**Bonni:** [00:00:00] It's not a regularly requested topic because so many of us assume it's inevitable that it will be a headache for us. However it's keeping many of us from being our most productive. On today's episode, getting to zero inbox in our e-mail.

**Production Credit:** [00:00:16] Produced by Innovate Learning, maximizing human potential.

**Bonni:** [00:00:24] Welcome for this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. This is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to increase our personal productivity approaches so we can have more Peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

**Bonni:** [00:00:52] Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. This is Bonni Stachowiak and today I am going to be talking about the aspiration although in my case I can report as of four forty five today. The realization of having zero e-mails in my inbox. Now does that mean that I've taken care of everything that needs doing. Absolutely not.

**Bonni:** [00:01:16] Instead what that means is that I don't use my email as a task manager but instead I use a task manager for a task manager and I'm going to be sharing with you strategies for how you can achieve the same thing no matter how busy your semester gets this term zero inbox sometimes called inbox zero.

**Bonni:** [00:01:38] The words are often interchanged with each other was first coined by a man named Merlin Mann and he gave a very popular talk to the Google employees some years ago that is still so relevant today in fact so much so that I have put it in the show notes at teachinginhighered.com/56. If you've never heard him give that talk before it is worth a listen because it is so relevant with somewhat of the backwards way that we have started to treat our e-mail boxes.

**Bonni:** [00:02:10] He uses the analogy that many times how we treat email would be ludicrous if we treated our real mailbox that has the physical mail in it that way it would be the equivalent of we receive our Visa card bill in the mail and we leave it out there in the box and we keep it out there in the box because it's not coming due for some time so we'll just leave it out there until twenty twenty seven days from now when I actually need to send that check in.

**Bonni:** [00:02:37] And going out to the mailbox in front of our house multiple times a day and just checking in to see if anything's arrived since the last time that we looked. And just an ever accumulating mass of mail. Now we know that eventually we wouldn't have enough physical space in that physical mail box.

**Bonni:** [00:02:57] We'd run out of room so that's but that's not the only reason we don't manage things that way. With a bill it's certainly important that we're going to pay it on time and so most of us have some sort of a system that we've set up to ensure that we pay it. By the time that it is due.

**Bonni:** [00:03:12] That's the equivalent to how we want to treat our e-mail box or at least there's many parallels between them. The first thing we want to think about when we want to get to Inbox zero or zero in box is we want to be strategic about what times we check e-mail. I put this one up front because it's the one that I am the worst dad and I'm the worst at it at all times of the year. I'm the worst of it at summertime. I'm the worst of it.

**Bonni:** [00:03:36] During my busiest times of the semester the most productive people that I know the people who are the most present for the people in their lives are very strategic about what times they check their email I have a colleague who hosts a podcast called The Student Carian podcast David Pecoraro.

**Bonni:** [00:03:55] And he's very good about only checking email a couple of times a day and that means he doesn't have to go back and have those interruptions which the research shows it's very hard for us to get back to whatever it is that we were doing and were able to have a lot less stress and just stay focused on email when we're checking it and the other times that day stay focused on whatever it is we want to be focused on.

**Bonni:** [00:04:17] We want to use e-mail like a real mailbox with physical mail in that we empty it out every day. Get rid of the junk and have some sort of system for taking care of those items when they need taking care of or having them for

reference. If we believe we're going to need them for reference in the future the biggest part of being able to do that is to leverage a to do list or a task manager.

**Bonni:** [00:04:43] As I mentioned in previous shows my husband Dave and I both use a task manager called Omnifocus. It's only available on the Mac and it's one of the higher end ones. But there are all kinds of options for you out there the most important thing is that it goes with you everywhere so that's why it's so smart to have it on your phone or other device that you carry with you everywhere.

**Bonni:** [00:05:04] And then you also want to make sure it's something that you'll consult on a regular basis at least once a day although probably multiple times a day. Another way of getting to zero in box is to make use of what are called snippets for commonly asked questions.

**Bonni:** [00:05:21] At the end of every semester I'm going to get a few students who are going to ask when their grades will be posted or there maybe the inevitable students who will have questions about. Is there extra credit some kind of opportunity that I can have where I can have another do over on my grade and I have a common response to those things and what I can do is save them essentially as templates.

**Bonni:** [00:05:47] And just type a couple of keyboard strokes on either my keyboard or even on my phone. I have what's called text expander which is on the Mac and on the iPhone and on the iPad.

**Bonni:** [00:06:01] But there's also a Windows equivalent called Breevy and were able to save up these snippets of everything from I'm constantly forgetting what my work phone number is so I have a text expander snippet for that I am regularly scheduling podcast interviews and I have a snippet that will expand to be the Web site that I use for scheduling those interviews.

**Bonni:** [00:06:23] And I've got these commonly asked questions that I save up there and I've got a whole bunch of templates that I can use for various things that I do on a regular basis it allows me even to fill in information so that it can be customized in some ways that's another way we can get those e-mails taken care of address the questions and move onto the next one.

**Bonni:** [00:06:46] The other thing is to schedule meetings we've talked about this in previous episodes with tools that allow you to do this much more seamlessly

than e-mail does the two that have come up most frequently are doodle or thebestday.com.

**Bonni:** [00:07:00] I've linked to both of those in the show notes at Teach-In and higher red dot com slash 56 instead of sending 5 10 15 20 different e-mails that are all oh I can't do that day I'm not available. What about this day. We can save all that time and just have a single e-mail that goes out to say hey fill out this form on doodle and a single e-mail that goes out that says this is the time that's been selected.

**Bonni:** [00:07:27] And even conveniently has a attachment with a meeting request in it so people can easily add it to their calendar. The other thing to help you be more focused on getting to zero in box is to have some sort of a hub for committee work that you do or other kinds of collaboration. If there's one central place where we go whether that's a shared Dropbox or perhaps some kind of a wiki that you use or some kind of a tool where everyone knows that's where the agenda is that's where the minutes are.

**Bonni:** [00:07:59] That's where the things were supposed to give feedback on our we can get people used to going to one central place and have fewer e-mails that need to go out as I mentioned I've got Merlin Mann's video and inbox zero if you want to learn more.

**Bonni:** [00:08:13] The biggest thing is to stop using your inbox in your email as a to do list transfer those items over to a task manager that you're consulting regularly. The advantage of doing that is that then when you're prioritizing your you're prioritizing with a lot more things in consideration than just what's setting in your inbox.

**Bonni:** [00:08:35] When you use e-mail as a task manager you're allowing other people to prioritize what's important to you in your life and in your work. When you use a task manager it's things that have been defined by others. Gas needs that others have commitments that you've made but also you're generating your own input into what's important and what needs to get accomplished.

**Bonni:** [00:08:58] I encourage you to watch Merlin Mann's video if you'd like to learn more and just have a appreciation for what the good uses of e-mail are and the not so good uses. And at the end of every show we always do our recommendations segment.

**Bonni:** [00:09:15] And mine is going to be that after Dave and I recorded the most recent episode that was 55 on calendar management. I went and listened to Tim Stringer from learnomnifocus.com. I listened to his webinars on calendar tools and this is specific for those of you who do use omni focus but it was such a revelation to me some of the things I didn't realize you could do in omni focus to manage your calendar a little bit better.

**Bonni:** [00:09:46] And how those two tools can talk to each other is a really nice resource so if you're on omni focus highly suggest that you check out Tim Stringer's overall website called Learn omni focus dot com and especially that calendar web and our had a lot of good insights for me.

**Bonni:** [00:10:03] Thanks so much for listening to today's episode of Teaching in Higher Ed and looking forward to some of the guests that we have coming up over the course of the next few weeks. As always if you have suggestions for the show you can give them good at teachinginhighered.com/feedback.

**Bonni:** [00:10:22] And if you have yet to subscribe to the weekly updates you can do that at teachinginhighered.com/subscribe and that'll get you the weekly. Show notes from these podcasts and an accompanying article on either teaching or productivity. Thanks so much for listening. And I'll see you next time.