

Time for an Information Diet

UNPLUG completely

Every year, people start with their best intentions: losing weight and doing more exercises. But a new issue is emerging: you also have to go on an information diet.

As with the oversupply of food, the information mountain is growing by the minute. And just as people can get addicted to food, they can also turn into information junkies. The more information they receive, the more information they want. We already know that only five per cent of all information is ever being used. If we only would know upfront what five per cent that is.

Moderate information skills

Work and private life are becoming integrated. Contemporary IT has made this possible. The in-

ternet has given rise to unlimited and fast access to free-of-charge, abundant information. Also, the attitude towards the ownership of information has changed. A number of organizations give free access to their information sources. The rationale behind this is that the application of information can lead to new knowledge or increased profits.

More than half of the work force can be regarded as information workers. Information is their business. At home, we are also busy with all sorts of information: magazines, television, the internet, your social networks. We think people know how to cope with information. After all, that is what we do every single day. Unfortunately, few of us are educated in good information skills. Most of us are 'trained on the job', often resulting in moderate information capabilities.

I will start today

A change of eating habits starts with you. Only you have access to the grey matter between your ears. The same applies to your information behavior. If you want nutritious information that is healthy and easy to digest, you have to change. Take a close look at the best practices on the sidebars. The following measures can also be used for personalized, tasty information.

- You are not a victim if you receive too much information. Nowadays, it is accepted to follow a diet. People dare to say: 'No thank you. I have had enough.' The same expression can be used when it comes to information. Not easy for the information junkies among us, but we have to learn the hard way: there is simply not enough time to keep up with all information sources.

Who am I?

An important step aimed at reducing information overload is to know yourself. Who else knows your information profile best? For example, do you know how much information you receive per medium, how much time you spend per medium, and if you are using the right technology in the most effective way?

People differ in the way they collect, analyze, and disseminate information. Yet hardly anyone uses this knowledge when they exchange information. If we send a message in whatever format, we mainly think about ourselves. We do not even train the sender when we receive unwanted information. Feedback as in oral communication, is hardly ever done with for instance e-mail of physical documents. So next time you get irritated or frustrated by a message, provide genuine and honest feedback.



Nice or necessary to know

Perform a one-day information audit. Assess to what category the information you receive belongs: 'need-to-know' or 'nice-to-know'. Pruning the information sources is important in the first category. What information can be missed without hampering or obstructing your decisions. The second information flow can easily be stopped. You do not need to have the information readily at hand. Often, it is only used for gossiping or satisfying one's hunger for information.

- People like to talk to other people. In the earlier days, knowledge came from other people. Now we think our IT systems and the internet are the sole supply of wisdom. Yet people are still the best search engine. They deliver the right information within the right context.

- You hardly ever need more information to make a good decision. What is needed, is more time to reflect on the information already available. Like good chewing on your food is better for your digestion, so is viewing the existing information from various angles better for your decision-making process.

- Stay curious, but not too curious. Do not try to have a broad knowledge of many subjects. Instead, be an expert of a few information areas.

- Try an information sabbatical. Or have a day without any e-mail conversation. Certainly a new incentive for senior executives is to have a couple of days without information or gadgets. Disconnect from the digital world whenever possible. Set aside some moments for solitude and quiet reflection. Unplug completely.

In the end, a conscious choice what information to absorb and, at the same time, show your information behavior to your environment, is everyone's duty.

Readers and Listeners

Seventy per cent of all people have a preference for receiving information in written form: they are readers. The others like to listen. This is of course no absolute number. It also depends on the type of medium. E-mail, chat or SMS: a listener prefers oral contact, preferably with a face-to-face encounter. If you want to make sure the receiver understands your messages, you have to take into account how the addressee prefers his information.

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