

Three Steps to Rekindling Online Communication Etiquette

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Am I being snubbed? Did it end up in their spam folder? Are they out of the office or maybe they no longer work there? Do they treat every client this way? These are just some of the thoughts that go through peoples' minds when emails or direct messages (DMs) are sent and days pass without a response. It is easy to forget basic conversation etiquette when using email or DM as a means of communication. Sending the wrong message by not responding appropriately or in an appropriate amount of time could damage your relationships or your professional credibility.

Basic considerations that would seem automatic when talking face-to-face are just as important when communicating electronically. Just as neglecting to respond during a verbal conversation would be interpreted as rude and offensive, neglecting to respond to an email or DM can tell your co-workers, clients, or potential clients that they are not important, even if that's not what you intended them to believe.

[A 2017 study](#) showed that over 80% of people expect to receive a reply within 24 hours when communicating electronically. Only 4% of the people in study thought it was acceptable to have to wait longer than 48 hours for a response. With that in mind, here are some basic rules to live by if you don't want to seem rude or make your clients/co-workers feel that you don't think their emails or DMs aren't important:

- 1) Respond within 24 hours, even if you don't have the answer. A simple, "Thanks for your email. Please give me a few days to get the information you want," lets the sender know that, yes, you received the email and you are working on a solution. If you are out of the office a lot, use your email's out-of-office assistant or automated response to inform people that you are away from your computer for an extended period of time.

Remember to state in your out-of-office message when you will be returning, so they have an understanding of when they should expect a reply.
- 2) Include introductions and closures. If you are close with a coworker or client, a simple and informal "Got it!" response might be adequate. For a more formal interaction, it is more appropriate to start your communication with a "Good Morning, Mrs. Smith" and end it with a "Sincerely, Joe." Unless you and the coworker/client are at a point where one or two sentence email exchanges are acceptable, being a little more formal in electronic communications is a sign of respect to the person with whom you are communicating.
- 3) Keep the length of the email or DM response reasonable. My colleague, Dan Brown, a former principal and school superintendent has the mantra, "Email is for information, not communication." He believes that if what you want to relay is really important or lengthy, then a phone call, video chat or face-to-face discussion is the better avenue for that discussion to take place. An example email or DM response to a request for a lengthy reply could be, "Thank you for reaching out. Is there a time we could schedule a call to discuss this topic? The information is quite complicated and I want to make sure what I provide you meets your needs." For documentation, you could follow up with a

post-call summary email or DM stating, “Thank you for the call today. Here is a brief summary of what we discussed...”

As with any other form of interaction, email communication and DMs are only effective when two people (the sender and the receiver) are engaged and considerate. Taking a few seconds or minutes out of your day to compose a polite and timely response to a received email can make a big difference in how you are perceived professionally.

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