me and our management team. I just saw the feedback. I could not agree more. It was a terrific course.

Jesus Diaz, **Publisher**, *The Miami Herald*

We all boosted our reading speed significantly, several of us almost doubling it. The strategy for digesting reports and manuals has proved a great time saver.

Rick Hirsch, **Senior Editing Team**

Outcome-oriented e-mail—quickly and memorably send and receive messages

Are you also in Inbox Overload? Many business people receive 200 plus e-mails a day. How many do you usually receive and send? What is your e-mail reading speed? Do you have a strategy for RapidScanning them and Deep-Reading the most vital ones?

Times have changed. Today fewer messages are written by hand or pecked on a typewriter, licked, stamped and mailed at the post office to be delivered several days or weeks later. We now have instantaneous e-mail. So there's no reason not to send and receive as many messages as you want to anyone anywhere. Or is there?

E-mail is free, right?

Apparently so, but not really. How much time and money is e-mail actually costing you? To find out—divide your annual salary by 120 000 minutes (40 hours a week \times 60 minutes an hour \times 50 weeks a year) to get your salary per minute.

Next multiply your salary per minute \times 3 minutes per e-mail. That's the cost per e-mail to you—and your organization! So if you make \$60 000 a year that's 50 cents a minute or \$1.50 an e-mail. 100 e-mails a day costs \$150.00 a day and consumes 5 hours of your time! Not to mention what it's costing your employer!

Tell the truth: Are you addicted to e-mail, checking it constantly—when you get up, all through the day, before you go to bed?

Take control of your e-mail. Check it at specific times and let regular senders know what those times are—like 10:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. Tell people that if they need you immediately, they should call or stop by. When you read e-mail, shut your door, turn off your phone and focus on your messages and outcomes.

“Corporate America sends more than 7 billion e-mails a day,” according to International Data Corp. What would it mean to you and your organization—if most of the e-mails you sent and received were cut by 80 per cent? It's possible. Here's how...

Send more effective e-mail

Always use the subject line. Like the central image in a Mind Map, it immediately says what your message is about—the outcome—and why your recipient should open it.

Grass Roots Tip
Use the formula on this page to find out what each e-mail is costing you.

Assume they are busily racing along in 2nd gear. So it's up to you to get them to slow down to read your message and requests in depth and follow through as requested.

Pre-digest your message before sending. What exactly do you want? Use fonts that allow your e-mails to easily slip into their brains. Bold keywords. Add color, clip art and pictures but always check file size before sending so you don't overload your recipient's inbox.

Receive e-mail more effectively

RapidScan all e-mail up front. Read subject lines and/or first paragraphs. Delete irrelevant ones. Prioritize which need immediate action and which to respond to later. File reference material.

Next study your most important e-mails. Address each point requested and ask for clarification if needed.

Send relevant e-mails to relevant people

- Make e-mails 1 page or less. When scheduling a call or conference, include topic, location and time in the subject line.
- Put most important things first. Most people don't read past the first screen.
- Spell out your outcome and the actions you want them to take in detail. Include time frames so they can meet your requirements.
- Put all requests to the same person in one e-mail if possible.
- If the list is extensive, pick up the phone and discuss. Back and forth e-mail queries take time.
- When you're tempted to cc or bcc, ask yourself: what do I really want the copied person to know? Individualize the subject line to include specifics on why you're forwarding the message to him or her.
- Edit forwards. Cut and paste instead of making recipients fight their way through a long string of messages to be opened and opened and ...
- Use Send All and Reply All wisely! It can be a major source of Inbox Overload. One CEO Susan and Richard work with disabled Reply All in his company's system to save everyone time and money!
- Respect relationships. Think about others preferences and boundaries before forwarding their message.
- Don't send jokes routinely. Or you'll be routinely deleted and lose your e-credibility.
- Lead by example. Do unto others what you want them to do unto you.

Remember what makes Mind Maps user-friendly—color, keywords and phrases, variety of type, images, bolds and underlines. Include these elements in e-mail as well so they'll be easily digestible and memorable to the brain.

And pass these Managing Information Overload guidelines on to frequent e-mail partners—coworkers, vendors, clients and customers.

Now put these ideas to work. Read the following ...

From: Jim
Date: January 18, 2007
To: Harry
Subject:

Hi Harry,

Just wanted to catch you up on things here. Since the last meeting, Joan has been out sick. She broke her toe at our group outing. Richie left the group. He's now in India. So we're a bit confused and disoriented for now.

You remember that we'd talked about our next meeting being in February. Given all these changes we are going to have to put it off until March 3 when everyone will finally be able to attend. Hopefully they will be able to do their follow through by then. Joan is supposed to report back on the Milo project. Richie's replacement, Jean Baxter, will need to be briefed on what she has to present at the meeting on the Williams account. Do you know of anything else that will need to be handled?

See you then,
Jim

(144 words)

OR ...

From: Jim
Date: January 18, 2007
To: Harry
Subject: Meeting date change and follow up

Next meeting March 3
Follow through:
Milo project—Joan.
Williams account—Jean Baxter, Richie's replacement, needs briefing on presentation she'll make.
Anything else?

(29 words)

Grass Roots Tip

Review some of your recent e-mails and see how you could cut them by 80%.

What would it mean to you and your organization if the majority of e-mails sent and received were CUT by 80 per cent? You know now how that could happen.

OUTCOME-ORIENTED MEETINGS MAXIMIZE TIME, ENERGY AND FOLLOW THROUGH

“Meetings are ‘the hidden landmines’ of Information Overload. Most people have never been trained to organize their thoughts, to listen on purpose or keep meetings on track. So meetings wander on and on, start late and run over, and attendees walk away muttering—what a waste of time! And I’ve got so much to do!”

Make meetings worthwhile—set your outcomes in advance. Ask yourself up front—Why are we meeting? What do I/we want from this meeting? What needs to be done afterward and by whom?

Sitting through a boring, off-course meeting can drain you for the rest of the day. But participating in a purposeful one can move you and your project ahead dramatically.

Take a break after 50 minutes. Your brain can focus for up to 50-minutes. Pressing on after that—without taking a break—becomes less and less productive and more and more exhausting.

Meetings are like text. Only 10 per cent are key. Drawing a Mind Map during the meeting will force you to remain focused on your outcomes. If you’re getting together for the first time on this subject, create a new Mind Map. If you’ve met before, review your previous Mind Map beforehand and add to that map as you meet. Insert a question mark (?) or follow up (FU) in areas that will need to be dealt with after the meeting. Be sure to bring your Mind Map to the next session.

Distributing Mind Maps is an ideal way to circulate the results of your meetings. Mind Maps are a powerful way to organize a presentation. Hand out copies and work from it as you speak. Or speak first and then handout a Mind Map as you review. Mind Maps make your presentation memorable and impactful, include your contact information and date. Mind Mapping keeps meetings on course and insures follow up steps by all attendees are pursued to completion.

Make meetings worthwhile. Set outcomes in advance. Do you need to meet? Or could the outcomes be reached more effectively by e-mail or a call? Would another approach save time and energy? However, remember, a key benefit of meetings is rapport and team-building.

Grass Roots Tip
Increase the effectiveness of your meetings. Take breaks after 50 minutes.

Start on time and if your outcomes have been achieved, end early. If they haven't, plan how and when to complete and end on time. Respect attendees' plans and commitments at work and at home.

Mind Map the meeting as it unfolds. Are you on track? What else is there? What decisions need to be made? Allow participants to voice opinions. Their input needs to be heard. Don't railroad. Create consensus and ownership. Re-direct hostile individuals and comments. Switch back to the agreed-on agenda.

Was it worthwhile—considering the time and salaries of participants?

PURPOSE-FULL LISTENING

Maximize your opportunity. Sit close to the speaker. Turn off cell phones. Bring paper and pen/pencils. Speaking happens in real time. If you miss what is said, it's gone. Tune up and tune in.

Stay focused. See, feel and pre-experience what you hear and look for missing details and information. Make sure the hologram you are creating is detailed and multisensory. Ask questions if it isn't. If you catch yourself chatting or daydreaming, retune and refocus or use the 5-Finger Technique.

You enhance relationships dramatically by letting others know you are listening by letting them know they are heard. "Uh hah, yes, I hear you saying"

Notice which gear you are in as you listen

"Are you in 1st gear, trying to learn new information, needing immediate input and direction, rights and wrongs, dependent, anxious but eager?"

"Or in 2nd gear, working to get a project done, meet bonus standards, a deadline or budget?"

"Or in 3rd gear—open to ideas and insights, willing to offer input and pre-experience potential futures—new products or services, new ways of generating results?" says Susan.

Be sure to listen to everyone around you. Consider their ideas and how they connect to your ideas and outcomes. The most powerful ideas come when you least expect them—driving, showering, talking to a stranger or child. From the people you may least expect to get them.

FYI: The idea for the outside elevator came from a janitor. The idea for the bar code came from a graduate student. The idea for your organization's new

Grass Roots Tip

As you listen, analyze which gear you are in and make sure you meet that gear's needs.

breakthrough product or system may be incubating in your mind right now—and need only one more piece to become full blown.

Susan says, “To succeed in the future you will need to get comfortable operating in 3rd gear.

“Creating—new links, connections, associations, new products, services, industries, new ways of living and doing business together.”

CONCLUSION: THESE SKILLS WILL ALLOW YOU TO USE NEW INFORMATION BETTER THAN THE COMPETITION

No, technology may not be making our lives easier. But it's not technology's fault. It's ours—our use of outdated skills and approaches most of us learned in elementary school and haven't updated since.

Three-gear, proactive leaders know that managing Information Overload needs to be at the top of their current To-Do List. The future success of your business will depend on your team's ability to digest information and convert it to knowledge more and more effectively, efficiently and creatively. Proactive leaders know that they must make time to shift people into 1st gear to begin updating their reading, e-mail, listening and meeting presentation skills—their information skills now. Proactive, three-gear leaders also know they must allow team members to practice their new skills over and over to get them up to speed and ready to use for 2nd gear productivity.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the next chapter, Tony Dottino looks at how neuro-science research provides new insights into our thinking and behavior. This information will give you and your team the competitive edge you are seeking.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Mind Map the next four meetings you lead or attend.
- 2 RapidScan one book a week during the next month.
- 3 Make sure the subject line of your e-mail tells the whole story.
- 4 Be sure to include the exact actions you want the recipient of your e-mail to complete and when.
- 5 In 1 month, redo the Reading Speed exercise and check on your progress.
- 6 Draw a Mind Map of the most important project in your work or personal life.

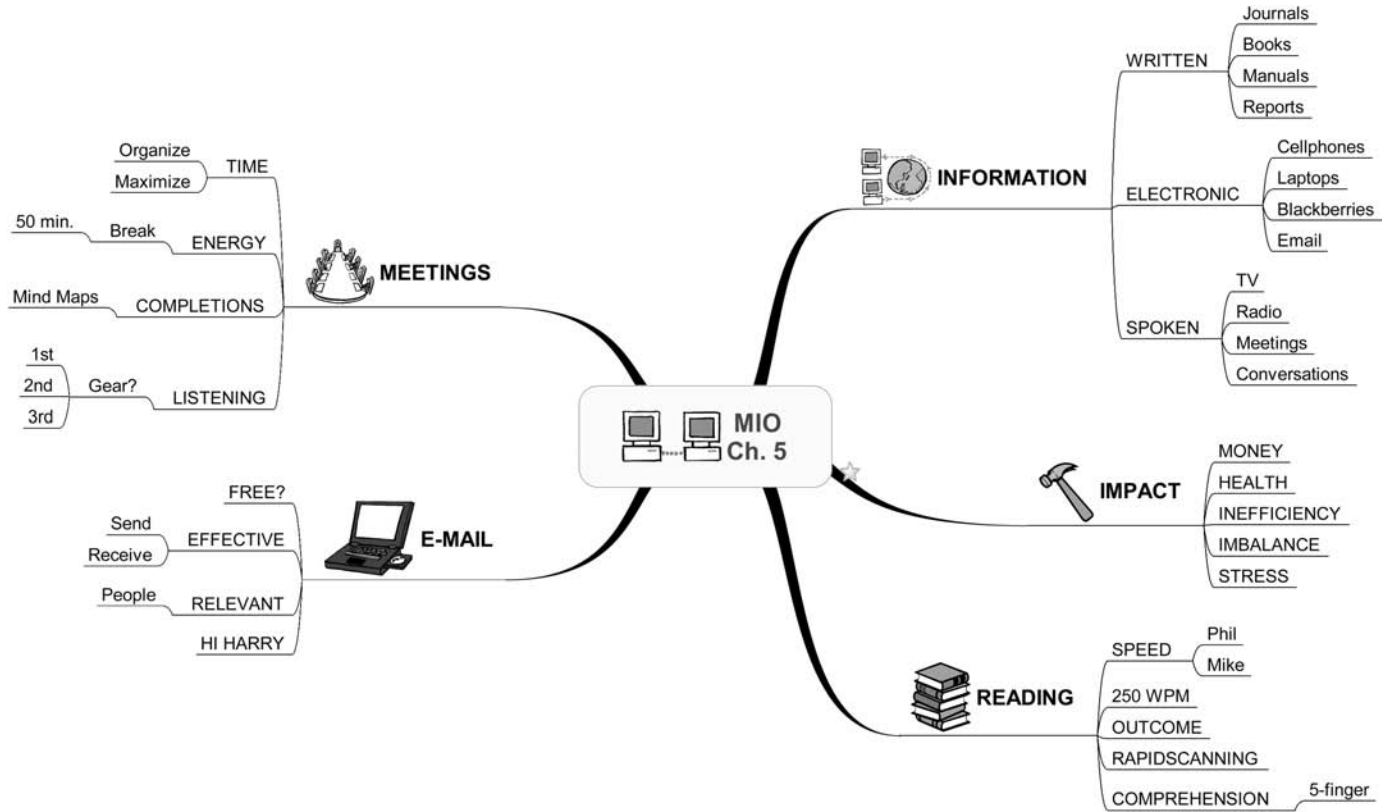


Figure 5.1 Mind Map—managing information overload