ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION ETIQUETTE

Electronic communication (Facebook, Email, Twitter, Text Messages, and Instant Messages) is both great and terrible at the same time. It is great because it allows you to communicate quickly and efficiently. It is terrible because everyone has a different writing style and electronic communication removes two elements that are vital to good communication: tone and body language.

Chances are someone in your workplace, family, circle of friends, or community group has written an electronic message that probably should not have been sent. Perhaps it was not funny, too long, too harsh or too confusing. Nothing can stir up trouble in relationships like poor electronic communication. Since you and the person you are communicating with desire to stand firm in one spirit with one mind *(Philippians 1:27)* and all followers of Christ ought to desire to live at peace with one another *(Romans 12:18)*, we offer the following six suggestions when it comes to adopting electronic communication "rules."

JUST THE FACTS

Try to keep all electronic communication to "just the facts". Emotional topics are difficult enough to communicate face-to-face and are almost impossible to communicate electronically. Make every effort to keep electronic communication factual. Here are some examples:

- Do you want to meet up for dinner on Thursday?
- Guys, any interest in watching the Rangers on Wednesday?
- Wanted to tell you, lunch with my dad went well, more details later, but thanks for praying.

Rule of thumb: Electronically, factual information communicates best.

STAY AWAY FROM CONFLICT

Electronic communication is terrible for conflict resolution, venting frustration, and negative emotion. One problem with using electronic communication is how difficult it is to appropriately communicate tone, facial expression, body language and voice inflexion. All of these are essential elements to good communication and when they are removed, all you are left with is words.   Electronic communication is really "one sided" communication. Long emails full of emotional topics often communicate selfishness (I want to make sure you hear and understand me), rather than the desire for mutual understanding and assuming the best.

Rule of thumb: If your message has the potential to be interpreted negatively, don't send it.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Electronic communication is acceptable for encouragement and positive emotions. Everyone loves a random message of encouragement, and this is one very positive use of electronic communication.

Rule of thumb: If it will brighten their day…fire away!

SHORT & SIMPLE

If you are writing more than five lines, your message might be too long. You are busy and everyone in your group is busy. If you find yourself writing more than five lines in your electronic communication, it might be best to make a phone call or shorten the message to "just the facts."

Rule of thumb: One topic per message.

FAVOR FACE-TO-FACE

If there is something you feel more comfortable sharing via electronic communication rather than during a meeting or community group time, then this may indicate an issue that needs to be discussed face-to-face. We've all received the 3 page email from someone after our group time has ended and wondered, *why didn't they share this while we were in the group or at the meeting?* If you feel more comfortable sharing prayer requests or other details about your life electronically rather than when you are gathered with your group members that should be explored. Electronic communication is best when it functions as a secondary means of communication, not a primary means of communication. The group will probably benefit from engaging in this conversation (next time you all are in the same room together).

Rule of thumb: If you didn't (or wouldn't) communicate your electronic message during group time, why not?

PREFER THE PHONE

When in doubt, pick up the phone. Rarely do people regret picking up the phone to communicate with someone in their group or sphere of relationships. If you have any doubt about whether or not your electronic communication should be sent, err on the side of caution and pick up the phone.

Rule of thumb: If you call them, you probably won't regret it (unless there is conflict, in which case face-to-face is always recommended).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The best form of communication is face-to-face communication, however, that does not mean you should completely abandon all forms of electronic communication. Electronic communication is not the problem. It is a great tool that has made this world much easier. However, like all tools, when not used properly, there are some unintended consequences. Electronic communication can serve your group or it can fracture your group. Hopefully by following the simple "rules of thumb" listed above, you and your group can experience its benefits with as few unintended negative consequences as possible.