

### 3 ways to be LESS FRAZZLED FUNDRAISER

Burnout has been a problem long before the pandemic and has only gotten worse as we all manage competing demands all the time. According to a recent <u>study</u>, nearly 50% of the nonprofit workforce is either suffering burnout or on a path to become burnt out.

For a sector that prides itself on trying to do a lot with little, employees have reached an alarming breaking point which, if left untended, will have ripple effects on nonprofit effectiveness overall.

Since you're reading this, you've probably taken a momentary pause from your full inbox, your double-booked calendar, and the 14-page "to do" list on your desk. You deserve applause for the pause!

Let's stop wearing the nonprofit sector's Martyrdom Syndrome like a badge of honor. Real productivity and rewarding work does not come from martyrdom.

Here's how you can work more efficiently (and effectively) with less exhaustion:



### D1 BLOCK TIME ON YOUR CALENDAR EVERY DAY TO DO WHAT CAL NEWPORT CALLS "DEEP WORK." HOLD THAT TIME SACRED.

Our hyper-connected world creates big stress. The unintended consequence of the convenience of emails at your fingertips is the expectation you will be accessible all. the. time. Social media apps that refresh with a simple swipe are only fueling our addiction to our phones. And addiction to our phones affects every aspect of our fundraising lives and personal lives.

Books like <u>Make Time</u> (Jake Knapp and John Zeratsky), <u>Unsubscribe</u> (Jocelyn K. Glei), and <u>Digital Minimalism</u> (Cal Newport) remind us to focus on the most important work. Replying to every email as it comes through our inbox feels productive. But really, it isn't. It short-circuits our brain's attention span and prevents us from





intentionally setting our schedule to block time for meaningful work.

Prioritizing the strategizing, planning, research, writing, brainstorming, even daydreaming and resting you need to do to advance your work – that's what this is about.

How does this show up on your own calendar? Block out time just as you would a meeting for specific projects.

#### As a fundraiser, what does this look like for you?

It might mean blocking time every day to call or write to a donor. Or to analyze your major donor portfolio and pipelines. Or to map out your strategy for the coming months. Or to work on the proposal or other donor communications piece due soon.

It sounds easy-ish to do. But the lure of replying to emails or instant messaging (if you use an app like Basecamp or Slack) will be strong. If you work on site with your team, in-person distractions will try to wreak their own havoc.





### Try this:

**Turn off your email, productivity apps, and push notifications.** Our brains don't know the difference between something that's really important and the constant ding of new notifications.

If you share a calendar with a team, **mark your periods of availability** and stick to that. (Respectfully but firmly.)

**If you're in a shared work space, display a visible sign** that you are in the zone and it's not an ideal time to chat. (Explain this sign to your colleagues first. Let them know it's an experiment to help you be more efficient and effective. Invite them to give it a try themselves.)





# 02 TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR EMAIL.

Are you in charge of your email, or is it in charge of you?

In Unsubscribe, Jocelyn K. Glei says,

"If writing a letter a hundred years ago was the equivalent of sitting down with someone in a quiet room and talking face-to-face, writing an email today is like yelling at someone across a noisy traffic intersection while they're rushing to an appointment."

It's true. And it's hurting us.

Emails are among the most common and default means of communication. But the overwhelm,

studies tell us, has now predisposed us to view emails with a slightly negative attitude. Managing your inbox can easily consume an entire day.





### Try this: Reduce your email time to just a few designated periods each day.

As a fundraiser, you're thinking this is impossible to do.

What if a major donor is ready to make that transformational gift and you don't respond to their question in time?

Create a standard automatic response that defines external expectations. You might say that you are focusing on end of year deadlines and will only be checking emails occasionally throughout the day. Leave an alternate contact person or other way to reach you for timesensitive matters. Most importantly, give the sender a sense of when you will be able to respond to their email.

Just as you begin to block time in your calendar for your priority work, "email check" can be a time block to help you focus on only that activity.





### Also try this: Define your emails by *what needs to happen with them*.

Emails are constant "to dos." A quick look at any of our inboxes will cause us to think, "how many more things do I need to focus on *now*?" Not every email requires an immediate response. Not every email requires any response. We have adopted the expectation that the receiver is waiting anxiously at their device for an instant reply. This is often false. And acting on it as an assumption scatters your energies and devalues your time.

Try grouping emails by action type. (A Jocelyn K. Glei suggestion.)

For example, don't leave emails in your Inbox as a holding device. Every email requires some sort of action — a response, a "to do," waiting, scheduling, filing away, etc. When you check emails (in just a couple of blocks of dedicated times each day!), move them from the inbox to the folder that makes the most sense. Don't let them linger.

Then, during scheduled email blocks in your day, tackle one action type, such as the "action" folder first. You'll start feeling like the fire hose has finally been turned off. Email won't go away. But you can breathe and focus.





# 03 EVALUATE EVERYTHING ON YOUR "TO DO" LIST.

To quote author and educator Stephen Covey: "The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."

In his book, *First Things First*, Covey offers a time management matrix of four quadrants to help define what's truly at the top of your list. This tool is often called the <u>Eisenhower Matrix</u>. Get honest and ruthless in marking your tasks: Must Do, Would-Be-Great-to-Do, Have to Do but Not Important, and Not Now.

The Must Dos are the activities that will help you raise money now.



The Would-Be-Great-to-Dos are activities which may take longer to implement. They may not necessarily result in immediate funding, but are enhancements to your plan. *Consider the right timeframe for them*.



The Have to Do by Not Important could be tasks that don't necessarily have to be done by you but could be delegated. It might be time-sensitive and may not even help you in your long-term fundraising plan.

The Not Nows are ideas and activities which are not the best use of your bandwidth. Maybe not the best ROI. And they may not fit into your strategic development plan at all.

#### Try this:

Once or twice a week, look at your calendar and "to do" list. Group them into these four categories. After a few times, you'll be surprised how easy it will become to shape your days and weeks by priorities.

Once you master this tool, take it one step further, based on a suggestion in *Make Time*:

Each evening, think about the one or two "highlights" that must get done the next day. How much time do you think you will need? Have you blocked the time? If you don't have the flexibility in your schedule, either restructure your planned meetings or your "highlights" to make it work.

When you work efficiently, smartly, and sanely, you will be of greater service to your donors, your organization, and those you serve.

Burning out isn't a badge of honor. It helps no one in the long run.

Intentionally and honestly identifying what comes first – and keeping it front and center – channels your limited time and energies most effectively. Commit to getting off the hamster wheel and out of a mindset that leads to burnout and compromised outcomes.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, give yourself grace. You are doing your best. And you cannot do it all. Give yourself the time you need for your own self-care and other personal or family priorities.

Here's to your fundraising success!





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Her consulting firm, <u>Windmill Hill Consulting</u>, helps non-profit organizations of all sizes peel back the layers and develop a profitable fundraising strategy that focuses on the resources, skills and tactics they need to build more effective donor relationships and catapult their revenue.

She serves as past president of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Washington DC Metro Chapter and as a former member of the Advisory Panel for Rogare, The Fundraising Think Tank in the U.K. Her firm, Windmill Hill Consulting, is a member of the Giving Institute and Barbara is involved with the Giving USA report. She is a frequent and sought-after presenter at national and international conferences. In 2020, she joined the faculty at the University of Maryland's Do Good Institute teaching nonprofit fundraising.

To learn more about how Windmill Hill Consulting can help you grow your fundraising, visit <u>www.whillconsulting.com</u>.

