

Email Etiquette: Should You Reply to My Email?

By Bruce Mayhew

I've sent you an email and am experiencing dreaded email no reply — should you reply to my email? Panic is setting in. What should I do? I'm likely experiencing some of these 8 panic points:

1. Did you see my email?
2. Am I low priority and you'll respond 'later'? If so... when is 'later'??
3. Did your server block my message?
4. Did my server block your response?
5. Perhaps you are working on a response — so I should wait?
6. Do you need more time?
7. Did I upset you — was my request inappropriate or was my email tone harsh?
8. Perhaps you did see my email and don't care.

Help!

What's The Email Etiquette? Should You Reply To My Email?

This email etiquette question boils down to 'Are people supposed to respond to every email, even if it's only to say yes, no or thank you?'

The most common reasons I hear of why people say we should not reply to some email is:

- They are being efficient — saving time.
- They are saving space on the companies server and back-up systems.

I understand both of those points. Sure — they might save 5 seconds by not responding, but I think the cost of me assuming any of the above listed 8 panic points is way more costly to our business and our relationship.

The Risk Of Not Replying To Email

All you have to do is lose one piece of business, miss one deadline — or show up to one meeting that the other person doesn't come to to easily waste 30 minutes or more in preparation and travel time to experience the benefit of replying first-hand.

A quick reply, saying 'I'll have an answer for you tomorrow', 'Yes' and/or 'Thank you' is polite and a simple, time efficient way to be build relationships AND be motivating.

And, for all the 8 panic points listed above, if I don't get a reply to my email I really don't know it was received (read receipts don't work because they can be cancelled by the reader).

Example: A Situation To Consider

You receive an email from your very busy boss asking for some important information. She has outlined her needs and has asked for the information by 6PM Wednesday... the night before her meeting.

On Wednesday you have to leave by 3PM... it's a lot to get done, but at 1PM on Wednesday you email your boss what she requested.

Now it's 2:15PM and you have not had a confirmation from your boss that:

- She received your email / information
- The information is what she needs
- Panic!! For many of the 8 reasons listed above you begin to worry because your professional reputation is on the line if she's not happy. Your reputation is on the line.

Example Continued: Your Reputation Is On The Line

You want to make sure your boss is supported, so from 2:15 to 2:45 you meet with your assistant and your boss's assistant and show them where all your back-up files are and the key elements that you addressed when putting together your boss's request. This way:

- If your boss didn't get your work you have peace of mind to know that they have access to it.
- If your boss needs to make any adjustments you've done the best you can to bring them all up to speed.

What Did Happen was... your boss saw your email and you did a great job... but you don't know this.

The Problem...

By not taking 5 seconds to email you back "Thank you, this meets my needs perfectly." your boss has lost a perfect and easy opportunity to show you that you are important to her and the company. Instead, you have now:

- Stressed out yourself, your assistant and her assistant
- Kept yourself from doing some Important Work for at least the last 30 minutes
- Kept your assistant and her assistant from doing their Important Work for the last 30 minutes

So, what do you think? Should we send a response to all email?

I believe silence to email provides too many opportunities for errors, disappointments, and expensive assumptions to be made.

Certainly — if someone send you a “Thank you” it’s 99 percent likely that you don’t need to send a “You’re welcome” message. That is wasting time. Otherwise, if you are wondering “Should You Reply To My Email?’ Yes, I recommend erring on the side of safety... even (or especially) if it’s only to be polite, give me a pat on the back and say “Thank you.”

Happy communicating and creating workplace harmony. Thank you!