

How to Eliminate Accidental “Reply All” Email Embarrassment

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Tell me if this sounds familiar – a close co-worker sends out an email to your whole company notifying them of a new policy change, and you take that as an opportunity to reply back and tell the co-worker about the great time you had at the Justin Bieber concert last night. The only problem is that you accidentally hit the dreaded “Reply All” button and sent your response to your entire company. The next thing you know, some people are using the same “Reply All” button to inform you of your mistake (“Ummm ... you know you sent this to all of us, right?”) or mock your love of Justin Bieber (there are some great memes and gifs out there!). All the while, others are using “Reply All” to condemn each other for using “Reply All” or to request removal from this flood of emails.

Stories like this happen all the time. In fact, recently [a congressional staffer accidentally sent an email to every single staff member in the U.S. House of Representatives](#) that started a “Reply All” frenzy!

So how can you avoid this awkward situation? [As one article outlines](#), you could remove the “Reply All” button altogether, delay the messages you send, or install a program that alerts you when you are about to send an email using “Reply All.” Unfortunately, while these may be good suggestions for some, each option has downsides (you can never “Reply All” if you remove that option completely) or other limitations (“Reply All” alert plug-ins usually only work with certain email systems).

Let me offer you a recommendation that doesn’t require additional software and that can be used with any email system:

Use “Reply All” as your default response.

Wait ... what?!? You are looking for a way to eliminate accidental “Reply All” situations, and I am telling you to do that by using “Reply All” more often? Yes, you read that correctly.

Many email providers offer ways to make “Reply All” your default option, but I haven’t made any system changes to my email. It is more of a mental change where I consciously choose to click the “Reply All” button unless I have a compelling justification not to. I have practiced this for the past year and it has made a real difference.

Why? Let me explain.

Once you change your frame of mind, it forces you to think about your email replies in a different way. Consider that

the list of people that all received the initial email received it because the information was relevant to all of them (hopefully). Therefore, any reply you have should likewise provide valuable information to all who received the initial email. If that is not the case, it is probably better to either start a new email thread or not send the email at all. When you frame your email responses this way, it makes the replies much more thoughtful, intentional, and professional. And you are far less likely to accidentally send something to a group of people that you will later regret.

Of course, there will be situations when you make a conscious decision to use “Reply” instead of “Reply All,” and that is to be expected. For example, maybe you need to reply to the sender with a question that is only relevant to you, or you want to quickly thank the email sender for the information. It’s the intentionality behind that decision that matters.

When you intentionally use “Reply All” regularly, you’ll find that you rarely (if ever) use it accidentally.



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