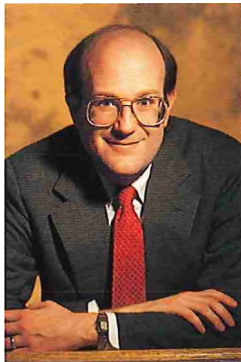


# New Rules for New Technologies

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In an automated world, old rules for ethics and etiquette are not adequate.

**L**aura sent Larry an E-mail message containing information that could be embarrassing if read out of context. Larry forwarded the note to another colleague, who then forwarded it to several others. When she learned of the note's distribution, Laura was very angry.

Question: What are the ethical boundaries around the retransmission of E-mail?

Doug disagreed with Mary, another staff member, about the contents of a phone conversation. "I know I'm right," Mary responded, "because I taped it." Doug was aghast, since Mary had never asked his permission to make the tape.

Question: When, if ever, is it acceptable to tape a conversation without first asking permission?

When Stu returned to work after a short absence, his 10-minute voice mailbox was full. However, one person had called five times and used the maximum message length of two minutes each time. Some co-workers and customers complained about being unable to leave a message.

Question: What is appropriate voice mail etiquette?

Dora returned from vacation to find 122 E-mail messages waiting in her in-box. Four days later, a colleague berated her for not answering his query.

Question: What are the rules regarding unsolicited E-mail messages?

Carl, who has an unlisted phone number, called an acquaintance who, unbeknownst to Carl, had caller identification. This person was involved in charitable and political organizations and passed Carl's name and unlisted number on to them. Carl soon began receiving phone solici-

tions from members of these organizations.

Question: If you do not safeguard your privacy by blocking your number so it cannot be viewed under caller identification (blocking is available in most states), does the called party have the right to do whatever he or she wishes with your number?

In these examples, individuals made certain assumptions about communications customs but found those assumptions were not necessarily shared. As new communications technologies change our environment, existing rules of ethics and etiquette are no longer adequate.

Today, besides person-to-person conversations, communications often consist of machine-to-person, person-to-machine or machine-to-machine messages. Speaker phones and conference calls enable multiple parties to engage in simultaneous conversations. And inequalities in communications can result when one party has more powerful tools (caller identification, call waiting, etc.) than another.

There is also an increased use of devices that are vulnerable to eavesdropping. Cordless and cellular phone transmissions are easily intercepted, even where prohibited by law. And E-mail and voice mail archives can be accessed by system administrators and others.

In addition, it is becoming more difficult to avoid unwanted communications. Automated dialing devices. E-mail and voice mail make it easy for one person to reach a vast number of individuals. Other devices make it simple to secretly record communications.

Call waiting offers a particularly interesting set of behavioral challenges. When is it rude to interrupt a conversation?

Does it make a difference if you are the person who placed the call or the one who received it? Is it impolite to say, "If I don't come back in 30 seconds, please hang up"? If you do hang up in such circumstances, who should re-initiate the call?

New communications technologies also offer opportunities for deception. Someone can claim that he or she is not recording your conversation, but you cannot verify that claim. An individual can tell you that you are on a speaker phone simply for convenience and not because someone else is in the room. However, you must take that assertion at face value. With call forwarding and conferencing, you may not know the location of a party, even if you initiated the call.

Some devices disguise your identity by altering your voice. Others enable you to simulate interruptions, such as a doorbell, so you can end a phone conversation.

#### SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS

When dealing with technologies such as E-mail, voice mail and call waiting, we don't have definitive guidelines on what constitutes good ethics and good manners. In this column, we offer principles for telecommunications norms. We hope these principles will serve as a starting point to further discussion.

**Respect confidentiality.** Other people have the right to assume that your communications with them are private — unless you request their permission to inform others. Therefore, you should not forward an E-mail message unless that is acceptable to the person who wrote it. The onus for securing such permission falls on the person who wishes to forward the message.

**Inform others of risks.** Some technologies have increased risks associated with them. Unless you tell people otherwise, they have the right to assume that their communications are being transmitted over regular land-based lines with a minimal risk of eavesdropping. If a less secure transmission medium is being used (such as a cellular or speaker phone), others should be informed.

**Don't impose unreasonable costs.** You should not impose costs on another person if that individual is unaware of the costs or cannot control them. Don't send long unsolicited faxes or call someone's

cellular phone (which causes them to incur a charge) without permission,

You don't have to respond to unwanted communications. The fact that you have a fax machine or a computer does not mean you have to reply to unwanted messages.

Do not deceive. It's wrong to mislead others about the technologies you are or are not employing. If you are recording a conversation, make that fact clear right at the start.

You should also avoid deceptive messages on your answering machine. You have a right to use such a device for call screening, but the message should not state that you are out. You can say something along the lines of, "Please indicate who you are and why you are calling after the tone."

Be thoughtful when leaving messages. If you try unsuccessfully to reach another party, you are not obligated to leave a record of the attempt. However, if you do leave a message, follow the rules of play for the medium. If a voice mail system has a two-minute maximum length for messages, stick to that limit. Don't call back repeatedly, filling up the message box.

We jointly own our communications. Communications are jointly owned by the people who take part in them. So you should not record a conversation without the express understanding and permission of all parties involved. Similarly, you should not quote another person unless that individual understands that the conversation is "on the record."

**Acknowledge the hierarchy of communications.** Generally, in-person communications take precedence over those that take place via machine. If you are having a face-to-face conversation, you should request permission before interrupting that conversation to engage in another dialogue, such as a phone call, in which the individual is not a participant.

**Do not coerce.** If you initiate a communication, respect the recipient's desire not to sustain or respond to it. When you make a phone call, respect the called party's

right to refuse the call or to end it quickly. If you initiate a communication, you should permit the called person to take another call.

Preserve anonymity. Although technologies such as caller identification remove much of the anonymity that existed in telecommunications, you should respect an individual's right to control personal information such as his or her phone number. A person may make a social call without blocking the transmission of his or her phone number, but this should not be construed as permission to reuse that number for other purposes.

#### **Exit communications politely.**

Request permission and offer an apology before interrupting or exiting a communication. If you place a call and during the course of that conversation hear the call waiting signal, you have a duty to ignore the signal or quickly dispose of the interrupting call. In every case, the person who interrupts has the responsibility to re-initiate the call at a later time.

We offer these principles as a starting point—a foundation on which to build the new rules of ethics and etiquette that are needed to deal with the new and emerging telecommunications technologies. We have undoubtedly overlooked some areas or overstated others. But we believe it is essential to make a start.

Today, we have a vacuum between technology and behavior. We owe it to ourselves and our industry to fill that vacuum as quickly as possible.

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