



MEMORANDUM

TO: Florida Conference Staff

FROM: Wendy McCoy
HR & Benefits

DATE: May 23, 2008

SUBJECT: Guidelines for E-Mail Etiquette

Why the reminder about e-mail etiquette?

Recently there have been concerns raised about the proper use of e-mail communication. This is a reminder of proper e-mail etiquette and conference rules addressing unacceptable use of e-mail.

Today's communications, especially in the form of e-mail, require brevity. Yet, because of the need for brevity, there is a strong need to be both concise and practice good e-mail etiquette.

One of the most potentially hazardous elements to e-mail communication is the writer's inability to communicate tone or expression—the non-verbal communications that accompany phone calls or face-to-face conversations. Because of this, words can often be misinterpreted and people can take offense at the message, even though there was no offense intended. E-mail etiquette can help you avoid this situation.

No flaming

Have you ever been flamed or flamed someone else? Flaming is the term used to describe verbal nastiness, venting emotion and in general being deriding or demeaning to or about others. If you are angry or upset, the same "count to ten rule" applies for e-mail as for opening your mouth: don't rashly—without thinking—spill out your feelings into an e-mail. Once the words are written and the send button is pushed, they can never be taken back. Be sure what you are about to write is something that you are prepared to say to the person face-to-face and discuss in a rational way. Be sure what you are about to send is something you are prepared to share with your supervisor or your supervisor's supervisor. Otherwise, you are setting yourself and possibly others up for a conflict. Even if the conflict takes place solely in the virtual world, it will have emotional affects on everyone involved. You cannot hide forever behind the monitor; eventually you will have to face it in some way.

Conference e-mail policies

The Florida Conference prohibits the following via e-mail:

- disseminating confidential information to unauthorized sources—this includes the transmission of documents containing financial information or Social Security numbers;
- sending or forwarding harassing, abusive, intimidating, discriminatory, or other offensive e-mails;
- unauthorized or inappropriate solicitation for any purpose;
- forwarding messages containing defamatory, obscene, offensive, or harassing information, or forwarding chain-type messages and executable graphics files which can cause an overload on our computer system;

- no text should be included in an e-mail message that would not be included in any other written communication (employees and users should be sensitive to the fact that e-mail creates a permanent written record);
- no information marked “confidential,” “not for distribution,” or “internal use only” may be transmitted via e-mail (or otherwise communicated or distributed) to anyone other than persons authorized to receive such material. Any e-mail received by an unauthorized person should be permanently deleted and the unauthorized recipient should immediately inform the sender of the error.

Remember, the confidentiality of any e-mail message should not be assumed. Treat each and every e-mail like you a sending a hard-copy, written postcard; everyone who comes across may read it! Even when a message is erased, it is still possible to retrieve and read that message. Further, the use of passwords for security does not guarantee confidentiality.

E-mail etiquette tips:

1. Be concise and to the point.
2. Do not bury requests for work or for action in the body of an e-mail.
 - a. In other words, don't make the end user hunt for information.
3. Do not ask multiple people to do multiple tasks in a single e-mail. Send separate e-mails to each person clearly stating task requests.
4. Answer all questions and pre-empt further questions.
5. Use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation.
6. Do not attach unnecessary files.
7. Do not overuse the high priority option.
8. Do not write in CAPITALS (using CAPITAL letters is considered shouting on e-mail).
9. Don't leave out the message thread.
10. Read the e-mail before you send it.
 - a. Read it again.
11. Do not overuse “Reply to All.”
12. Take care with abbreviations and emoticons.
13. Use a meaningful subject line.
14. Avoid long sentences.
15. Keep your language gender neutral.
16. Don't reply to spam.
17. Use the “cc:” field sparingly.
18. Read the e-mail again before you send it.

Is e-mail the best medium?

Depending on the message itself, its length, its sensitivity, the possibility of misinterpretation, the importance of its content and what you stand to gain or lose from it, you must always consider whether or not an e-mail is the best way to share the information. A phone or face-to-face conversation may be a better choice when there is the potential for reaction or misinterpretation, because there is the immediate opportunity for explanation and discussion. If the information is lengthy, put it on paper, fax or mail it, or make it an attachment to the e-mail that can be printed. People really do not like reading lengthy documents online.

E-mail is a wonderful tool, if you use it correctly. However, with any tool, you should learn how to use it in a proper way and for the right type of work. E-mail cannot replace face-to-face conversation and it should never be used as a substitute when it comes to dealing with or developing interpersonal relationships. A good working relationship can quickly turn bad if one forgets e-mail etiquette.