

Email Communication Strategies for Greater Harmony

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Whether you are communicating with someone face-to-face, over the telephone, or via email, text, or instant messaging, if your communication styles do not match one another, you might be headed towards problems. Email communications, in particular, are ripe for misunderstanding between corresponding parties. To understand why, let's review some basic email communication response techniques:

- 1) Some people prefer to handle all email messages as soon as they arrive. This approach is useful in a variety of professions, particularly when time is of the essence, as with financial brokerage and many types of sales professions.
- 2) Some individuals seek to handle all email correspondence by the day's end. This gives them leeway as to when and what they'll tackle. If they receive a request in the morning which merits considerable effort to address, they have time to work this task into their daily schedule.
- 3) Some executives, as well as entire organizations, maintain a policy of half-day responsiveness. For example, if an email message arrives in the morning, the goal is to answer it by that afternoon. Likewise, when an email message is received in the afternoon, the goal is to answer it by the next morning.
- 4) Some individuals allow emails to pileup for days at a time and then handle dozens of them over a prolonged period. Some people answer email in one to three days, while others wait until the end of the week or some other designated time to answer email. Depending on your profession and industry norms, this could prove to be satisfactory, and even appropriate.

Many people combine two or more of the email communication techniques above and few strictly follow only one path all of the time.

Triage Rules

Virtually all frequent emailers understand the concept of triage, even if they are unfamiliar with the term.

When email messages arrive, it's relatively easy to separate the important from the less important ones. Among the less important messages you can decide to delegate them, file them for future use, delete them, or offer a quick response if appropriate.

Important messages usually are afforded special status. Based on an email's level of importance and the attention it merits, it might be appropriate to drop everything else and work solely on the issue at hand, or at least schedule time later in the day to do so.

In all cases, with all email communication response techniques, a few basic guidelines will help even among corresponding parties who have conflicting email communication styles. The following ground rules could preserve friendships, opportunities, and peace of mind:

- 1) Regardless of your communication style, if you can't fully respond to the brunt of emails you receive amidst a tough stretch at work, while you're traveling, or during some other moments, at least **acknowledge reception of the email**. Send a quick note to the other party such as, "I received your message, traveling 'til Tuesday evening, will respond at length then." Offering such a message might help reduce potential anxiety on the part of the sender.

Often, when people send an email and don't get a response for days, a number of thoughts run through their heads. Has my email been lost someplace in cyberspace? Did it even arrive at all? If it did arrive, is my message being ignored? Is my issue or concern deemed low priority or inappropriate? By acknowledging your reception of an email that you can't respond to right away, you not only tell the other party that you are true professional, you also stave off them sending a second and possibly third follow-up to determine why they hadn't heard from you.

2) If you're not the right party to have received such a message or you know how the sender can **get the issue resolved quickly**, and you can answer within a couple sentences, again, go ahead and **fire off a quick response**. The recipient will be thankful.

Indicating that you are not the correct person to have received this request gives the other party news they can use. It might not be the most welcome news, but it keeps them from waiting on you. If you can point them to the right party and offer them an email address, URL link, or phone number, then you have most aptly served them.

3) When you are the right party and can address the issue immediately, do your best to **handle the task in one fell swoop**. Whether it takes five, 10, 15 minutes or more, once you delve into the issue at hand, and are providing some type of solution, or at least appropriate response to the sender, seek to complete the task then and there.

Any other method of proceeding means that you lose some productivity. If you have a 15 minute task ahead of you, and you are pulled off track seven minutes into it, chances are you'll need a lot more than the remaining eight minutes to complete the task. Why? You lost your momentum. Your brain was focusing on the issue, became distracted, and now has to refocus. Think in terms of completing entire units of work, via email or any other task, and your whole day will always go better.

4) **Develop a comprehensive set of email signatures** that answer frequently asked questions. Nearly every email software program today enables you to save a variety of signatures, also known as closing statements, that automatically appear once you finish the body of the email and click on the appropriate signature link. So, if you're asked a question repeatedly, formulate a fabulous answer, and save it as a signature. Thereafter, you might be able to send that paragraph without having to do much else, or, at the least, make a few refinements here and there.

You can have email signatures for your biography, for explanations of what you or your company does, for prices, for service lists, for hours of operation, and so on.

5) When leisurely corresponding with a friend, or frequent associate, **look over your email one more time** before sending it off. We've all made the mistake of sending messages to soon. It could be that we left out an important word, committed an error in logic, or, heaven forbid, sent something off that made no sense whatsoever.

Caution: Never fire off an email when you're angry. It simply won't be interpreted in the way you want it to be. And, it's more likely than not to cause additional problems.

In this day and age, when it's well known that a variety of government agencies can tap into any kind of communication we've ever sent, it's crucial to ensure that what you're sending is exactly what you intend to send.