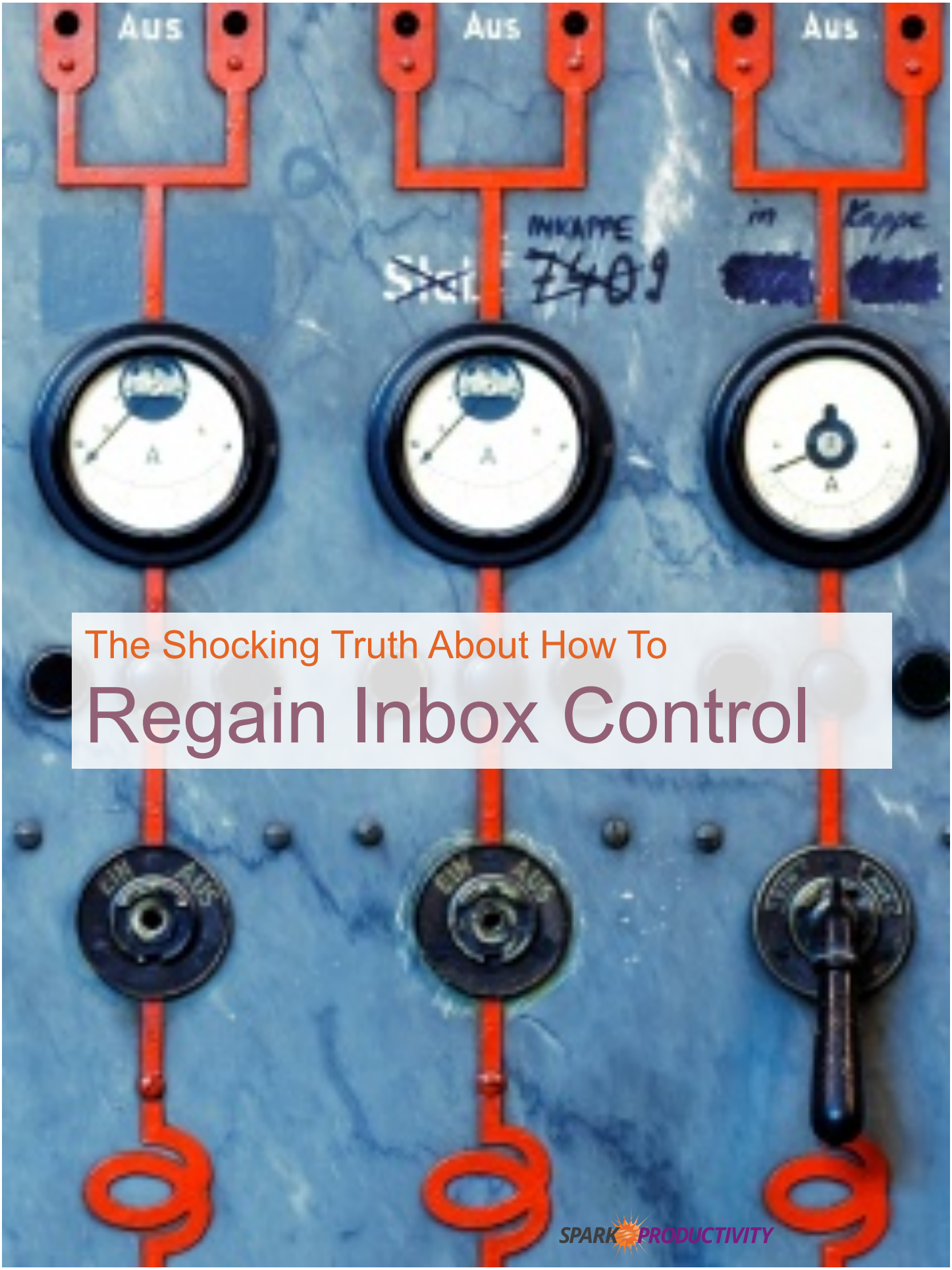

The Shocking Truth About How To

Regain Inbox Control

SPARK PRODUCTIVITY

Trainers:

Linette George & Donna Lindley

Spark Productivity trainers Linette and Donna work with people and organizations that want to do more and achieve more — and feel more fulfilled in the process. Helping them judge time using a deliberate rhythm is often a means to that end. Reach Linette and Donna at 312.765.7550 or linette@sparkproductivity.com donna@sparkproductivity.com

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Chapter 1

STATUS QUO

How often do you open up to an overwhelming email inbox?

If you're like most executives, one mistaken belief is perpetuating a daily menacing email situation. And it's not what you think. If you believe you need to "organize" your emails to regain control, you're wrong.

When you're bombarded with hundreds of emails a day…

you know something must be done to maintain order. So you are drawn toward methods that give order to so many other areas of your life. Categorizing clothes according to body parts saves time. Separating forks from knives makes setting the table faster. Filing papers by project makes key documents easier to find.

So creating an elaborate folder system to store reference emails must be the answer. Right?

Wrong!

The practice of being organized in the inbox leaves you disorganized”

Imagine if Google were to “organize” information. Say you’re vacationing and you want to find a well-rated sandwich shop that will deliver to the beach. Do you look in the Sandwich Shop folder under the Town Name? Or in the Delivery folder under Restaurants? Or maybe in the 2013 Top-Rated Restaurants folder ? (Is this folder quandary familiar?)

Your inbox has the same issues Google is facing with the Internet. The volume is high and any given message includes multiple topics. Because digital search has become so powerful, organization is not the answer…

Search is.

Chapter 2

NEW PARADIGM

Instead of using paper folders as your archetype, model Google. Opt for far less order and then use keyword search-and-sort to retrieve items when you need them. If you're a PC user and don't have the advantage of Spotlight, consider investing in an add-in desktop search tool like X1 or Copernic to enable split-second email and document searches across your computer.

Exchange Hyper (Overly)Organized for Hypo (Slightly) Organized

Many people already use hypo organization in their sent folder and inbox because they are so far behind on their filing. The following steps will soothe your guilt over not filing and replace it with relief when you see only new and task-begging emails without the clutter of useless ones.

step 1: PRACTICE SEARCH

So that you can get comfortable enough to implement Step Three, practice search. Test yourself for up to a week to see if you can find things without referring to your folder system. Study the advanced search features and customize your sort options to yield more accurate results.

Step 2: Establish a Single Reference Point

Now that you're secure in finding things, create a general reference folder. This is where you're going to dump everything that no longer requires action, but may need to be referenced some day. Common names include *Reference Bucket*, *General Reference*, *Reference*, or *Dump Bucket*. If you're feeling brave, consider the *Delete* folder or *Archive* in Gmail as your single reference point.

This eliminates the need to file...

because hitting the "delete" or "archive" key automatically removes it from the inbox and files it for you.

Chapter 3

MAKE THE CHANGE

Now that new habits have been determined, take action to transfer your inbox and folders to the new system.

Step 3: Move Inbox Items Into Your Reference Point

Select everything in your inbox that is three weeks or older and move all of those items to your single reference point. Feel free to adjust the timing to two weeks, but don't adjust in the other direction. Do not organize those emails by filing them into your folder system! It's not worth your time. You're currently getting along without that organization, so why apply the organization when you know you can live without it?

Step 4: Review Remaining Inbox Emails

Go through your remaining emails and file items that don't require action into the reference point and leave all those requiring action in your inbox.

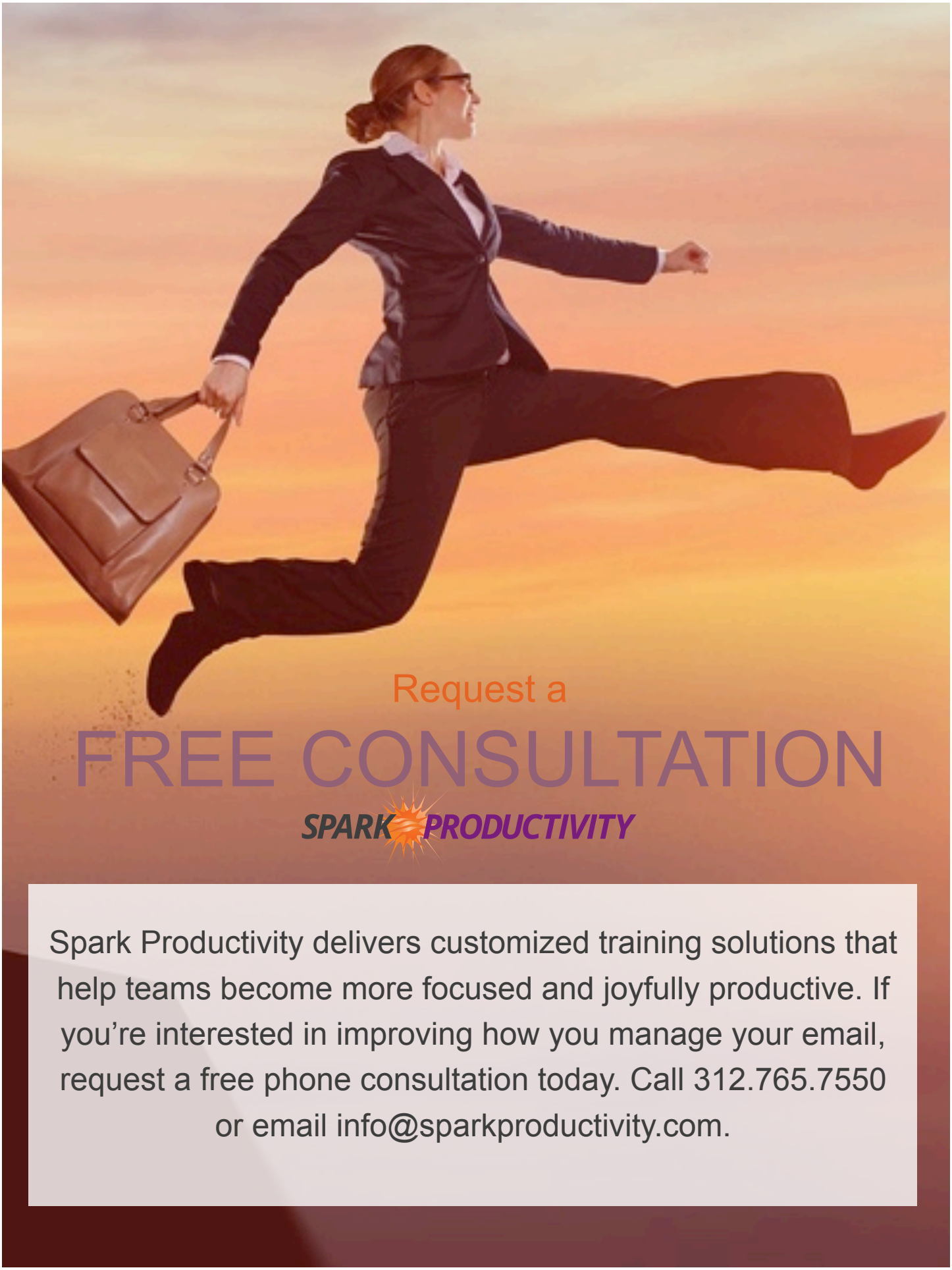
The last step is to close down your old folder system.

If having some emails organized and others not bothers you, then take the longer road of selecting all from each folder and moving them into the single reference point.

Step 5: Sunset Old Folder System

If this level of detail doesn't matter to you, nest the folders under the single reference folder and then fold them up so you no longer see them. If you identify a folder or two that seems more reliable than search or sort, you're allowed this exception (like Google's Images/Maps/Videos filters) provided they don't rule.

Establishing new email inbox habits with a single reference location and searching for needed emails will enable you to dominate through disorder and joyfully enter your email.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