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VEPACHEDU EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION
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Mana Sanskriti (Our Culture)

Chief Editor: Dr. Sreenivasarao Vepachedu[1], Esq.

EMAIL CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

A communications evolution began in 60s, which got a boost in 1972, when @ was picked for the use in email. It became a revolution in 90s and exploded into 2.6 billion email accounts[2].

Recent statistics from the Office for National Statistics indicate that the UK has the second-lowest rate of productivity out of the leading G7 industrial nations - putting it behind the US, Germany, France, Italy and Canada, but ahead of Japan. The UK's development of a "macho culture" in which employees wanted to be seen to be available by email at all hours, was causing stress and depression, and in turn making workers less efficient[2].

Email has become and stayed ubiquitous form of business communication, although other forms of informal communications mushroomed such as Instant Messaging (IM), social networking, text messaging, Mobile IM, tweeting, etc. According to a report[3] based on 2013 statistics, there were about 4 billion accounts and about a billion business email accounts worldwide and about 2.6 billion users[4]. Despite all of its drawbacks and problems[5], it is impossible to get rid of email from working lives any time soon.

PROFESSIONAL EMAIL ETIQUETTE

Experts in professional writing identify the following items to be important for a proper "email etiquette" in this global Internet and email based business world:

1. Recipients

It is important to be selective and judicious in selecting your recipients relevant to the subject. Otherwise it would cause confusion. It is also possible that once an email is sent, it can be forwarded by any one of the recipients to a total stranger or it may go viral on

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the internet. In addition, if the unnecessary recipients are copied, they will ignore future emails from the writer.

If it is a reply to an email, it is important to make sure if all the recipients need to see your response. Just because the original sender copied certain recipients, they are not automatically and necessarily recipients to the response.

Before responding to an email, it is important to make sure that the intent of the sender is clear, if it is not clear, making assumptions will cause problems. It is better to get clarification by phone or in person, rather than to make a wrong assumption and jeopardize the relationship.

Forwarding Email

When forwarding an email, it is a good practice to provide an introduction of the subject and the role of the new recipient, in general; and when forwarding a long chain of emails to a new recipient, in particular. Otherwise, the reader may get lost in the trail and may fail to see the reason for which it was forwarded.

It is also important to note that people feel that their time is precious, in general. If an email fails to catch their attention, it may be perceived as "junk" that does not serve a specific purpose or provide any benefit. There is a high probability of it being deleted and the sender being identified as spammer.

2. Subject

After you have filled in the fields such as TO, CC and BCC, the next item is the "Subject." An email must have a subject for the following reasons:

      a)   The subject helps the recipient to know the relevance of the content of the letter, just like in any professional letter writing, where the subject is identified under the heading RE.

      b)   The subject also helps the recipient in filing, retrieval and reviewing as needed.

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c)   An email without the subject may not be read at all, as there is a lot of email, including spam, in any inbox, nowadays.

d)   A wrong subject is even worse than no subject. Sometimes, the writer finds an old email of the recipient and simply replies, without changing the subject. The recipient will be confused and may misfile it, because the subject is not the real subject of body of the email.

e)   Queries in the subject with blank body may be considered spam. It is better to write an email with subject, salutation, body and signature.

3. Salutation

There has to be a proper salutation, such as "Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Family Name" or "Dear Jane/John," in a formal letter or email.

However, it has become a norm to simply give the information, without a salutation and signature, in many office communications, as if it is an informal texting, Instant Messaging or Chat. Although used in a professional setting, these communications are informal and informational. Whether this informal email is proper is a question best answered on a case-by-case basis. One has to use commonsense and judgment depending upon the context.

4. Color, Font and Format

As there are different email clients with different capabilities available, the formatting in the writer's email may be lost in the recipient's email system, losing all the emphasis placed on bold, underlines, colors, indents, bullets etc., which are appropriate in normal business writing on paper.

Generally, black text on a white background should be used to make it easy to read in an email based formal business communication. Typically, in paper communications, colors such as blue, red, or green may be used to call attention without distracting the reader, and also in word documents in which "tracking" activated for the purpose of

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distinguishing the changes from the original. Colored words within a body copy may make it difficult to read, not only for the color blind, but also for normal people due to settings in monitors and background colors. Use color highlighting to focus the reader's attention is a common practice, but using wrong colors would make it difficult to read, e.g., red color to highlight black text would be impossible to read. In addition, color may be lost in the recipient's system.

Similarly, it is advisable to use common fonts that are shared across all systems, such as Times New Roman, Verdana, Arial, Georgia etc. The purpose of a professional email is to make sure people get the intended message conveyed without any confusion or distortion.

Other issues to consider:
All capital sentences are considered yelling or shouting emphasis. All capitals for headings are acceptable, as bold and color may be lost in transmission.

Patterned backgrounds may cause problems, making it difficult to read. In addition, it may be lost in transmission.

Avoid emoticons in professional emails, which also may be lost in translation.

5. Body
Emails should be professional, short and informative. Long emails confuse people. Nowadays, nobody has time to read long emails. When it is a long letter, it may be a good idea to prepare a memo on a letter head and attach to your email. However, it may not serve any purpose to attach a two line note in an attachment. In addition, attachments have limitations in size and have to be screened for viruses.

It is better to be bland and avoid sarcasm and jokes, which may be interpreted as unprofessional or offensive, depending upon the sensitivities of the recipients.

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6. Proofread[(5)]
Any letter or email should be proof read before it is sent out. Missing verbs, prepositions, punctuation, and typos will make it difficult to understand the intent of the letter and writer. Such errors are considered as proof of writer's lack of communication and writing skills, although such errors are very common.

7. Signature and Contact Information
Just like in any professional letter, a professional email should contain the writer's name, postal address, phones, fax, email and web address etc., so that the recipient can easily get in touch with the writer, if and when needed. In an email, it would be very easy to include a signature, with all the contact details, which can be automatically appended to every outgoing email, under the signature.

8. Commonsense-Business Sense
Finally, it is important to use the business email for business purposes only and personal email[(6)] for personal issues. It is not only professional etiquette, but also commonsense, because business email is company's property that is owned and monitored by the company. When using business email, senders are representing the company, and there is no expectation of privacy or secrecy[(7)].

When using the personal email, senders are representing their individual identities and personalities and a reasonable expectation of privacy exists, and the employer cannot not monitor under normal circumstances. Courts usually side with the employer when it comes to email privacy[(8)]. A survey conducted by the American Management Association (AMA) [(9)] revealed that more than half of the responding companies monitor employee email, and one quarter of them had fired an employee for misusing email. Further, the AMA study showed that 15% of the companies surveyed had faced a lawsuit triggered by employee email, providing a legitimate reason for the employers to monitor employee communications.

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In addition, unless affirmative steps are taken to encrypt messages[10], email cannot be a confidential method of transmitting information. This is because anonymous hackers can intercept it, law enforcement officials with a warrant can seize electronic correspondence, and the Internet service provider may legally be able to scrutinize email.

9. Things to Avoid

As a rule of thumb, any message that would be uncomfortable or results in a blush, when a coworker or employer reads it, should be avoided.

Email is not an urgent message delivery system.

Emailing people who do not need to know should be avoided.

Avoid wrong subject and no subject.

EMAIL FOR FAMILY[11]

As a family matter of safety, putting personal information in an email is not always a good idea, contrary to the discussion above. Important information, such as full name, address, phone number and passwords should not be shared through email.

Recent data[12] suggests that social media venues like Facebook and Twitter have surpassed e-mail as the preferred method of communication in all age groups. While today's tweens and teens may be more digitally savvy than their parents, but their lack of maturity and life experience can quickly get them into trouble with these new social venues. For this reason, it is imperative that parents talk with their children of all ages about social media and monitor their online social media use to help them navigate this new online social world.

A federal law, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)[13], was created to help protect kids younger than 13 when engaged in online activities. I COPPA imposes certain requirements on operators of websites or online services directed to children under 13 years of age, and on operators of other websites or online services that have actual knowledge that they are collecting personal information online from a child under 13 years of age. Since the implementation of the rule, several companies have received rather large civil fines for violations of COPPA. COPPA prohibits unfair or deceptive

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acts or practices in connection with the collection, use, or disclosure of personally identifiable information from and about children on the Internet. Most recently, UMG Recordings was fined $400,000.00 for violations[14].

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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Cloud Business Email Market, 2015-2019; http://www.radicati.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Cloud_Business_Email_Market_2015-2019,_Executive%20Summary.pdf ; accessed on August 31, 2015
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