

YOU DIDN'T FOLLOW UP – NOW WHAT?

When is the last you looked in your physical/electronic Inbox only to realize you never answered that client/friend/colleague?

You probably have a few of these haunting your Inbox right now. Whether it's answering questions from a prospective client or responding to a friend of a friend who is seeking a connection in your field, you know when you've been silent too long.

One day can turn into weeks, and it's never just one e-mail that has slipped. Ultimately, all of us have several of these communications that have fallen to the bottom of our proverbial sea of information. Perhaps you can pound out the guilty response, the words flow, and the relationship is salvaged on the spot. If damage control doesn't come naturally to you though, here are some tips:

1. **Ask** yourself if the e-mail or call to make is indeed still relevant. Is it a relationship worth salvaging? If I deleted the e-mail now without responding, could I sleep well at night? If yes, then let it go and make peace with it.
2. **Acknowledge** the delay with words such as:
 - "It's been a long time but I haven't forgotten . . ."
 - "Now that I have time to properly answer your question . . ."
 - "I'm cleaning out my e-mails and just noticed that I never got back to you..."
3. **Apply** eloquence and/or humor to smooth things over. "Yes, it's true, responding to your question two weeks later is beyond poor form. Indeed, it might just be rude."
4. **Admit** you dropped the ball. "As you can see, you're the latest victim of my poor time management skills."
5. **Ascertain** the very next opportunity to connect with the person.
 - For a personal contact, call them, or forward a funny e-mail or article with a short personal note. A handwritten card earns you bonus points.
 - For a professional matter that has slipped (assuming it was not urgent), admit you have been busy and offer to meet in person to catch up.

No matter what you do, you're still late and possibly rude, but it's time to move on. These suggestions will hopefully take the sting out of the situation, and give you the satisfaction of finally taking action.

Do it now. Take one ignored e-mail that makes you cringe and answer it. Just one!

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