

## Would You Email the Hospital for a Medical Emergency or Dial 9-1-1?

I know – the question is ridiculous. Of course you wouldn't send an email for a medical emergency. Why not? There are many reasons such as:

- No one may respond to your email for hours or days.
- You want immediate confirmation that someone knows you need urgent attention.
- There may be information missing in your email that is critical to receiving the proper response.
- You want to confirm immediately that your needs are understood correctly.
- The person receiving the email (the 9-1-1 operator) may have questions that need immediate clarification so they can respond effectively.

### **THEME**

- *Don't use email for urgent items -- make direct contact instead.*

What's surprising is that many people in business today do often attempt to use email for urgent requests, and it backfires! This is true even though the five reasons stated above also apply to their situation. For example, you've probably seen emails such as:

*"Can you attend that meeting that's happening an hour from now?"*

*"If I don't hear back from you by the end of the day, I'll go ahead with what I proposed."*

*"Can I get your input by 8:00 tomorrow morning?" (stated in a email sent at 2:00 p.m.)*

*"HELP!! I have a problem and need your input immediately!!"*

*"URGENT!! I need this item expedited!"*

The people who send these emails are often frustrated and disappointed when they don't receive a response when expected. To make it worse, the people receiving the URGENT!! requests are also often upset that they weren't given the opportunity to respond appropriately for an important item. So not only do the tasks not get accomplished, but the relationship between the people involved gets damaged as well!

This phenomenon is a relatively recent problem triggered by the increased use of PDAs with continuous email connectivity. Some people are CHECKERS – they continuously check their messages on their PDA, even during meetings, at home, while waiting at a red light, etc. These people assume that others are doing the same.

Other people are BATCHERS – they try to process all of their email in “batch” one or two times a day for more extended periods of time. When a CHECKER has an urgent request for a BATCHER, **BAD THINGS CAN HAPPEN!**

Most productivity experts side with the BATCHERS. They believe email is most effectively processed when a person can focus on the content of the email and respond appropriately. They agree that PDA use is perfectly fine during times when a person’s attention is not needed elsewhere – such as when waiting for a meeting to start. But many people continue to use their PDA after this period – such as during the meeting when their input is beneficial. Still others fall into the habit of reading an email as soon as it arrives, even if they are working on another activity on their computer. Studies have shown that the distraction created by this has a significant negative effect on a person’s concentration and effective IQ.

So how does the business world resolve this conflict? It is really pretty straightforward. The most important thing is that everyone in a company communicates *consistently and effectively as an organization*. This basically means that people need to use the right communication tools (email, phone calls, meetings, etc.) at the right times and that everyone in an organization knows when a certain communication tool should be used.

For the specific case of not using emails for urgent items, the following two rules can help achieve this goal.

**Don’t assume that people will read your URGENT email soon! Contact them directly if it is a critical item.**

- Marking an email with URGENT! HOT! READ THIS!! or other means doesn’t help if the person is not reading their emails continuously.
- If a person has a lot of emails, the urgent claims in the title may easily get lost. One message marked URGENT in a stack of 200 may be hard to notice.
- An exception to this rule is a situation where a specific system has been put in place to handle urgent requests via email or text messaging. A continuously monitored hotline is a good example of such a system.

**Email is an excellent means to communicate non-urgent items and requests that do not require immediate feedback.**

- A great benefit of email is that it allows the person receiving the messages to process them on their own time schedule.
- With email, the person can process the request after they have addressed their more important items.
- It is also generally most efficient for people to process emails in “batch” at times that are allotted for this purpose.
- Verbal requests are great for many things, but for items that do not require an immediate response they can have the effect of distracting the person being asked the question, often causing them to lose focus and efficiency.

Go to <http://talkmoreemailless.com/> for more articles and information on communicating consistently and effectively as an organization.

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