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Musings

#25: Email and Meeting Etiquette

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Go to <https://gilesrichard.com> for past musings.

Some more tactical thoughts today.

Email has become today's communication lifeline for working adults. I fear to count how many I get and send on a daily basis. It is a beautifully efficient communication medium but the simplicity also ramps up volumes and leads to challenges. Here are some of my rules:

- 1) **Always respond to an email.** Even if it is a short "ok" or "thx." If you don't respond, the sender doesn't know the communication was received. Maybe it went into a spam folder? Maybe the address was wrong?
- 2) **Rarely use "Reply All".** This might be the cardinal sin. Someone sends an email to a big group and someone hits reply all saying "I'll be there." Only use Reply All if it is information that everyone needs to know.
- 3) **Delineate "To" and "CC".** Email CC has become the biggest CYA in the modern workplace. If you are a CC on an email, you are an observer to the communication tennis match. You really should not respond. You were not the recipient. You were copied because the sender wanted you to know, not to respond.
- 4) **Never put on the "out of office."** I am sorry, but if you have an important job you are never "out of the office." You might not check them as often, but you should be checking regularly on weekends and vacations.
- 5) **Don't use your inbox as a database.** I try to be a zero inbox person. While I am no superman, the i-Phone red circle is my kryptonite. I don't accept that folks can have thousands of emails in their inbox and then use the search function to find the relevant one like querying a database. (see a funny WSJ article on the red circle and relationships [here](#))

Now to meetings.

- 1) **They start on time.** To quote Greg Finkelstein, "two minutes early is five minutes late." People are trying to manage their time and need certainty. Think how much more pleasant going to the doctor would be if everything happened on time.
- 2) **Ideally, computers down and phones off.** I think society has moved beyond this possibility unfortunately. Multi-tasking means someone is not listening completely. Going green and the substitution of taking notes on the computer from writing on paper has become the Trojan horse for multi-tasking.
- 3) **Don't let Outlook say meetings have to be an hour.** I don't like the default in Outlook that everything is an hour. Some meetings can be 15 minutes. I see a growing use of daily scrums. Invented by software developers doing agile development where it is critical to know what others are doing, the relevant group of people have a quick, standing up meeting every

day and review what each team member is doing to check interdependencies – physically somewhat like a scrum in rugby. In today's fast moving, interdependent world, this may be the standard of the future.

- 4) **Push out materials at least 24 hours beforehand.** The meeting should be about the exchange of ideas. Like “flipping the classroom” in education, the transfer of content from one “speaker” / “presenter” should happen before hand and everyone should be expected to have read the material. The meeting can then be the exchange of thoughts about the material.

And now onto video meetings, I am not particularly accomplished in the use of video for meetings, having only recently become a heavy Zoom user, but here is what I have noticed so far:

- 1) **Find the best place in your home.** Figure out the lighting, camera angle etc.
- 2) **Make everyone's camera be on.** You want to limit multi-tasking and need to know what the attendee is doing. I think it also is better for communication when you can see someone.
- 3) **Open up with some personal “banter.”** Some call it the check-in. Stay personally connected.
- 4) **Slow down pace of exchange and limit attendees.** Pretty hard if you go over a number like six. The flow is difficult as people “interject” so you have to slow it down and make sure someone has finished their thought.

Be safe.

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