



LEADERSHIP insights

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EMAIL OR FACE-TO-FACE?

As a manager, it can seem more *efficient* to text or email when you need to communicate with your employees, especially when you manage “virtually” to multiple locations. You can’t always do things face-to-face, but how do you decide?

Consider the following factors before hitting “send”...

Email usually works fine for:

- Clarifying steps in a process or *decision you have already discussed* with the person
- Exchanging information that is *not emotional* to employees
- Reporting progress on something you or your employees have done before (it is *not new* or different)
- When there are *clear lines of responsibility* as to who does what
- Touching base on a relationship that already has a *sound basis of trust*
- Getting out the facts on *non-complex* issues
- To give employees *a heads up* about what you want to discuss in a meeting, especially if you set this up as a regular way of doing business (i.e., “Every Monday, email me your agenda items for our coaching session and I will add mine and return to you by Tuesday so that we both know what we need to be prepared for.”)
- Praise and *recognition* can work in email
- In *follow up to a face-to-face* discussion where decisions or agreements were made to document it (i.e., “Here is my understanding of our agreement...”)

Better make it face-to-face when:

- *Emotions* may be running high or have the potential to
- It is a coaching discussion about *any kind of underperformance*
- *Performance reviews* and *goal setting* sessions
- You *need their buy-in*
- You *need to establish a relationship of trust* because the person is new or there has been conflict

- There is the chance that the *employee doesn't understand their role* or boundaries
- *Collaboration* is important to getting the job done
- Announcing *a major change* in the department
- It becomes a *back and forth “email discussion”*
- The work is *new territory*, not something that has been done before
- You want to recognize an employee that goes way above and *beyond the call of duty*
- It is *anything that is going to be hard to hear*, particularly if it has not already been talked about
- You are feeling *out of touch* with your employees
- You start hearing *concerns about employees* from others and you have not seen the behaviors of concern yourself

You can strengthen your leadership with intentional communication practices:

1. If you are emotional when you compose email, walk away from it before you hit send. You may regret it otherwise.
2. For that matter, if you are emotional before a face-to-face conference, address that before you start too.
3. Generally when in doubt about email or not, go face-to-face.
4. Consider how people would rate your “presence” in the department. For some, it equates to accessibility to see you once in a while.
5. Some simple basics when you do use email matter more than you think and can help you engage people: do use a greeting and their name, thank them at the end, avoid using all caps, and include signatures with contact information.