

“Are e-mails taking over your life?”

The use of e-mail has revolutionised communications by increasing the ease and speed at which individuals and organisations can deal with each other – but bad practice and a lack of agreed conventions for its use have come to outweigh the undoubted benefits.

Your organisation may have a policy outlining best practice – but are you doing your bit, by modelling good behaviour?

Good Manners

- 1 Make your emails personal** – not only should an email be personally addressed, it should also include customised content. If you are sending information, consider whether this new recipient will need the whole thread, (the story so far), or just a précis / summary of the parts that are relevant to them. Much better that you do some editing, than force them to scour through a lot of history in order for them to find (or not!) the information that you want them to have.
- 2 Do not forward chain letters** – you can safely assume that they are hoaxes. Just delete the letters as soon as you receive them.
- 3 Do not pass on virus warnings** – you can safely assume that they are hoaxes. Just delete them as soon as you receive them.
- 4 Do not reply to spam** – if you reply to spam or unsubscribe, you are confirming that your email address is 'live', which will only generate more spam! Therefore, just hit the delete button, or right mouse, click on the item to add it to your Junk mail list and notify your IT administrator of the problem.
- 5 Do not request delivery and read receipts** – this will almost always annoy your recipient before they have even read your message. If you really want to know whether an email was received, it is better to ask the recipient to tell you so.
- 6 Do not ask to recall a message** – if it has been sent, it has probably been received and read. The best policy is to send a new message explaining the previous mail was sent in error and re-send the correct text.
- 7 Do not copy someone else's message or attachment without permission** – you run the risk of infringing both good manners and copyright laws.
- 8 Do not use email to discuss confidential information** – think of an email as a postcard. There have been many cases of 'interesting mails' finding their way into the public domain. If you would not be happy with your mail being displayed on a bulletin board, think before you send it.
- 9 Do not send or forward emails containing libellous, defamatory, offensive, racist, sexist or obscene remarks** – you may be running the risk of involving both yourself and your company in embarrassing and expensive litigation.

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10 Think about your Out of Office Message (OOMs) – If you are on a mailing list along with other subscribers and you use an OOM whilst on holiday for example, you should unsubscribe from the list. Otherwise, every message that is sent to the list will trigger a response from you, which will be sent to everyone – telling them (repeatedly) that you are on holiday.

11 Email is not always the best tool – and it is not appropriate for dealing with:

- Matters to do with someone’s individual relationship with the business
- Complex issues
- Personal issues / issues of a delicate nature

Neither is it appropriate to communicate by email on any occasion when it is important to read another person’s body language, or if it is necessary to be able to display emotion (compassion, empathy, understanding) oneself.

So, email would not be appropriate for:

- annual appraisal
- performance feedback
- delegating complex tasks
- thank you letters
- delicate decisions, requiring buy-in
- sackings
- giving a reprimand
- offering condolences

12 Be aware that sometimes emails are misinterpreted and you will receive a ‘Flame’ by reply – a flame is a response to a mail, which you may have sent to 20 people, but which has been taken to be abrupt, rude, pernickety (add your own words here) by one recipient and, as a result, they have fired off a heated response. It is very tempting to get into a ‘flame war’, but try to be sensitive and conciliatory, try to see the mail from the other persons point of view, think through your response and even when you have written it, p - a - u - s - e before you send.

Ask yourself, will my reply help the situation or make it worse? Do I want to (can I afford to) end communication or sour relations with this individual forever?

It is important to focus on adult to adult conversation and to draw flame conversations to an end as soon as possible.



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