

The Ten Best Practices of a Positive Email Culture

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Email, when used effectively can be the edge that a business can have over other businesses. Email misuse, on the other hand, can drain companies almost without them knowing the source of the drain. Email habits add or take time in very small chunks—they save or add seconds here and there which really add up. In the Positive Email Culture, each person is doing his or her part to save time with email, seconds at a time! Here are those best practices, that if every person does them, every time, your company will find more time to do the things that make you a great company.

1. **Keep e-mail messages brief, and small in bytes**

By keeping your messages short and concise, your reader will get the message more clearly, without misinterpretation. If you send long and rambling emails, you risk the reader skimming, and even worse, missing the point. If it takes you longer to compose the email than to call and explain something, make the call, and confirm the main points later.

2. **Edit forwarded e-mails with the reader in mind**

If you use this practice every time you send an email, you could save yourself and your company a lot of time and productivity. Many times, people forward previously forwarded emails, causing the reader to sift through unnecessary drivel to try to figure out which parts are important. By taking a few moments to edit out anything unnecessary or confusing, you'll save others time, and be appreciated in the process.

3. **Do not use e-mail for urgent messages**

The positive email culture is NOT an urgent email culture. If something is urgent, pick up the phone. If the members of your organization believe that they must check frequently so they don't miss something urgent, they will force themselves to lose focus every time the computer "dings" with the arrival of a new email. A good rule of thumb is to email items expecting that it may not be read in under two hours. This allows your co-workers to focus on their tasks and check their email only periodically.

4. **Turn off automatic send – receive**

This practice supports item 3 above. The positive email culture has co-workers checking their email only periodically during the day, morning, mid-morning, lunchtime, mid-afternoon, and late in the day. To effect this, you can turn off your automatic send/receive, or simply shut down your email.

5. **Email only one subject in each email**

Readers skim. Readers file email messages. When you put more than one subject or one request in an email, you risk their missing one of the points or their having to create more work for them to file them in two different places. You also enable discussion on one topic without confusing the other.

6. **Write a very descriptive subject line**

By making your subject line extremely specific, you help others sort and find emails. Works for you, too. Instead of having your subject read, "Tuesday Meeting," have it read, "Please bring this handout with you to the Tuesday 2:00 meeting." See the difference? Also, you may be able to avoid the person even having to open the email. Another second saved.

7. **Write the main point of the email in the first 2 lines**

Be sure that your message has the request or important point in the first two lines of your email. Too many people bury the important stuff in the middle of the email, causing skimmers to miss the point. This is great because some people have autopreview turned on and can "get" the gist of the email immediately.

8. **Do not use e-mail as a chat room**

When seeking opinions from several people, either set up a company chat or call a meeting. Trying to do it by email can be very frustrating, because multiple strings emerge, and it is hard to figure out which track people are on. If you notice this happening, the best thing to do is to call a quick meeting...

9. **Do not use email for ANYthing sensitive**

Because email loses body language, voice inflection, etc., things can be very misinterpreted. Avoid anything sensitive via email, instead, meet with the person or pick up the phone. This includes constructive criticism, disciplinary issues, gossip, etc. If it can be interpreted harshly, it will. And in the long run, it will take you more time.

10. **Send emails to only the "right" recipients**

Think very carefully before you press the "Send" button. Every time you include an unnecessary recipient, not only have you caused more work for that person, but it is likely that he or she will return a response that you have to open and read. By reducing the number of copied recipients to only those who truly need the information, you will add minutes and hours to the day.