Article: E-mail rules

Read through computer books and they'll teach you the rules of "Netiquette"

This will include such rules as "not using capital letters because that is the equivalent of shouting " not "spamming" people; and not "flaming" people. These are very good hints, but the fall far short of what is required in a corporate environment. What these rules ignore is the vital importance of corporate communications via e-mail.

Here are some of the rules Hattingh believes apply to corporate e-mail:

- Remember that you are only one of dozens of people sending e-mail to your colleagues. As such, your e-mails could be clogging up their inbox. Decide just how important your e-mail is before sending it. To clear the average inbox today takes 90 minutes of a working day. Consider the implications of this on corporate productivity before hitting that "send" icon.

- Don't send e-mail if you can possibly walk over to your colleague and speak to him face to face. Personal communication remains the first prize; everything else is a substitute.

- Especially don't send an e-mail if your colleague is within walking distance. You send negative vibes by doing this.

- Only send an e-mail if you cannot reach the person during office hours.

- Don't send an e-mail to one person with dozens of other people listed in the CC address field. This is impersonal and an insult to all the people receiving the e-mail. Apart from anything else, this CC field is dead data flying around your network.

- Don't CC other people when you are having an argument with or confronting a colleague. It's the equivalent of physically inviting the selfsame colleague into your office or cubicle when you're having the argument face-to-face.

- If somebody sends you an advisory note, don't simply hit the Reply button and say "Thanks". This reply e-mail will be one of many e-mails that clog the network and intray without adding value.

- Reply timeously to an important e-mail. Many corporate conflicts could easily be resolved by sorting out an e-mail issue before it escalates. Not replying to important messages is akin to ignoring and order or request. It's also rude.

- Check with your recipient if he's comfortable with e-mail as a communication medium. Some people prefer to integrate e-mail communication into their corporate lives, particularly if their work centers on the PC.

- Don't use your e-mail as a barrier to contact. There are many, many people who use their cell phone, voice-mail and e-mail as three barriers to personal contact. This is a frightening indictment on these people.

On a PC hygiene level, two very important points:

- Delete any messages that do not contain information you may need at a later stage as soon as they're read. This saves you the chore of cleaning out your inbox regularly.

- Finally, get to know the features of your e-mail application. So much time and effort can be saved if all the useful features of your e-mail reader are appreciated - most of which help prevent and even eliminate some of the above issues.

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