

Cyberspace Conflict

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Have you ever been involved in an email message bush fire? It starts with one person feeling hurt, dismissed or angry about an email communication. The recipient reacts with a one up slamming or defensive message. Here is a hypothetical example: "I am deeply offended by Sam's allegation that I mismanaged our organizations funds. Sam should be more concerned with his own lack of meeting attendance." Sam types his message and hits "Reply all." "Who does Joe think he is?" etc.

Often this kind communication is copied to one or numerous individuals. Sometimes the offensive communication arrives in the mailboxes of people who have little or no connection to the players or organization. The miscommunication, dysfunction and tension becomes out of control.

Although email is often a more convenient way to transfer data than using a phone, there are disadvantages when conflict is involved. Clicking on SEND is often an automatic response. Words alone convey about 7% of our message. Tone, pace and volume of voice, which the phone offers, increase our understanding by about 33% and in person contact, with body language, provide the full message sending deal. Facts and information work well with emails. Emails are invaluable for the transfer of data. However, be wary of dealing with relationship dynamics through the internet.

Some organizations make a policy that any personal or group conflict is to be dealt with at face to face meetings. If ever you receive an email with conflictual content, either delete and don't get involved or, if you are a main player, pick up the phone and arrange to meet with other party. As Voltaire said "The road to the heart is the ear." Our eyes add understanding. When relationships count, give it your communication all.

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