

The Abuse of Email and Its Impact on Work Relationships

By Debra Hamilton

Email use continues to exponentially grow with nearly 100 billion email messages being sent per day worldwide. The convenience and expediency of email has resulted in abuse and overuse of the tool - often creating a climate of dissension. In brief interviews, here are what people have disclosed as some of the pitfalls and perils of email.

- People don't get their point across.
- It is used as a CYA tactic instead of communication.
- People don't know who should respond to what, causing overuse of the "reply to all" function.
- Email messages are often ambiguous, vague, or lack necessary detail to act on.
- Emails without summaries (that refer back to previous conversations or decisions) add confusion.
- Numerous ASAP/urgent emails often lack context of the emergency.
- Haste, inappropriate tone, and inadvertent actions put people and businesses at risk.
- Email used as a discussion to solve problems or resolve conflict often escalates the conflict and damages relationships.

Despite its popularity, people point to email as one of the major causes of work-related stress and strained relationships. Here are some guidelines for taming the email beast.

1. Decide if email is your best choice for communicating. Think first before using email. Do not use email to solve major problems, resolve conflict, dish out reprimands or criticism, communicate tight deadlines, or handle sensitive matters. In these cases, replace email with a phone call or meeting. A brief phone call is often more efficient and can replace dozens of poorly constructed email messages bouncing back and forth.

2. Limit the volume of email. The more email going back and forth, the more frustration and opportunity for error, misinterpretation, haste, wasted time, and hurt feelings. When you are caught in a series of email messages, know when to cut the thread and pick up the phone.

3. Avoid using e-mail as a CYA tactic. In organizations where trust is low, people routinely "copy" everyone as a CYA tactic. This strains relationships and wastes readers' time. A person should be copied when they are directly involved with the task/project and

need to be aware of progress. Avoid copying to escalate an issue unless you have exhausted other options.

4. Show respect for your reader's time. When writing email, be ultra clear as to why you are writing and what you need. Focus on just one issue per email and give the reader specific details and dates to help that person respond. Also, allow for a 24-hour response time. If your message is more urgent, pick up the phone.

5. Use email to build workplace relationships. Our busy global landscape limits face-to-face interaction with others. As a result, email continues to be the prevailing tool for communicating and fostering loyalty and building relationships. Email messages are often misinterpreted, quickly creating a climate of dissonance. Show respect for readers by sending a well-organized message with the appropriate "body language" to carry a positive tone. Use please and thank you. Insert phrases such as, I appreciate your help with this. Go the extra mile for your colleagues and customers to reinforce the working relationship.

CMC offers a free consultation for those interested in learning more about Management Communication and how it can benefit your organization.

About Change Management Consulting, Inc. (CMC)

Founded in 1993, Change Management Consulting is a global management consulting and training company, dedicated to helping organizations of all sizes improve performance, achieve goals and advance leadership capability. As a full-service organizational improvement firm, CMC focuses on organizational and leadership development, compliance management (ISO 9001 and its derivatives), strategic planning and Lean Six Sigma initiatives.

Headquartered in Wayne, NJ with offices in San Diego, Dallas and Detroit, CMC has a proven track record in helping public and private sector clients implement pragmatic continual improvement initiatives that drive financially measurable results. CMC also has extensive experience in obtaining grants and funding assistance for its clients. Learn more at www.cmc-changemanagement.com or contact CMC at (877) 268-2440 or (973) 696-7878.