

The Efficiency Expert

*A Skit by Dwayne Yancey
From his collection, "Skits 24/7"*

Cast: 3 flexible

Length: 4 ½ pages of dialogue (1307 words)

Performance time: About 7 minutes

The Story

E-mail means better communication: it's more efficient than long-winded meetings, less effort than formal business letters, and much faster than playing telephone tag. But not always! This poor office worker finds tips from an e-mail efficiency expert really equals more errors!

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The Efficiency Expert

(An OFFICE WORKER is at a computer. The BOSS enters, with a CONSULTANT, clipboard in hand. {You may change names to reflect gender.})

BOSS: Good morning, staff. I have an announcement I'd like to make. I'd like for you to meet Carla Midgewood. She's a consultant with Advanced Corporate Communication Strategies who has been brought into help us look at some of our company operations and offer some advice on how we can all do our jobs better. So, please offer her any assistance you can. There you go, Carla. They're all yours. Well, I'm got to go ready for the board meeting. And oh, Michelle, you'll have that report ready in time for me to present it to the directors today, won't you?

WORKER: Sure thing, boss. I'm working on it right now.

BOSS: I knew I could count on you.

(BOSS exits. CONSULTANT approaches WORKER.)

CONSULTANT: Hello. And your name is — ?

WORKER: Michelle.

CONSULTANT: *(Looking at clipboard.)* Michelle. Michelle. Michelle. Ah yes, here you are. Hmmm. Oh dear.

WORKER: Is there, uh, something I can help you with?

CONSULTANT: Oh no. But there might be something I can help you with. You see, according to our computer analysis, you rank in the 15th percentile in terms of our e-mail efficiency quotient.

WORKER: Your what?

CONSULTANT: The e-mail efficiency quotient.

WORKER: What's that mean?

CONSULTANT: It means you have a lot of unopened e-mail.

WORKER: Well, yes, you see I'm kind of busy here with this project I'm working on and I just haven't gotten to a lot of it—

CONSULTANT: *(Shaking head.)* Each unopened e-mail represents a potential lost opportunity. These could be important messages from internal customers, external customers, supervisors —

WORKER: Yes, but you see I've got this deadline so I'm just opening the ones I know I need to deal with right away —

CONSULTANT: Let's work on getting your e-mail efficiency quotient at least up to the national average, shall we?

WORKER: Uh, OK, yes, ma'am.

(CONSULTANT exits; WORKER frantically works at the computer.)

WORKER: *(Continued. Muttering.)* Ok, I've got to get this report done. Now, let's see, we have the sales figures for the last fiscal year and — *(The computer PINGS with e-mail arriving.)* Stupid e-mail. Don't people know I'm trying to get this report done? *(Types out a reply.)* There, that's one done. Now, where was I? Right, the sales reports. Now, we analyze the competition and — *(The computer PINGS with e-mail arriving.)* All right, all right! Enough already.

(The WORKER types out a reply; the CONSULTANT enters.)

CONSULTANT: So, Michelle, is it?

WORKER: Yes, ma'am.

CONSULTANT: How are we doing on the e-mail?

WORKER: Uh, I believe I've gotten it all. *(The computer PINGS with e-mail arriving.)* Oh, wait, here's another one. Pardon me.

(WORKER frantically pounds away on the keyboard. CONSULTANT studies clipboard.)

CONSULTANT: Let's see. Yes. Our latest computer analysis here does show you're opening your e-mail a lot faster. Very impressive.

WORKER: Uh, thank you.

CONSULTANT: Your arrival-to-response time is up to the 80th percentile. *(The computer PINGS with more e-mail arriving.)*

WORKER: Oh, wait, here's one more. They come in awfully fast, you know.

CONSULTANT: Hmm. But oh, this isn't good. Not good at all.

WORKER: What's that?

CONSULTANT: This analysis shows you have adopted a linear intercept strategy. Not good at all.

WORKER: A what?

CONSULTANT: It means you open the e-mail in the order it's received.

WORKER: Well, yes, you said to open it as fast as I could.

CONSULTANT: An understandable beginner's mistake.

WORKER: Beginner's mistake?

CONSULTANT: But not very efficient. You need to prioritize your e-mail so you can distinguish between what's urgent and what's important. We recommend a multi-dimensional model for e-mail management. You can prioritize your e-mail by the sender, by the subject field, by the priority status indicated in the priority field —

WORKER: Isn't that what I was doing in the first place?

CONSULTANT: We can sign you up for some training sessions on e-mail management. I'll recommend you for an introductory class.

WORKER: Look, I don't have time for a class on how to open my e-mail! Especially right now — I've got this report due, see?

CONSULTANT: Now, now, we can all stand to brush up on our workplace skills to stay current with the latest trends. I'll check back with you later and see how you're doing, OK? OK! (*Exits.*)

WORKER: (*Mimics consultant.*) We can all stand to brush up on our workplace skills. (*Works faster.*) All right, prioritize, prioritize. And oh, geez, this report is almost due. (*The computer PINGS with e-mail arriving.*) All right, what's this one?

(*CONSULTANT enters.*)

CONSULTANT: So, how are we doing with the prioritization?

WORKER: Oh, we're prioritizing, all right!

CONSULTANT: Very good. I've been looking some more at your computer analysis and I think the next thing we need to work on is keystrokes.

WORKER: Keystrokes?

CONSULTANT: Yes, this report shows you're in the 15th percentile on keystrokes.

WORKER: Is that good or bad?

CONSULTANT: That means you don't say much in your e-mail replies.

WORKER: Uh, well, I'm trying to be efficient, you know. Now, if you'll excuse me —

CONSULTANT: Let's not be penny-wise and pound-foolish, as they say. Our studies have found that a strong correlation between short replies and imprecise communication. And imprecise communication can lead to confusion and confusion leads to inefficiency and inefficiency leads to added costs and reduced revenues. So, let's work on the number of keystrokes.

WORKER: Let me see if I understand this: You want me to be more long-winded in my replies?

CONSULTANT: Not long-winded. Just more — precise. We've run a regression analysis if you'd like to look at it — this study shows that the relationship between the length of an e-mail reply and the communication comprehension factor falls along a bell curve — and you'd be right here! Not a pretty picture, now is it?

WORKER: Uh, no, but I really need to be getting some work done now.

CONSULTANT: Very good. I'll check back with you in a bit. And oh, good news. I've been able to persuade the company to adopt a full training session on e-mail management — both introductory and advanced levels.

WORKER: Uh, that's great.

CONSULTANT: But we may need to sign you up for remedial. We'll have to see.

(CONSULTANT exits, WORKER works even more frantically.)

WORKER: That's just great. Remedial e-mail training! Geez. OK, Michelle, let's focus now: Prioritize, get the report out, write longer e-mails, get this other report out, prioritize some more —

(CONSULTANT enters.)

CONSULTANT: Well, Michelle, I've been looking over our latest analysis.

WORKER: Uh, can it wait?

CONSULTANT: I think we need to work on grammar.

WORKER: I need to work on this report.

CONSULTANT: You see, our computer analysis shows you use an unusually high number of one-letter words in your e-mail replies.

WORKER: I'm listening.

CONSULTANT: That could be because you have a tendency to use a lot of computer shorthand — the letter "U" for the word "you," the letter "r" for the word "are," that sort of thing.

WORKER: Uh-huh.

CONSULTANT: And a very high percentage of your keystrokes involve colons and the shift lock for zero.

WORKER: I can't really talk right now.

CONSULTANT: This suggests an over-reliance on emoticons.

WORKER: Emoticons? Look, I'm really busy right now — I've got to get this report out.

CONSULTANT: Smiley faces. We believe that smiley faces and frowny faces are not appropriate tools for business communication.

WORKER: No, but they're darned efficient sometimes. Now, if you'll excuse me —

(BOSS enters.)

BOSS: So, how's it going?

End of Freeview

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