Emails. Tasks. Timeline.

written by Manoj Khanna | July 18, 2006

I started this post about two weeks ago but never got to a point where I can actually sit down and finish it. So I decided to do this today. I am altering my style of writing to be more focused on my immediate subject matters and what I have at hand at the moment. I think that was my approach in the begining but somehow it got lost and I got into this RDF and RSS things and collecting news and then reporting it. Well anyone can subscribe to the news feeds and get to it. And this reminds me of MT. I still like Moveable Type (MT) when it started and had a clean code to download and what a clear out of the box implementation. WordPress does the same now. And its much neater and presentable. And ajaxy! One of the reasons why I moved my new blog on my book to WordPress.com was simple and straight cause I like simple and straight approach. WordPress does that, and it has most of the things which Blogger still lags/lacks into (I'm not complaining!). But I'm happy with both. And I really don't want to take the pain out of my already 20hrs workday to move more stuff from one place to the other. Enough ranting!

One thing I've been observing over the past couple of weeks is to understand the reality of how well communication of emails happen. My take so far on it is that it never happens very well actually. Most of the times they are interpreted wrong! With wrong tones and wrong attitudes. I prefer picking up the phone and talking to someone straight but sometimes people don't like that and if you just walk upto them to talk or clarify well then it becomes more defensive and the other person starts thinking – 'why didn't he send out an email in the first place' – sort of invading privacy or a private territory. Well all things said and done, at the end of the day my focus is to look into my immediate tasks at hand and

their timelines. With emails pouring in most tasks get buried under pile of emails sent and recieved everyday. And sometimes this can happen even at the end of the same day! Now unless you are an Outlook champion (which I believe except the tech support guy nobody is) and know really-really well how to run the rules and organize all of your emails then chances are pretty good for you track your own stuff but if you are not that then you don't have to be in limbo and you should be able to manage those tasks and timelines al by yourself by using other means. Forgetting a task and timeline are a serious blow in anyone's face in a work environment. And especially for any project manager this is not a pretty situation to be in. And this is why I created my own solution to this problem. I started using multitracking mechanism to keep on top of all my tasks and timelines which come through emails directly or other requests visa emails and are formal and informal types both. And here's what I do and use:

(a) **FLAGS:** Flagging is one of my favorite tool – as my emails reside on the server its easier for me to track them via flagging and it reminds me at the time when I need it and when should I set it to and what action should I specify.

(b) **USING WHITE-BOARDS:** The other favorite tool is my almost wall size white board. On top of that I use multi-colored pens, hmmm… For me each pen has a priority and a code. With each pen having a significance of its own helps me track which one is due when, what and where. And most of all it the white-board sits right in front of my face all the time!

(c) **TO-DO-LISTS:** Making a to-do-list at the begining of the day usually helps me a lot. And these days instead of making it everyday I use online tools to-do-lists and make them whenever I get a chance and then track and delete when I start implementing that list. In this category lately I've started using TadaList, before that I used RememberTheMilk (nice name and idea!).

So even after going through so many steps if I miss at any one

of my tasks or timelines then its purely my fault and fault of not completely following my ‘*remind-me*‘ system. And possibly I got too lazy or too careless to pay attention to them or didn’t have the motivatioin to complete them.

In a nutshell on emails; ‘Emails’ are instant ways to communicate but at the same time they are very fragile. A communication that needs to be handled with utmost care and in a very gentle manner. Cause if you don’t then you should be ready with a contigency plan. And voila! I found this post on *Writing Sensible Email Messages*. Looks like I’m not alone thinking this, finally. Happy emailing!

Technorati Tags: Email, Moveable Type, Project Management, WordPress, Open Source Project Management, Organization, Tasks & Timeline

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