DEPARTMENT *Leadership, Motivation & Productivity*

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Effective
E-Mail Tips

If not crafted properly, e-mail messages can result in misunderstandings. Recently a pastor spoke with my husband about a message my husband had sent to several church members nearly a year ago. My husband's message was in response to an invitation to a couples' retreat and marriage seminar. My husband responded to the message using the "reply to all" function and asked, "Are you implying that our marriage is in trouble? LOL" This was meant as a joke assuming others knew that "LOL" means laughing-out-loud.

The pastor didn't know what "LOL" meant and assumed it was my initials as my name begins with "L." The pastor discussed this with others in the church, concerned that he had offended me and he had been disturbed by it for over a year!

Most of us spend a considerable amount of time handling e-mail. Sending and responding to messages can consume many hours a week. It's a good idea to review e-mail habits to be sure we are being effective in our productivity and communication.

By practicing the following tips you will be more effective in your communication, be more productive and avoid this kind of misunderstanding.

1 Shut off the auto-reminder! Most messages don't require an immediate response, and hearing (or seeing) the e-mail alarm go off every few min-utes is very enticing. This is a big, and usually unnecessary, interruption to your concentration and workflow.

2 Prioritize e-mails according to your high payoff activities. Priorities should guide the order you handle messages. Especially if you get a lot of e-mails, act first on the ones that provide you and your organization with the biggest benefit.

3 Create file folders & limit inbox messages. Set up e-mail file folders for different subjects. This saves significant time in handling and locating a particular e-mail. Then be sure to move messages you need into appropriate files. Set a limit on the number of messages you have "floating around" in your inbox. Once the e-mails reach your set limit, delete them, move them into the right folder, and/or take action on them. This saves considerable time in trying to find un-filed messages in a burgeoning inbox.

4 Have set times to check e-mail and have one touch. Schedule times in your day that are best to retrieve and handle messages. Resist the temptation to even look at other times. Many people find that three times a day is adequate – early morning; lunch time; and before leaving. Have a goal to handle (not just read) e-mails during this time and then file or delete.

5 One subject per message. Resist the urge to put more than one subject in a message. Often additional subjects get lost and/or forgotten. If you have multiple subjects, it's better to send additional messages. The receiver can more easily take action on single subjects.

6 Watch the use of humor, irony or sarcasm. As in the opening story, if you do use humor, do so sparingly, and be sure the receiver knows how it's intended. Remember, they can't see your facial expressions or hear your vocal tones.

7 Create subject lines that are meaningful. This will assist the receiver in determining the nature of the message. It also becomes very useful in finding the message later.

8 Send to the right people. Be sure everyone on the recipient list really needs the information. Watch who your message is being copied to (i.e., the "reply to all" function).

9 Proofread! Take a final look at the message before you hit "send," as it's pretty much a done deal once it leaves your computer. And be careful with the use of acronyms or jargon the recipient might not know.

10 Know when an e-mail should not be used. E-mail is not appropriate for all communication. Call rather than e-mail when you have potentially "bad" news or a sensitive subject. Never send a message to someone when you are emotional or angry. Wait a period of time before sending, preferably overnight. You'll likely feel and think differently about the subject once the emotions subside. **SAN**