

Never write a nasty memo

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One day I arrived at work and opened an email from the big boss addressed to everyone that had two sentences typed in it: “This organization is a total and complete joke. If I could trade everyone out, I would do it by nightfall.”

At first I thought someone hacked this boss’s screen and wrote it as a joke. And if not that then it was a message unintended for everyone and was meant to be sent to a single individual, perhaps a deputy leader. Or maybe this leader was having a bad day and had an early-morning overreaction to something.

As I sat there pondering it, someone knocked on my door. It was the big boss. We were the only two who arrived to the building early that morning. The boss realized the problem with sending out an email like that and asked me if I knew how to recall it so no one could read it when they arrived to work. Luckily I knew how and luckily I was the only one who opened and read it.

Nasty memos or emails are never interpreted entirely the way the sender intends for them to be. One thing is for certain though: a nasty message shotgunned out to the masses will

generate reactions. Some subordinate leaders will scramble around in panic mode suspecting the reasons behind the message. Other leaders will have senseless meetings trying to figure out what and why the big boss wrote the message. And yet others will become angry, feel insulted, and lose respect for the big boss.

I once watched a big boss pack up his office after being fired for rancor comments written to a subordinate worker. The words and tone in that particular email were bitter, condescending, harsh, and ended with name calling and a threat! I’m not sure what this boss was thinking, but when the employee filed a complaint, the evidence was in writing.

Abraham Lincoln admitted that when he was in deep distress with someone and could not restrain some expression of it, he would sit down and write out a harsh letter venting his anger, but he would not send it. I wouldn’t recommend you do the same thing with email but rather, to have a trusted mechanism or person who allows you to vent without written or spoken words reaching their intended audience. Or you can just stop and think about it for a bit and give yourself time

to cool down and regain control of your emotions, actions, and words.

If you want to be an effective leader, never write a memo that criticizes, belittles, degrades, or is hurtful to a colleague. Never write a memo that is cynical, condescending, or unkind. Never send a memo written in anger or frustration. Sure, there may be times a memo for record is necessary to document wrong doings or negative circumstances surrounding an issue, but those types of memos should be limited to facts and actual actions only. Leave opinions out of them.

It’s a small business world out there. People get promoted, change companies, change jobs, and have powerful friends. Companies merge, acquire, and get acquired. Your self-made enemy could show up anywhere and/or your damaged reputation could become wide-spread.

Never give a company rival or other colleague a smoking gun. Be careful what you write in emails and memos. Once you click the send button, you may not be able to retrieve it. Once you click the send button, your reputation goes with it. Don’t click away a reputation that took you years to earn.

~ The End ~