

8 Tips to Stay Out of Email Hell at Work

02/05/2015 10:43 am ET **Updated** Dec 06, 2017

-
-
-
-
-
-



Email reigns as the king among workplace tools in the U.S., yet some workers don't exactly treat it like royalty.

Last chance to become a HuffPost founding member!

Sign up for membership to become a founding member and help shape HuffPost's next chapter

[Yes, I want to support HuffPost](#)

In a survey for the Pew Research Center, 61 percent of Internet-using adult workers in the U.S. cited email as the most important workplace tool. Email ranked higher than all the other tools: the Internet, the phone and social media.

“What is potentially surprising is that even in the face of constantly evolving forms of digital communication, potential threats like phishing, hacking and spam, and dire warnings

about lost productivity and email overuse, email continues to be the main digital artery that workers believe is important to their jobs,” Pew says. “Since taking hold a generation ago, email has not loosened its grip on the American workplace.”

Some American workers can't seem to get a grip on proper use of email at the office, however. One high-profile example: Amy Pascal, head of Sony's film division, recently became ensnared in a made-for-the-tabloids scandal over leaked emails. The emails revealed her private — but self-admittedly “insensitive and inappropriate” — musings on matters like President Obama's movie-viewing habits and an embattled Sony-backed biopic about Apple guru Steve Jobs.

Experts provide these eight tips for making sure your workplace inbox doesn't get you shoved out the door — or at least doesn't make your colleagues want to immediately delete your emails.

1. Communicate carefully.



Think about what an email says before you hit “send.”

“If you are delivering bad news, this should be done in person. It is hard to communicate with empathy and compassion via email,” said Sherri Mitchell, co-founder of staffing and recruiting company All About People.

Along those lines, keep personal messages and even fantasy-football info out of work emails, business consultant Walt Meyer recommended. Specific content to avoid includes jokes, political remarks and religious views, unless they're actually welcome and allowed, according to HR consultant Laura Gmeinder.

2. Check your temperature.



If you're even slightly hacked off, avoid blasting off an angry email. Your foul mood will come across in the tone of your message.

"Instead, pick up the phone. Hearing the other person's voice will force you to be nicer and calmer," Monster.com HR expert Mary Ellen Slayter said. "Plus, if you do wind up being a jerk, you can immediately apologize without a paper trail."

Another option: Save the email as a draft and review it once you've cooled down.

"Firing off an emotionally charged note without first counting to 10 is kind of like eating a doughnut. It may feel great for a moment, but the regret often lingers long after," said Sean Smith, president of marketing and advertising agency Third Street.

3. Mind your manners.



Be cordial and polite, just as you'd be with your grandmother. Of course, steer clear of profanity.

Also, remember to begin your email with a friendly greeting, such as "Good afternoon, Julie." This perks up what can be an impersonal communication method, financial planner Michael Clark said.

"As more and more of our daily work occurs over the Internet, more of us will experience professional relationships that exist only over the web," etiquette consultant Jodi RR Smith said. "Strive to make every interaction a pleasant one."

4. Get to the point.



Your emails should be clear and concise, experts say.

“If you have a bunch of items to discuss, you may want to consider sending several emails. This makes your message clear and allows the recipient to reply to one topic at a time,” said Mitchell, the All About People co-founder.

She added: “Rambling emails are dreadful. How your emails are written is a reflection of you.”

Don’t overlook the subject line, said Pete Sena, founder of marketing agency Digital Surgeons.

“People nowadays are primarily consuming their email on the go and from mobile devices. A descriptive subject line helps to improve the likelihood someone will open it,” Sena said.

5. Keep it simple.



If you're going to cover several matters in an email, divide the information into small, organized blocks to make it easier to read, Mitchell recommended. Also, incorporate bullet points, but don't overdo it.

"If it doesn't fit on one screen, edit the message or turn it into a Word document that can be attached to a short email cover note," said Ron Culp, director of the graduate PR and advertising program at DePaul University. "Brevity is especially important, since more than a third of email messages are being read on mobile devices."

6. Erase the errors.



Before pressing “send,” be sure to run your email program’s spelling and grammar checker, said Parker Geiger, CEO of Chuva Group, a branding agency. Then, he said, print the email and read it backward — word-by-word. No one wants to read sloppily constructed emails, including those with lots of words in all caps.

7. Cut the cuteness.



Want to be treated seriously? Then don't pepper your emails with childish smiley faces and similar symbols.

"If you're adding a smiley face to show you're kidding about something or to make bad news seem better, take it out," Monster.com's Slayter said.

In the absence of a smiley face, reword your email to clarify its meaning, according to Slayter, or simply relay the information in person or over the phone.

8. Don't be a copy machine.



Resist the urge to CC everybody in your office. Rather, CC only those people who need to be kept in the loop. Excessive CC'ing drains productivity, said Dave Scarola, vice president of The Alternate Board, a peer advisory network for business professionals.

"I have seen too many people widely copy recipients who get no benefit," Scarola said. "The sender's motivation is often 'Hey, look at me. I am doing something.'"

Photos via Thinkstock/Stockbyte, Thinkstock/Artem Sam, Thinkstock/Ivonne Wierink-vanWetten, Thinkstock/Wavebreak Media, Thinkstock/Daniel Vineyard, Thinkstock/Christian Chan, Thinkstock/Christopher Robbins

John Egan is editor in chief at SpareFoot, an Austin, Texas-based startup that makes it easy for people to find and book self-storage units online, offline and via mobile devices.