Think Before You Press 'Send'!

By: Carole Spiers

Sonya, is a Sales Manager in a Pharmaceutical company, a position that had taken her over 10 years to attain. She prides herself on her communication skills but at her appraisal meeting, she was told that her formal and blunt emailing style needed to be more 'friendly'. She was very surprised and argued that the quantity of email that she had to deal with each day meant that each one had to be dealt with quickly, and with no real time for pleasantries. Which leaves the question:

> Could formal and blunt email messages be taken by the recipient as a form of cyber bullying?
> The answer is, 'No!'. Cyber-bullying is writing with the intent to humiliate an individual by publishing adverse comment about him or her.

Although Sonya never does this, nevertheless her style of writing which is terse and short could be taken by the recipient as 'unfriendly' – which could not be termed bullying, but will not make her addressee feel valued.

So where is the line between a direct and blunt, personal management style, and bullying behaviour?

Many of us receive over fifty emails per day and our aim is to try to clear our inbox as quickly as possible, but in our haste, we may write in a way that can offend or which can appear unnecessarily abrupt. When emailing, we very often ignore the usual courtesies that we use when writing a letter.

Many times emails are received, and written, with no subject header but just the bare message, with the result that the words often appear to be harsh.

Do you remember the days when you would receive a letter by mail with a handwritten signature – instead of one that was scanned electronically? Unfortunately, such personal correspondence is now a thing of the past.

The result is that many of us have to arrive at the office early, or stay in late, just to clear our in-box. However, as we deal with our messages on phone or screen, we must still be aware of how we write and how the message will look to the recipient. It is important to appear polite, so, next time you hit the 'send' button, re-read through your message again. You may not mean to be rude or aggressive, but this can be done all too easily. With one click of a button, the message has gone, never to be retrieved! Meanwhile, the recipient sits at their screen reading what appears to be a critical message from you that may cause them anxiety or distress, which was not intended.

So what can you do about it?

- Never answer emails if you are angry or emotional. If you wish to 'let off steam', then do so but put the email into your 'draft' box, as you may not wish to send it in the morning!
- When you have written your email, read it as if you were the person receiving it.
- Try and use words or phrases such as 'I appreciate', 'you have done a great job', 'many thanks', 'you have done really well', etc.
- Don't copy in your emails or texts to the whole office when you don't need to.
- Don't send out emails late at night and set a poor example for working long hours.
- Don't make your messages 'high-priority' unless it is really urgent.
- If you need to be direct with someone – think

of the words that you say BEFORE you write them.

- If you have sent an email and are not happy with what you have written, then pick up the phone and tell them, in advance.

If you manage your emails and texts correctly and give praise at the appropriate time, then when you need to criticise, there will be a balance. You would have told them that you appreciate them when they have done well, so it will not be an issue if you have to bring to their attention the fact that something has gone wrong.

With all the pressures that we experience at work, email can be an extremely efficient method of communication but it can also become a major hazard if it is not handled appropriately.

Key Points
- Emails & texts show no emotion
- Give appreciation in your emails
- Electronic messaging needs care

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