What, me frustrated?

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Who among us hasn’t worked with or for people who flat out refuse to get back to us? I am currently working for a VP who gets so many emails each day that he is unable to reply to all of them. So he skims, rather than reads, as they come in. The lower down in his inbox an email falls, the less likely he is to reply. This can be a problem when I am waiting for a response for information that only he has or an approval that only he can authorize.

In the most recent edition of the GPA newsletter, *Take if for Granted* (Summer 2011), my colleague Danny Blitch wrote a short article on how important reading is for grant writing. He also eloquently describes how annoying it is when people admit that they saw your email but didn’t bother to read it. He correctly points out that, “All the reading required in order to complete a successful grant application may take more time in total than in takes to write the actual proposal.”

I like to read, I’ve always been a reader and I have a hard time understanding exactly why some people don’t. Especially email because it is so critical in today’s business environment. I know some people shun books and only flip through magazines in a waiting room, but email? Email is still a primary means of business communication. If I am writing an email to a colleague, it’s probably not full of chatter about my recent trip to the beach. I work from home, with the exception of randomly scheduled meetings, thus the main way I converse with clients and colleagues is via email.

As a consultant, I know little bits of information on a wide variety of subjects. I may know enough to write the abstract; but, I definitely do not have the subject area knowledge to write an entire application about specific subjects (such as Alzheimer’s disease, breast cancer, housing for veterans, etc). Whatever I could compose alone would certainly not be detailed enough to be funded.

It’s an issue of breadth versus depth of knowledge. I am dependent on my clients and colleagues to provide me with enough subject knowledge that I can make a compelling argument for funding. When people refuse to reply to email and/or fail to send me the information that I’ve requested, I cannot make the argument.

Grant writing is my job; but, I will not accept responsibility for an unfunded application when I was unable to secure the information requested from the program staff. At such times, an old bumper sticker phrase comes to mind - a lack of preparation on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part. Similarly, a rejection letter does not mean that I have failed in my job. It may mean that the application was weakened by a lack of
substantive information. For while I can google with the best of them, there is no replacement for in-the-trenches anecdotes and information.

This article may be the very definition of preaching to the choir. The other grant professionals in my personal network are all strong readers and prompt repliers. However, I think it’s important to remind ourselves every now and then that we are not alone – that many of us struggle with the same challenges whether we’re working in professional office setting in New York or California, or sitting alone at our desks at home.

In fact, my need to not feel alone is what keeps me involved in my state’s Grant Professionals Association (GPA) chapter. Ours is a unique occupation. It is important that I have the opportunity to meet and network with others who share my struggles and frustrations – and actually it has been an invaluable resource for me.

Our local GPA chapter tries to save time at each meeting to conduct a round table discussion of what people are working on and/or what people need some input on. I believe that this portion of the meeting amounts to a group therapy session and is reason enough to renew my membership each year.

There are also an ever-growing number of linked-in groups that provide this same sense of camaraderie. Reach out wherever you can – whether through online discussions or in-person meetings. What is important is that you keep faith. You are not alone. You have many more colleagues just like you and they are ready to support you. And if you email me, I promise a prompt reply!