

## **Email Post's Guide to Online Decorum**

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*"Manners are made up of trivialities of deportment which can be easily learned if one does not happen to know them;" - Emily Post*

While Ms. Post's advice about the appropriate dress for a butler in a well-appointed house and the rules of conduct for a debutante are hopelessly outdated, good manners still count. Without a doubt, email is an efficient and cost-effective way to build and maintain relationships, whether with your organization's supporters or with your own nearest and dearest. But those relationships will be stronger and healthier if you heed the do's and don'ts of polite email society – they're simple and apply in equal measure to both groups.

- **Out of inbox, out of mind?** Gaps in communication for prolonged periods are a sure way to let a relationship fizzle out. Email lists that have been left idle for extended periods of time tend to have lower response rates (I don't recommend testing this!). Unless you are actually trying to ditch a wearisome ex, it's best to maintain regular contact with your supporters, just as you would with friends or family, even if that requires some creativity and legwork when the content is not abundant. But be sure to maintain integrity – always instill your messages with some value because...
- **...no one likes a town crier.** Do you know someone who forwards emails indiscriminately? Be it a CNN news alert (that you receive yourself, thank you very much), a chain letter promising good fortune to those who pass it on to seven spirited women, or a cartoon featuring singing Matzo Men, these e-town criers want to be the first to spread the news.

Organizations, too, have been guilty of blasting out messages that most recipients don't care to receive. This kind of behavior is a nuisance. Before hitting the send button, think carefully about whether the message merits the time your recipients will take out of their busy lives to read it.

- **Keep it simple.** It is important to keep your messages simple and clear. No legalese, no insider jargon, no buzzwords, and no policy wonk language, please! Words like "churlishness" and "pernicious" belong on GMAT study guide, not in email communications. No one wants to read an email about "H.R. 4526 bill to extend the discretionary spending limits through fiscal year 2011, referred to the Committee on the Budget, and in addition to the Committee on Rules for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned." Rule of thumb - write the email to your supporters as if you were writing it to your mom.
- **Sometimes email isn't enough.** Email is an excellent medium to maintain contact with college buddies scattered across the country, busy board members, in-laws, and online advocates. But even the most vivid and eloquent email communications are not a substitute for an old-fashioned phone call or (gasp) in-person meeting.

Look for opportunities to connect with online supporters. Invite your e-advocates to attend a press conference or volunteer at an event. They will appreciate being asked, even if they cannot make it, and those who do show up will be that much more committed to your cause. To ensure a better turnout, ask for RSVPs, thank the signups, and send them a reminder message. Lastly, make sure that it is easy for participants to get to the location (don't you just love it when your friends include a Googlemap link?).

- **Who manages your inbox?** If you're in charge of your organization's online program, I hope you have an answer ready. You work very hard to cultivate a personal relationship with supporters and donors, so don't jeopardize it by ignoring their emails to you. If you never respond to that cousin of yours (or it takes you weeks to do so), you might not get a holiday card this year. The same applies to your donors and activists. It's like that sign hanging in your dentist's office says, "Ignore your teeth and they'll go away."
- **Mind your manners.** Mom taught you right. Being polite is not about snootiness - it is about respecting others. Whether a donor contributes to your cause or a friend invites you to a happy hour, say "thank you". If you have to bombard your list members with a higher than usual volume of email messages, it's best to acknowledge the flood of communications, explain why you're sending so many right now, ask them to have patience with you, and thank them for their support. And if you are over the age of 16, please use proper grammar and capitalization, don't spell words phonetically, and don't abuse the abbreviations, KWIM?