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Email Reflections: 10 Simple Courtesies

By Catherine Franz

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Okay, you are super busy or you are down to your last email before heading home. Maybe it's first thing in the morning, you have a full in box to read and handle, all before your meeting starts in 10 minutes. It's easy to be in a rush and dismiss the little things, however...

...have you ever thought how your email looked from a receiver's viewpoint? Of course you have, every day, haven't you? It is so easy in our fast-paced lives to let the little things go.

When you receive a poorly formatted email and you don't know where each paragraph starts or finishes -- the thoughts are scattered and jumbled -- here's the reader's self chatter in action: "What the heck, it'll take me hours to decipher this. I don't have time for this. Can't X be respectful? I'll just pretend I didn't get it and maybe their follow-up email will be clearer." Click and delete. Of course, you have never done this -- chuckle.

By chance, your next email receiver is nicer and doesn't delete and pretend. They just move onto the next email and leave yours for the "someday in the future" stack. And maybe it will or will not ever be answered. Their response may even miss your point entirely or only provide feedback to half of the items that need addressing.

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If you have difficulty getting quick responses or any response at all, the receiver could be sending you a silent message. They could feel that you are wasting their time or do want to educate you on common email courtesies.

Recently, after receiving ten emails in one day from separate independent professionals, with their personal pronouns "i's" in lower case besides other items. I asked them to enlighten me about their lax protocols. I received a wave of negative responses. In order to keep this a family-available article, here are a few responses cleaned up: "i don't have time, too many emails." A few others

added, "i do it to everyone." I particularly loved the "to" in the last two emails -- I do it "to" everyone.

A human resource director client shared with me that every day she deletes ten or twelve applications, about 12% of the total number she receives daily, that omit common email courtesies. A majority come from individuals with higher degrees. I chuckled at the irony. She didn't and just heavily sighed. She found it even more serious on the number of emails she received from recruiters that also lacked these simple courtesies.

"Don't Sweat The Small Stuff" is a book I read a few years ago if I recall correctly. Normally I wouldn't care much about the small stuff either. However, coherent communication, whether verbal or written, still represents who we are and shows respect. Using history as an indicator, communication started and stopped wars.

Recently, I attended a speaking engagement with Michelle Singletary, author, "7 Money Mantras," and columnist, *The Color of Money*, for the Washington Post. In the presentation, she mentioned several times, "You had better sweat the small stuff." Of course, her reference was to money. Yet, it was an important point. It takes pennies to develop into dollars, dollars to add up to ten, and so on up the monetary ladder. Doesn't it hold true that if we leave out the small common courtesies and respect in emails, will it not block the dollars -- directly or indirectly?

When thinking over the given benefits for taking care of the "small stuff" in emails, here are three powerful mantras:

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- * A professional email attracts a professional response.
- * When you respect other people's time, they usually will respect yours.
- * When communication is thought through and clear, the chances increase significantly that the response will be returned in the same manner. Stinkin' thinking attracts the same.

10 Simple Courtesies, gathered from reading 2,000 emails, and feedback from the human resource director:

1. Focus on one topic per email. Keep the email simple so the receiver can focus in fast and easy. This improves the chance of a faster response, maybe any response. If you

write to someone regularly, ask what he or she prefers.

2. An appropriate subject line will help reduce accidental deletion. It will also help locate that specific email faster if needed. When forwarding or responding, change the subject line to reflect your response. You can also add your first name in the subject line as an added identifier. I like to start mine with: "Personal note from Catherine" or follow after the subject with: "From Catherine." If you are dealing with deadlines add: "Please respond by."

3. Keep each paragraph to one thought even if the paragraph turns out to be one fragmented sentence. You will want to limit email paragraphs to six sentences. A natural way of reading from a computer screen is with a scan-read process. Screen reading dries out the eyes and reduces blinking causing eyestrain.

4. Add subheader titles into the email when more than three paragraphs are in the email or more than three paragraphs follow the subheader. You can add subheaders as you type or while rereading. This keeps the eyes moving fast and easy. It also allows the mind to shift from topic to topic without developing cobwebs.

5. Re-read your email no matter how long or short. We always think faster than our fingers can type. Thus, what is typed isn't always what was swarming around in our mind.

6. Does the subject flow or was it choppy? Flow in an email isn't the same as flow from one chapter in a book to another. Flow allows the reader to easily transition and comprehend the material. If choppy, the reader might daydream or take a break and formulate a different answer that might not fit the material, creating additional emails on your part to clarify. Frequent places to check for flow in your material are where you start or stop a message or submessage.

7. Is there any type of priority or order needed to follow so that the receiver follows along with the material? Are there steps or information that build on the previous message? Before you can pour a glass of milk you might want buy the milk --- chuckle. When we are extremely familiar with how to do something, it's easy to write past something, a common mishap by IT experts. Do you know the receiver and their level of knowledge or experience on the topic? My favorite saying is, "When in doubt, write it out."

8. For goodness sake, turn on the spell check feature on. If you want to write pronouns in small letters, at least let spell check catch them for you.

9. Who are you? You would think that this one was common sense, at least I did. Yet, every week I receive 10–15 emails asking me a general question without telling me who they are or giving me some background. They are huge, open-ended questions that would take me years to answer. This falls into the lack of respect category.

10. What do you need or want? Forwarding an email that doesn't ask for what you need makes the receiver try to guess. Not cool. Speak up, don't be shy. If you take rejection personally, hire a life coach to work on this with you. Statements don't automatically ask anything. Questions do. My dad had a saying, "Squeaky wheel gets the grease. If you can't ask, squeak somewhere else. I can't guess what type of oil you need." A little harsh yet it makes its point. Go ahead and ask, and no this isn't a reflection on you.

We all believe we have good communication skills. There could be some real surprises when you start practicing these 10 Simple Courtesies. Take your time, slow down in order to

speed up. Tackle it slowly so that the lessons stick. You will be glad you did. The next email you send might be to your next boss, client, or forwarded to the President. You never know. It happened to me and it could happen to you.

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Reflections on the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

By Lisa M. Hendey

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Book Review – Reflections on the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

By Albert Haase

Reviewed by Lisa M. Hendey

Certain inspirational sayings and prayers transcend denominational lines, becoming part of the fabric of faith and inspiration for masses of believers seeking solace or comfort in difficult times. In *Reflections on the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi* (Saint Anthony Messenger Press & Franciscan Communications, September 2004, paperback 84 pages) author Albert Haase, O.F.M. dissects the classic "Peace Prayer" which is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. In his enlightening introduction, Haase offers a brief history of the prayer, noting that it has been embraced by as a "prayer for all times and all peoples", having been used by such notables as Margaret Thatcher at her inauguration and at the funerals of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Diana, Princess of Wales.

Given today's climate of political upheaval and war in so many areas of our world, contemplation of the Peace Prayer seems to be even more relevant than ever. This compact, twelve chapter book examines each phrase of the prayer in detail. Personal reflections and stories of individuals living out the aspects of the Prayer are offered and draw the reader into a closer understanding of what is meant by each simple expression. Each chapter ends with four reflective questions for individual or group consideration.

For individuals looking to truly live out the concept "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace", Albert Haase's book will become a treasured resource and invaluable prompt to both prayer and action. Groups looking for a concise study should enjoy gathering to read and contemplate the book as they examine how to become peacemakers in their own communities and in the world at large.

For more information on Reflections on the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi visit <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0867165723/catholicmomcom>

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