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?
Question (please answer in the chat)

What do you see as unhealthy temptations in email conflict?
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. Cotemporality – 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
Grounding Elements in Different Media (Email Temptation #1: Engage in Conflict via Email)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>In-Person</th>
<th>Zoom / Video Chat</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Texting / Chat</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Sequentiality?</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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
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
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
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

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 if necessary.”

• Step 2) Email just the subset, perhaps with the suggestion for a conversation
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
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?”
Question (please answer in the chat)

Did I miss any other temptations?
Thank You! Questions?

[QR Code Image]