

# **DON'T LET INTERNAL E-MAIL DESTROY YOUR TEAM'S UNITY**

**As a fast and convenient medium for keeping members of a working team in the loop, e-mail excels. Yet when it is abused, it can quickly turn into a tool of destruction, creating discord and eating away at morale. Although this piece was written with hotel staff in mind, the advice it offers will be equally useful in virtually any organization.**

**by Doug Kennedy**

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As regular readers of my articles know, I have always been a strong proponent of training your staff to use external e-mail effectively for sales and service inquiries.

It has been great hearing the success stories about increased e-mail inquiry conversion ratios and an overall improvement in hospitality and service efficiency for all guests who prefer to communicate via this medium.

Likewise, most hotel and lodging companies can benefit greatly from training their staff on proper etiquette for internal e-mailing. A little attention to this topic can help team members communicate more efficiently and also have a positive impact on both inter- and intradepartmental relations.

There is no doubt that overall, e-mail has made hotels run much more efficiently, enabling us to better serve our guests. When properly deployed, internal e-mailing has provided a clear channel of communication between any and all members of the management team.

Before, a general manager had to dictate memos to his or her administrative assistant, who then had to type and distribute the memos, but now anyone with internal e-mail access is but one click away from reaching pretty much everyone on the org-chart.

When used most effectively as a communication tool, internal e-mailing can help all stakeholders stay in sync with the countless details necessary to run a hotel operation.

Unfortunately, at most hotels (and especially hotel companies) I work with today, I see e-mailing becoming more and more of a detriment to team unity. Rather than being a tool for keeping everyone in the loop, improper e-mailing chips away steadily at the interpersonal relationships between team members, who spend countless hours responding back and forth with too-carefully-worded messages.

The problem is that most people have received little or no direction on how to best use e-mail to the team's advantage, and more importantly, when NOT to use e-mail. Instead, un-enlightened hotel executives are spending hours sniping away at each other, exchanging slow but steady rounds. And the sniper analogy really does work well for unity-destroying internal e-mailing.

Just as snipers don't have to face their victims, destructive e-mail senders can volley over rounds of personalized barbs and insulations, and "say" things that they would have the wisdom to withhold in a face-to-face meeting or phone call.

These clever-sharp word shooters know just whom to copy on what to snipe away at their target's credibility. Yet unlike sniper victims, e-mail sniper victims can fire back their own "rounds" to further escalate the cyber shoot-out.

### **Getting on top of the problem**

Here are some training tips and other considerations for ensuring that e-mail works for and not against your team unity:

#### **Develop and convey your company philosophy for e-mailing.**

Make sure that acceptable e-mail etiquette for internal e-mailing is outlined clearly in your standards and manuals. Most manuals provide little direction beyond forbidding illicit e-mailing, harassment and/or other inappropriate personal uses.

#### **Develop and convey your company philosophy for e-mailing.**

Outline examples of when to best-use e-mail communications. Remind everyone that e-mails are ideal for disseminating information such as schedules, system upgrades, policy updates and other fact-based messages. Encourage the team to think about not over communicating, saving everyone time reading unnecessary details and to help them focus on the really important e-mails in their in-boxes.

#### **Give examples of when not to communicate via the medium of e-mail**

E-mail is never the place to address topics that are likely to generate lots of questions, controversy and discussion points. Meetings, conference calls or Web presentations are much more effective because they allow for feedback and interaction.

Bad news should never be conveyed via e-mail. In the event that you have bad news to share with others on the team, make sure it is done in person or at least on the phone. This helps convey sensitivity and minimize overreaction to sensitive issues.

#### **Never use "CC" e-mail for the sole purpose of making others look bad.**

This very common practice might be the single most destructive use of e-mail. Before you add someone to the cc list, make sure they really need to be in the know. Avoid being an "e-mail tattletaler."

#### **Coach individualized senders directly**

When your colleagues and subordinates are using e-mail improperly, provide some personalized feedback the old-fashioned way, by phone or in person, to encourage their future compliance. It's not always so easy to coach your superiors, but sometimes they need it the most, so send the feedback upward in your organization as well.

By successfully using internal e-mailing, you'll be fostering fast and efficient communications throughout all levels of your organization.

More importantly, you'll ensure that your best people aren't wasting countless hours each day writing and reading hurtful and disruptive e-mails and instead that they pick up the phone or walk over to talk things through with someone and make it work.