

Communication in the News

Q&A with Jeff Davidson, author of *Breathing Space*

by Natasha Spring, executive editor, *Communication World*

Q: Your book *Breathing Space: Living & Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-Up Society* offers help with managing information overload both on an individual basis and in a workplace setting. Can you describe the key factors that have led to information overload in the workplace?

No matter how competent one may otherwise be, virtually all career professionals today find themselves in a daily tidal wave of information—phone, fax, e-mail, web, memos, meetings—the likes of which are unprecedented. The unvoiced expectation is that you're supposed to handle it all.

Q: Many of our readers are corporate communicators whose job it is to ensure that employees receive and understand information that is critical to their jobs. Can you describe three to five key strategies that they should use to ensure that this is happening?

1. Write and speak as clearly as possible.
2. Demonstrate, use graphics, keep it lively.
3. Be concise, trim the excess.
4. Repeat and ask for confirmation.
5. Follow up.

Q: What can employees themselves do to ensure that they are working in the most effective manner? Can you offer three to five strategies that all employees should be implementing in their own work habits?

1. Know where items are located. Be organized—this puts you in charge and provides freedom to concentrate on creative, fulfilling or necessary tasks.
2. Recognize that often you first need to slow down and ponder how to best proceed.
3. Staying organized and managing your own time are critical if you are managing others.
4. No one has a monopoly on good ideas, so stay open to the procedures that work for others.

Q: Technology has had a huge impact on all aspects of society, including employee productivity. How can technology be harnessed in such a way that it is used in the most effective manner?

Of all recent technologies, e-mail has become dominant. If you have to sort through hundreds of messages every time you look for information, your search will not be efficient, so manage and weed out as you go along. If you begin your day by reading new mail, delegate what you can before you respond. Create folders for each project and move all correspondence, including responses, into the appropriate project folder so that you'll have both sides of the conversation on file. Also, go ahead and make decisions based on the subject line!

Q: What do you see as the future regarding the environment of information exchange in the workforce? How does the increasingly global environment affect the ability of companies to manage information for their employees?

Pick good people from the start. All the management and monitoring can't make up for having an honest, competent person in place.

Q: If you had to point to two to three things that companies are doing wrong with regard to managing information, what would they be?

1. Over-communicating with too many semi-important messages, announcements, memos, etc.
2. Proceeding in a shoot-from-the-hip fashion instead of doing the hard work of managing information flow.
3. Short-changing training in managing information and communication overload!

Q: Can you sum up your advice with regard to how companies can best help employees to be more productive in an increasingly fast-paced environment?

Recognize that today's career professionals are part of the pioneer generation of information/knowledge workers, and help them move into this rapidly changing future and know that they can handle it. Every day, for the rest of our lives, we are likely to be besieged by more information, not less. When we understand and acknowledge what we're up against, we're in a far better position to take control.

Jeff Davidson helps organizations and individuals overcome the burden of information and communication overload. He is based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Visit www.BreathingSpace.com for more on Jeff's keynote speeches and seminars, including Managing Information and Communication Overload and Prospering in a World of Rapid Change.