



The Evils of E-mail

I love email. Chances are that you do, too. But I'm hard pressed to think of anything which has caused more confusion and hurt feelings among friends and chapter members than the evils of email.

Sure, sure, sure, email is great for sending out news quickly, almost instantaneously. And I've conducted business with people half-way around the world in the middle of the night via email. I personally manage 3 or 4 email groups. But when used for the wrong purpose, or when you let your emotions take over your keyboard, email can be downright evil.

If you've used email for a year or more, then you've probably seen what I mean. Someone sends a nasty-gram to someone else. They respond, copying others so that everybody knows what a jerk the first person really is. And then other people chime in, and things get into a big free-for-all. Full of losers, and no winners.

My good friend Susan Niven, CSP, of Momentum Learning Systems Inc., has written an article called "E-Wars", where she discusses this phenomenon, and offers some advice on how to deal with them. First, she recommends strongly to never start an E-war. But if you're ever tempted to jump in or get involved, Susan teaches "The 24 hour rule". "The rule is simple. When you are feeling angry, upset or any other emotion like that ... take no action on those feelings for at least 24 hours. Nothing. Don't make any notes about the situation, don't draft a letter. Nothing. Simply process the emotional part of it. And then, when the 24 hours (or longer if needed!) is up, it's time to figure out exactly what to do."

Susan also has advice about what to do if you're one of the people caught up in the middle of someone else's E-War. "It seems to me that the best thing to do is:

- 1) reply to the sender saying simply: 'Your feedback to (name) does not involve me directly. Please do not include me on any further messages on this topic.'
- 2) delete the message, and avoid any temptation to discuss it with others."

And the final situation, from Susan is, "What if you are the subject of one of these e-mails? This is a painful situation, and often the immediate need you might feel is to either strike back, or defend yourself. Said another way, there are 2 things going on simultaneously: the emotional response, and the need to do something. If this ever happens to you, you might want to stretch the 24 hour rule to 48 hours. You might also choose to seek guidance from one - or maybe two - mentor(s) who you are sure will respect your confidence. When it is time to respond, here are some suggestions for you to consider. Send a response to everyone copied on the original message saying something like 'It is unfortunate that you have all been involved in this situation. I will be following up on the issues directly with (name of sender).' As for dealing with the

sender, I urge you to consider doing that in person or on the telephone ... to provide for more effective communication. The written word is so easily misunderstood.”

I, too, have some suggestions about how to reduce the dangers of email. My suggestions include drafting responses (or original messages) in a word processor before sending them out. That way you have a chance to format the message, look at it, and digest it thoroughly. Your spelling will be corrected. You can add paragraph breaks where you want to change thoughts. You might even decide not to send it at all.

Another suggestion would be to never put in email what you wouldn't want read to the entire chapter audience at a meeting. If you write it, it will be read, and perhaps by some folks you didn't want to read it that way. Email can keep a very long, long time.

Resolving personal issues, in my opinion, should not be done via email unless there is no other way. In my opinion, apologies should be done in person, or (maybe) via the phone. It's just too easy to be misunderstood via email.

If you've avoided E-Wars and other problems with email, then congratulations! You're one of the few left in this world who has. Before you go into e-combat, please consider the advice of my friend Susan, and me, too. Remember the GWTA motto: “*Destination Friendship*”.

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Susan Niven's E-Wars article can be found on her web site,
www.MomentumLearningSystems.com.