Becoming (and Staying) Underwhelmed

 No one is effective or efficient when they are overwhelmed. We are in the era of e-mail with e-mail in-boxes too often looking like the snail mail mailbox to the left – mail is opened, looked at and stuffed back into the mailbox to be "pawed" thought time and again – this is neither effective nor efficient and will surely, at some point, overwhelm those who take this approach.

   Our current information super highway also means we can be easily overwhelmed by the increasing details we all face and have to wade through if we do not establish workable and efficient ways to handle them – effectively and efficiently handling these details can be the difference between success and failure.

   A couple of truths are clear and potentially helpful to us (if we acknowledge and mitigate them):

1. We can't remember everything so we should not be obliged to remember anything – We should have and use our calendars, computers and work schedules for this purpose (see the *Three Cs* tab).
2. Because not everyone follows-up as they agree to we should not assume anyone will – it is our responsibility to control this!

 Since most contact nowadays is made via e-mail a key control, for these purposes, is in e-mail "protocols" and paradigms, ad hoc simply won't work in today's environment – we cannot send e-mails and expect people to respond. Likewise, we can be quickly buried by incoming messages if we do not have a good system for effectively handling them.

   Key e-mail folders for this purpose are shown below:

- Most people have *many* messages in their Inbox forcing them to "plow" through the messages time and time again. As we know in working with "real" mail, the effective objective is to touch a letter only once. When we receive e-mails we likewise should review them and then *immediately* put them where they need to be (either Delete, Keep or OPEN) or Next In Line for items that we want to review quickly. This keeps the Inbox clean with all messages in the proper place for future action.

- The Sent Items folder should likewise be kept clean by promptly placing sent messages in the Delete, Open or Keep folders.

- The Keep folder's purpose is obvious – we want to keep the message, but only for reference, not for the purpose of taking any action (the Next in Line and Open folders are for this purpose).

- The key folder? The one that will makes us most efficient? Clearly the Open folder. This is for e-mails we have sent and for which we expect a reply. When we receive a reply we should take the few seconds required to delete the original e-mail from the Open folder and then dispose of the incoming message as appropriate – Keep, Delete or frequently respond to it and keep the response (with the chain of prior e-mail below this response) in the Open folder. Then, usually a couple to 3 times a week, we can review the Open folder to see if anything is past due or otherwise needs attention.
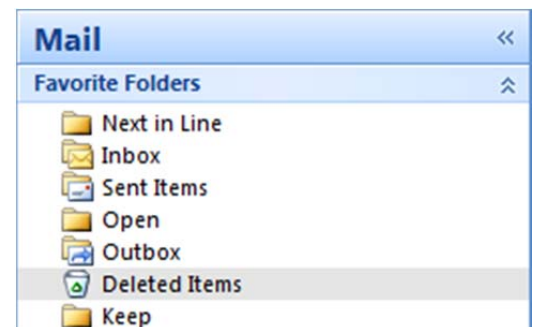
   We can't remember everything, but by using these simple tools we are not required to remember anything – what we need to remember will be in our Open or Next in Line folders! Likewise, because not everyone follows-up as they agree the Open folder will likewise do this for us in an easy and efficient way!

And, as these easy and simple (and once explained fairly obvious) principles are efficient and effective personally, they are even more important for companies to implement for <u>all</u> employees. The better organizations develop and monitor compliance with a "model" for e-mail management that all employees must use (with suggested improvements reviewed, and if accepted as worthwhile and valuable, likewise implemented organization-wide). Besides the benefits to all employees, on a day-to-day basis, consider the benefit to new hires –incoming employees should, under this model, be able to step right into the prior employees e-mails!

As we move into a new era it is important to develop organizational "best practices" so employees stay underwhelmed versus always being overwhelmed affecting both their own and fellow employees' effectiveness. The better organizations understand this (and, therefore, establish the best of best practices) while less efficient and effective organizations (and individuals!) fail to "get it" to their detriment!

A key objective when the tendency is to being constantly overwhelmed? To establish systems so we can remain underwhelmed – a great benefit and advantage to individuals and organizations that take these simple, yet key, steps!