

TLP Five-Minute Read Over Coffee – Keeping cool in a difficult email exchange



Context: An aggressive email arrives in your inbox. You find the email too direct and unfairly critical of you and your team. Furthermore, the sender has gone 'CC crazy' and needlessly copied in multiple colleagues.

How do you respond?

1) Firstly 'let the wave of indignation pass'.

Take some deep breaths and walk around your office. The professional emails I most regret are those sent in the heat of the moment.

2) To email or not?

Often tense situations are best resolved face to face and not in an email ping pong exchange. However, sometimes you need your reply 'on record' if

multiple senior colleagues are copied in. Your email can then strongly advocate breaking the cycle of emails and meeting in person.

3) Find your voice.

That sweet spot between being aggressive and passive - which can be hard to find. Avoid emotional, overly defensive, or accusatory language. Don't apologize or make concessions where not needed. Write simply, clearly and focus on the facts. Be polite - I find that politeness can be a powerful tool in a difficult exchange. Politeness does mean expressing a type of false friendliness. If someone sends you a very tough email you don't need to wish them a nice day! However, a polite framework can effectively highlight you are cool under pressure and always retain your professionalism.

4) My example.

Dear Linda,

Thank you for your email. I would like to clarify a number of important points.

- *Firstly, we agreed on a delivery date of 31 March 2022, mid-March was never discussed as a realistic option.*
- *I would also like to highlight that our client solution was signed off by the Senior Management Team (SMT) after an extensive review of all options. I don't think it is sensible to revisit the scope of the project at this late stage.*

We are determined to deliver a high-quality solution to the customer. I think it would be very helpful for us to meet face to face to talk through our next steps together. Let me know your availabilities and I will follow up with an invitation.

Best regards

Toby
