

## Mindful Email Practices

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*"Mindful emailing means staying connected to yourself during the email process, as well as staying connected to the fact that you're communicating with another human being" – Chade Meng Tan, Search Inside Yourself*

In today's digital world, much of our communications -- whether with co-workers, friends, or family -- is through email.

Email communication can easily go awry. Because we are not able to pick up verbal and non-verbal cues, it can be very easy to misinterpret what someone is intending to communicate when they write you an email. Conversely, people reading your email may not know you well enough to "hear" what you are really trying to say; they may misread your intentions. And when we are in a hurry -- as is so often the case in a busy workday -- we often don't pay careful attention to reading and writing our emails.

Below are a series of suggested email practices taken from best practices in modern office communications and mindfulness practice.

### Reading Emails

- "Hear" the voice of the person who is sending the email. Try to visualize her or him.
- Notice any emotions that arise when you read an email. Re-read the email carefully: does the sender really mean what you think they mean? Are you leaping to conclusions? "Are you sure?"

### Writing Emails

- Visualize the person you are writing to.
- If you are starting a new subject, and particularly if you don't know someone well, it is nice to open with a pleasant greeting as you would in a personal conversation. "I hope this note finds you well." "It's been a while since we've talked; how are things with you?"
- Try smiling when you write an email; it will help lighten the tone.
- Never email if you are angry or frustrated. Take at least three breaths and smile to the person in your mind. Once you have reached a place of equanimity, even if it takes a day or two, write your email or better yet, call the person.
- Keep emails short and to the point. Call someone if the topic is complicated.
- Write subject lines that let people know why you are writing and if action is needed.
- Review all emails on a subject before jumping in.
- Avoid putting confidential or sensitive information in an email. Email is not private.
- If you have an email exchange and there seems to be a misunderstanding or disagreement, pick up the phone immediately; don't escalate the email exchange. Take three breaths before calling.
- Try shifting to using a messaging system for quick exchanges, like Skype or Messenger. That will cut down on the proliferation of emails as will not *Replying All*.



### Sending

- Do your best to respond to emails in 24 to 48 hours, even if it means a short email letting the person know you received it and will respond more fully at a certain time frame.
- Out of respect for people's time, don't *Reply All* unless there is really a good reason. Reply to others only on a need-to-know basis to help cut down on email clutter.
- Don't get into a 1:1 exchange -- heated or normal -- with a group email.
- Don't forward an email without asking the author, even just to "fyi" someone else. Would you photocopy a memo someone wrote you and send it to others? If the author wanted to include other people in the exchange she or he would have done so.
- Take three breaths before sending an email to think about how it will be received. Re-read it from the view of the receiver.

If you have other ideas for how to improve our email communications, please share them!