

INBOX exercise

Scenario:

You have been under a lot of time pressure at work and did not get all your work done this week. You are however leaving on vacation after the weekend and have chosen to print out outstanding items and bring them home with you to clear your desk as you prepare to be away for 3 weeks. Each sheet of paper will be an email or message or note to yourself, which will need some sort of action from you. Your goal is to be able to drop these off at the office on your assistant's desk tomorrow on your way to the airport. For the purpose of this exercise you should assume that you are not able to contact any of your employees, peers, or supervisors during this time. It is therefore important to ask all questions during the briefing portion of this exercise. If you are not certain about any of the messages, make an assumption and state it on the page.

You only have 5 minutes to do this work since you have other appointments for the rest of the time before you leave to go on vacation.

Exercise:

Your task is to put your name at the top, then review these sheets of paper and decide on some course of action. Write the action you would take next to the "message" on each page and how high the priority would be for that action. (1 = high priority, 4 = low priority)

You have 5 minutes to do this. At that time, you are to stop writing.

Instructor notes:

1. Create a slide to show the scenario and the instructions to participants – contents of page 2. Answer any questions about the exercise before they start.
2. Hand out the working sheets after all questions have been answered.
3. Monitor the time –5 minutes and ensure participants do not discuss this individual exercise with each other. They are not supposed to ask any additional questions during this time.
4. At the end of 5 minutes everyone should stop and tell you how many pages they were able to action.
5. Debrief/discussion
6. Joint scoring – let participants score neighbor's sheets or own sheets (as you prefer)

Discussion/debrief:

- 1) Impressions of the participants?
- 2) How many decided on priorities for the various tasks?
- 3) Which ideas did people have for spending the unexpected extra time they had due to the change of flight?
- 4) Did they learn something about their profile and style with respect to managing work under time pressure?
- 5) How did the exercise compare to the pressure/situations they find themselves in at work?

Scoring:

Scoring is not important with respect to exact priorities. That would vary by style. It is more important that each person decided on a priority for each task.

Item	Score = 1 if chosen priority/action matches below.
A	Ask assistant to get more info, Defer until you are back
B	Delegate to assistant to expedite
C	Note to assistant – ask if you can call in and text you the info. Note to assistant – delegate to specific other person and notify organizer
D	Note to assistant – pls ensure out of office notice is on and remind org manager and project manager of your absence and expected time back
E	Note to assistant – remind org manager & Mr Jones of my absence and put “task” in my todo list to call Mr Jones when you are back
F	Defer until after vacation

Item	Score = 1 if chosen priority/action matches below.
G	No action if D is done
H	Note to assistant – please set up meeting in my agenda
I	Defer until after vacation
J	Refer to staff manager
K	Note to assistant – notify global leader of my absence and propose different time to review. If not, delegate to specific person in dept.
L	Note to assistant – delegate to specific person and follow up to ensure info is supplied on time
M	Handle self asap – find other care for dog
N	Note to assistant – ensure org manager knows and approves departure date
O	No action
P	Note to assistant – please schedule meeting
Q	Assistant to set up team/group meeting
R	Review again other priorities and decide to handle personally the highest priorities.

Total possible score = 18

Working Sheets

Inbox exercise

Participant name: _____

Number of items actioned: _____

Total number of items: _____18_____

A

E-mail from an employee

It is Chris' birthday on Tuesday. I noticed that the ABC project on the 2nd floor do nice events for birthdays. I think we should consider doing something similar for Chris. It would be a great teambuilding event for the team and for the project.

B

E-mail from payroll

A Bartel did not complete a timesheet for the pay period 20 April to 17 May. Please ensure that this is done as soon as possible to help us maintain prudent accounting principles in our reporting.

C

E-mail from the Managing Director's secretary

There will be a Townhall meeting next Wednesday and you are on the agenda to do an update on the activities of your group on the project. The attached file shows the template to use. We need your slides by noon on Tuesday. You have 20 minutes on the agenda and special areas of interest are:

- Progress to date
- Current issues
- Forecast until the end of next quarter
- Planned path forward

D

E-mail from your department manager

I need an update on the plans to roll out the new software in our department. We discussed it two weeks ago and as yet I did not receive the detailed plans from you about how we are going to address that. I specifically chose you for this project, because you are the only one in our department with a thorough knowledge of all our software and the IT system we are working on. Please provide me with a plan by Friday as I need to include the information in a report to Corporate.

E

E-mail – general announcement

Please be aware that Mr Jones (one of the members of your team and reporting to you) will be going on retirement and his farewell party will be held next Tuesday in the restaurant. He would like you and the rest of the team to join him for a drink and snacks as this is his last day at the office. Looking forward to seeing all of you there.

F

E-mail from Mr Green, representative of Software Experts Industries BV

Thank you for the time you spent on the phone with me last week. I would like to take this opportunity to propose a meeting during the next two weeks and as promised I have attached the additional information that you have requested. I want to stress the commitment that my company has towards customer service and meeting set and agreed goals in a timely and effective manner. Our customers have always had high praise for our products and our after-sales support. I will call you next week on Wednesday to confirm a lunch meeting.

G

Message from your assistant

The department manager wants to see you about the IT project. He can see you on (yesterday) 14:00.

H

E-mail from Dept Manager, forwarded an email from HR

Mr Smith (reports to you) has called in sick for the 5th time in 12 months. Please arrange a discussion with Mr Smith about this. Experience has shown that a frequency of this nature is often caused by stress.

I

Message from your assistant

Mr Green called to find out if you can meet with him tomorrow. I told him you were on vacation tomorrow so he asked if you could call him as soon as possible.

J

Message from employee in your team

I have heard that John Jones wants a set of golf clubs for his retirement. Should we collect some money on the team to give him a gift card? Or is it possible to put a gift card on the department's budget?

K

E-mail from the global leader for your function

There will be a global teleconference on Thursday at 9pm (your time) to review the current software used in our function globally. Please be prepared to give an overview of the practices used in your office.

L

E-mail from the project manager

The attached spreadsheet needs to be completed for a client requested report. It is vital that we have this information to the client by Wednesday morning. Please supply this information as soon as possible and e-mail it back to me at the latest 08:00 on Wednesday morning.

M

Message

Your neighbor called and said they have to leave as a family emergency has come up. They will not be able to watch your dog anymore while you are on vacation. They say 'sorry'

N

Envelope with a letter inside from Mr A Bartel

Please accept my resignation. I have found employment with another company and wish to start work there as soon as possible. Thank you for everything that you have done for me in the last 2 years. Please confirm that it is okay for me to leave in 2 weeks.

Regards

Mr A Bartel

O

Message from your assistant (from yesterday)

We are having some cake on the 3rd floor for Sally's birthday. Please come and join us after your meeting.

P

E-mail from Dafna (who, reports to you)

Hi,

I started here 2 months ago and to date you have not been able to meet with me to discuss my training and development. Please let me know as soon as possible when we can meet so you can explain the training options you have and when I can attend some classes to grow my career.

Regards
Dafna

Q

E-mail from corporate head quarters

It is with a lot of pride that we announce the latest results for the company. Mr Howe has been nominated as business man of the year for his role in setting the pace in the corporate world with respect to diversity/inclusion and knowledge sharing. It is also important to note that Mr Harris and Mr Lee have been appointed as joint managers of the latest business acquired by the company. They will report directly to Mr Howe starting on 1 February.

It is important that this information is shared within the company and within your group. Each manager is therefore asked to use the attached powerpoint slides to discuss these changes within his/her group.

R

Message from your assistant

The airline company called and your flight for tomorrow has been changed. They have cancelled all flights leaving tomorrow and have rebooked everyone on flights leaving the day after tomorrow. Will we see you tomorrow?