

Communicating by Email

Many people find it easier to express themselves in writing than to deal with sensitive or difficult issues in person. Because of its speed and accessibility, electronic mail, or "e-mail", has become a convenient way to communicate with co-workers, colleagues and friends.

Unfortunately, sending e-mail messages may not be the best way to communicate if you are involved in conflict with someone. When we send and receive e-mail, we do not have facial expressions, eye contact, body language, hand gestures, tone of voice or other cues that help us to know what a person wants to convey. In the absence of such information, people can easily misinterpret the intention of the sender's message.

Are you involved in a tense relationship with a colleague or friend? E-mail could be contributing to the problem! You may have more success if you take the time to sit down and talk. Consider picking up the phone rather than airing your frustrations to other co-workers, on social networks, or other electronic boards. If you absolutely must communicate by e-mail, strive to be civil, polite, and respectful. The following tips may help you to avoid or minimize conflict in your interpersonal interactions.

Think Before Your Write

Once you send an e-mail message, you cannot retrieve it or take it back. It can be printed, saved, forwarded, or otherwise shared by the recipient much more easily than other types of communication. Messages posted in a public forum can be read by a wide variety of people. Prior to sending e-mail, be sure to give careful consideration to what you wish to say and how you wish to say it. When composing the message, try to imagine how the recipient will interpret your words. Always review messages before you send them to ensure that your meaning is clear and that they are conveying what you really want to say. Never write anything in an e-mail that you would not want to have publicized widely. Never use e-mail to convey anything that, if forwarded or overheard, could be damaging or embarrassing.

No Bad News

Avoid using e-mail or electronic bulletin boards to convey bad news or controversial information. E-mail should never be used when criticizing, reprimanding, evaluating, or firing someone. Public forums should not be used to denounce, degrade or spread rumors about others. This type of action may be a violation of the [UCHC Rules of Conduct](#). In these and other sensitive situations, there is no substitute for a face-to-face meeting or a telephone conversation.

Take it Offline!

Personal conflicts should never be addressed using e-mail or social networking sites. They are best handled privately -- either in person or by telephone. Never initiate an e-mail message or respond to someone else's message when you are angry, frustrated or tired. If necessary, take some time to calm down and reflect on the situation. It may also be helpful for you to delay

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sending a message (by saving it as a draft) for at least an hour while you gain clarity about the issue. Avoid sending e-mail that contains angry outbursts, abusive or insulting language, sarcasm, irony, and certain types of humor that could be misinterpreted by readers. As a rule of thumb, if you would not say something in person, don't say it on-line.

Should you receive an e-mail message that you view negatively, take some time to think about it prior to responding. With e-mail, it is so easy to fire off a defensive, curt or bad-tempered reply without taking time to reflect on the situation or to consider the best means of responding. A hasty response can be quite costly and can ruin your chances of finding a mutually satisfying solution to the conflict. Is it possible that you may have misunderstood the person's meaning? It may be helpful to speak to the sender or to an impartial person to determine other ways to interpret the message. Be sure to save the messages you send, just in case you are involved in a dispute with someone.

Don't Shout!

AVOID TYPING IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. This practice signifies shouting and may be interpreted as being rude and offensive.

Patience is a Virtue

After you send a message, be sure to allow ample time for the recipient to read and respond to your letter. Don't assume that the recipient will read the letter as soon as he or she receives it.