

# Don't Send That Email. Pick up the Phone!

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4-5 minutes

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Around this time last year, I wrote about how we [need to get back to allowing conversation to occur](#) without texting, emailing, browsing, Tweeting, Facebooking, or doing whatever else zeros and ones can do these days on smart phones, iPads, notebooks, etc. I am as guilty as the next person of falling for the perception that any response latency is unacceptable. As 2012 fast approaches, this needs to go on top of my New Year's resolution list: focus on the live conversations at hand, rather than parallel conversations on the Blackberry screen.

But the bigger need is just for more live conversations to occur, period. This is especially true when people are trying to resolve a conflict or communicate an important business decision. There is a rising and unproductive trend towards people trying to do digital conflict resolution. The de facto path for issue resolution seems to be increasingly via email. More accurately, email has become a convenient mechanism for issue-avoidance. It is easier, quicker, less stressful, and less confrontational to have critical or challenging issues sent over email versus a live one-on-one with a counterpart.

Like many readers, I have experienced too many unproductive strings of back-and-forth emails or texts that should have stopped in round two, but continue. The problems with trying to resolve sensitive matters over email or text are quite obvious:

**1. It is hard to get the EQ (emotional intelligence) right in email.**

The biggest drawback and danger with email is that the tone and context are easy to misread. In a live conversation, how one says something, with modulations and intonations, is as important as what they are saying. With email it is hard to get the feelings behind the words.

**2. Email and text often promote reactive responses,** as opposed to progress and action to move forward. Going back to the zero latency expectation in digital communications, it is hard for people to pause and think about what they should say. One of my colleagues suggests not reacting to any incendiary message until you have at least had a night to sleep on it, and always trying to take the higher ground over email. While by definition reactive responses occur in live discourse, they are usually more productive. The irony is that while email, as an asynchronous channel, has the potential to be more thoughtful, it often promotes the opposite tendency to be immediately reactive. Why? Because the bark is almost always bigger than the bite behind remote digital shields.

**3. Email prolongs debate.** Because of the two reasons above, I have seen too many debates continue well beyond the point of usefulness. Worse, I have experienced situations which start relatively benignly over email, only to escalate because intentions and interests are easily misunderstood online. When I ask people if they have called or asked to meet the counterpart to try and reach

a resolution, there is usually a pause, then a sad answer of “no.”

Email is one of the greatest productivity contributors of the past two decades, and social communication platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have fundamentally changed and positively enriched the means and reach with which we are able to interact. Yet we have to recognize when such digital channels cannot substitute for a live conversation. Email and social networking modes of communications have created a generation of casually convenient new connections, and even helped us deepen existing relationships, but they can rarely replace the real world. As digital communication accelerates the pace at which people form and broaden relationships, it is also decreasing the rate at which people are willing to resolve issues professionally and directly in-person. The next time you experience an issue over email, ask yourself if it is something that would be better served by a real conversation. Then have the courage to stop emailing and pick up the phone. Or even better: have a meeting.