

## Before you click send

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In my not-so-long ago younger days, it was good practice to "hold your tongue" or "count to ten" to avoid saying something ridiculous during a disagreement. The advice was useful, and many professionals will tell you that holding back, even momentarily, propelled them forward in their careers. You will rarely get fired for thinking before you speak.

So, fast forward to today, when the majority of conversation is in written form: emails, posts, texts, etc. Technology gives every one of us the opportunity to not only THINK before we speak our minds, but to EDIT before anyone knows what we're thinking. This is why I'm often surprised when people go off on public email tangents.

For example, one member of a local meetup group was confused as to why his posts were being censored. The moderator said he viewed the posts as negative. "There is a difference between criticism and negativity," he said. So true. Criticism means judging the merits and faults of something. Negativity, on the other hand, is an attitude: angry, discouraging, pessimistic. Criticism gets a conversation going, shares information, works in facts and stats. Negativity just leaves a cloud over everything; not constructive, not informative. Criticism can inform people. Negativity? Not really.

Can a statement be transformed from negativity to constructive criticism? Sure, if you know what you're talking about. Pinpoint what drives you to feel negatively about something. What bothers you about this situation? Focus on the problem. State the issues, the drawbacks, the shortcomings of your thing. Try to avoid emotional references; definitely leave out any words commonly associated with finger pointing and schoolyard tiffs. There is a delete button on your keyboard, over there on the right. See it now? Learn to use it.

And if you don't know what you're talking about? Believe that someone will find you out. Criticism is best left to experts. If you've only been around the block once and you're tearing me to shreds, count on me to check out your online profile. I'll want to know who I'm dealing with. If you are the expert you purport to be, I will thank you for your advice. If you are an armchair critic, well, who died and left you in charge? Why are you feeling compelled to comment?

21st Century self control is free, easy and available to everyone. Delete before you send. You and your career will thank me.

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