

The Heroes and Villains of Corporate Communication

By David Finney



I recall a former boss telling me (about 20 years ago) that he felt I was shouting at him by using upper case in response to his emails. Even though in my mind the upper case was to separate my comments from his and hence aid easy reading, I've not used it since. There is often misalignment with what we intend and what is received. In the wonderful world of electronic communication, the bad feeling that is produced by a de-motivating email can spread like a virus. The senders of these kinds of emails tend to fall into one of four groups:

Amiable Diplomat – Holes in the backs of trousers through much non-committal sitting on the fence

Information Taxi - Forwarding emails without adding value and without getting too involved

Railroader - Intense passion to push something through but no room upstairs for other opinions

Bad Cop - Using email to flex power muscles and belittle others

Of course like all behavioural models, these are less about fixed roles but more about styles that we can slip in and out of during the course of a working day. Email is a warm and loaded gun - if you shoot someone may shoot back. The speed of response it encourages is often the very cause of the lengthy and unproductive mulling that follows.



Email is a loaded gun - if you shoot, someone will shoot back

Many an executive has sat seething over the contents of an email fired into her inbox, unable to work effectively until the effect has worn off. Many an executive has sat mourning over the loss of dignity due to aimed criticism shared in front of a 'cc' audience. We have often learnt the hard way that the Internet's most powerful gift can easily become the most toxic of weapons and needs to be handled with extreme care.

So what happens when the communication process that has begun between two associates breaks down and action remains pending with no apparent sign of progress? Radio Silence can be frustrating and although incessant chasing can work, sometimes an alternative strategy is required. It could be a case of varying the modes of communication, possibly the approach or maybe it's a call to do something radically different.

In any communication scenario where email has been selected as the medium, a reliable tool can be helpful - here is The **A5** Email Management Tool.

- Aim** what is the objective, for information only or does it require action?
- Audience** who is it intended for and what is the rationale for each of the TO & CC audiences?
- Appropriate** how will the message be tailored so that it is appropriate for each recipient?
- Action** who needs to do what and by when?
- Accountability** who is going to make sure each action point is carried out in its allotted timeframe?

The steps can be split into two parts:

Before drafting, check Aim, Audience and Appropriateness.

Before sending apply two final checks:

Action have you made it clear who is going to do what?

Accountability if action is not carried out you will have wasted your time

Organisations are littered with staff angry or upset with a message that has arrived into their mailbox which can have a devastating snowball effect on the working day. A5 may help to be the preventative whilst the cure is simply an honest conversation with the sender. In conversations of these kinds the past can creep in and discolour the present. The HERO Model delivers the required pep talk for conversations that might otherwise be confrontational and unproductive.

Start with the premise that you are both **H**uman with similar needs and concerns;
Show **E**mpathy and seek to understand the motivation behind their behaviour.
Demonstrate sincere **R**espect to the person whatever has gone on in the past.
Talk with an **O**penness that will build bridges and move things forward.

Ask yourself: what can I do to improve this relationship? What would be the benefits of having this conversation? What are the costs of not having it? Communication Heroes can patch up relationships damaged by email, always achieving the best results through the energy of conversation.

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