Office Of The OMBUDS

A safe place to navigate through difficulties at UCR

EMAIL CONFLICT – THE 7 TEMPTATIONS

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Health Conflict Engagement and Email 7 Temptations

For each temptation:

1. Why is the behavior tempting?

2. Why is the behavior a problem?

3. What can you do instead?

Email Temptation #1: Engage in Conflict via Email

Why is this tempting?

- Everyone is on the same page

- Quick

- Provides documentation

- Provides for uninterrupted logical reasoning

- Common mode of communication

Why is it problematic?

- Lacks Tone, Context & Social Cues

- Doesn't allow for dialogue, quick feedback loops of a conversation

- More emotionally remote

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Grounding (Email Temptation #1: Engage in Conflict via Email)

1. Co-presence - Same surroundings

2. Visibility - Seeing each other

3. Audibility – Hear timing of speech and intonation

4. Contemporality – Utterances received as produced

5. Simultaneity – Receive and send messages at once

6. Sequentiality – Focus on one matter at a time in order

Dispute Exacerbating Elements of Electronic Communication: Raymond A. Friedman, Owen Graduate School of Management Vanderbilt University and Steven C. Currall, Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Management Rice University

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Grounding Elements in Different Media (Email Temptation #1: Engage in Conflict via Email)

Element	In-Person	Zoom / Video Chat	Phone	Texting / Chat	Email
Co-Presence?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Visibility?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Audibility?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Contemporality?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Simultaneity?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	No
Sequentiality?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

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Email Temptation #1: Engage in Conflict via Email

What to do instead?

- Use In-person / Phone / Zoom / Teams other interaction

- Include friendly greeting, personal note in email

Email Temptation #2: Use ALL-CAPS or Red

Why is this tempting?

- Need for emphasis

- Historical lack of formatting options

Why is it problematic?

- Comes across as shouting and/or angry

What to do instead?

- Use colors other than red

- Highlight

- State the formatting is merely for emphasis or importance, not tone

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Email Temptation #3: Send an Immediate Response to bothersome email

Why is this tempting?

- Sense of urgency to respond or correct

Why is it problematic?

- Invites a quick counter-response

- Lacks both reflection and restraint

What to do instead?

- Give sensitive emails 24 hours

- Send an acknowledgement email & follow up later

- Write (but do not send) the angry first draft. Send (maybe) the second or third draft.

- Get someone trusted who will be straight with you to look it over

- Careful about rumination

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Email Temptation #4: Send email late at night or on the weekend

Why is this tempting?

- We're busy
- Don't get to email during regular hours

Why is it problematic?

- Not at our best late at night
- Stresses others out about responding

What to do instead?

- Reply at a time when you are fresh
- Send a brief acknowledgement email and then follow up
- Use delay delivery
- Make clear there is no need to respond quickly
- Establish healthy expectations about response times

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Email Temptation #5: Send a long email response

Why is this tempting?

- We want to be thorough

- Complex matter

- The ability to lay out the logical reasoning from A to Z is strength of the written form

Why is it problematic?

- Length is intimidating and escalatory

- People don't read it

- Invites a long response in return

- No opportunity to address issues one at a time

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Email Temptation #5: Send a long email response

What to do instead?

- Practice BIFF: Brief, Informative, Friendly, Firm

- Extinguish the chain by providing shorter answers

- Create and attach a document

- Ask for time to review documentation and then opportunity to discuss it

- Structuring: Summary at the top, headers, short paragraphs

Email Temptation #6: Copy lots of people

Why is this tempting?

- Seems efficient
- Everyone on the same page, with same information
- Includes expertise
- Support/witnesses

Why is it problematic?

- Creates an audience
- Public shaming / need to defend honor
- Can feel like ganging up

Email Temptation #6: Copy lots of people

What to do instead?

- Be particularly mindful of tone with lots of people copied

- Before copying others, hitting reply all
  - Consider how those on the chain may feel about inclusion of others
  - Consider who really needs to be included

- Hit "reply" instead of "reply all"

- Get consent / Give notice to add someone to the chain before just adding them "I think it might be helpful to loop in [person X] because [reason Y] "

- Cull the List
  - Step 1) Reply all and propose follow up with only a subset "I propose that [person X], [person Y] and I touch base about this and then circle back to the rest of the group as necessary."
  - Step 2) Email just the subset, perhaps with the suggestion for a conversation

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Email Temptation #7: Engage in "Documentation Wars"

Why is this tempting?

- Preserve the record for anticipated problems down the road

- Miscommunications (which tend to increase when there is conflict or tension)

- Reacting to being documented

Why is it problematic?

- Heightened anxiety

- Stilted conversation

- Inhibits ability to engage in other healthier conflict engagement mechanisms

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Email Temptation #7: Engage in "Documentation Wars"

What to do instead?

- Continue to meet and talk in person and by phone

- Make personal notes and observations

- Frame notes in neutral, impartial manner

- Clarify and ask for confirmation

"Here's what I recall: [insert summary] Is this what you recall too? / Does this look right to you?"

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