



TUBBY BYE BYE: Imitating Laa-Laa may not go down too well in the office, but no one can see you at home

How e-mail can stop you going Laa-Laa

THANK God for e-mail. It has changed my life and probably saved my marriage. In sickness and in health, for richer or poorer and until death does me part, I swear that I will not be without e-mail.

At face value, this could appear to be a sad indictment of my lifestyle, so let me explain.

Back in the early days of my business career to get anything done I had to be chained to the office. All correspondence was typed, formatted, printed out and either mailed or faxed. In fact, the fax was new, and IBM's first PC had only just come on to the market.

Business life was filled with never-ending "telephone tennis" matches, long-winded phone calls and waiting for the post to arrive. As a confirmed workaholic, I hardly ever left the office before 10pm and was in most of the weekend as well. Not exactly what I'd call a life. But now, thanks to e-mail and the humble PC, all that has changed.

I can still do my 80-hour working weeks, but a great deal of those hours can now be done from home. I function better and I'm far more productive being relaxed in my own environment. What is perfectly normal at home would be strangely inappropriate at the office.

Rolling around the floor with my daughter and pretending to be Laa-Laa (FYI — Teletubby, slightly embarrassing but there you go) in between phone calls at the office wouldn't go down very well with my staff but it is absolutely expected at home. At Bright Station, we have a relaxed dress code. However, as yet no one has come into the office wearing just a pair of boxer shorts, flip-flops and an ill-fitting robe, at least not that I know of, anyway.

E-mail allows me to process infinitely more enquiries and communications than "the bad old days" because brevity and relevance is an integral part of the protocol of e-mail. We can all think of talkers who are best avoided on the phone; people who can take hours to say what could have been a one-line e-mail. With

e-mail, brevity is king. I have never received a spreadsheet from a colleague complete with a 10-page attachment about what they did at the weekend.

Mind you, there are a few things about communicating by e-mail that can inadvertently give the wrong message if you're not careful. Did you know that if you TYPE IN CAPS the recipient thinks you're yelling at them? Neither did I, until I got a very short reply from a colleague asking if I thought they were deaf.

And the smiley face thing — have you seen that one? If you want to say something offensive and get away with it, just add a smiley face after the insult: Dear John, Saw your interview last night and I thought you did a

brilliant impersonation of Porky Pig. Glad that media training wasn't all for nothing. :-).

And have you noticed how people get bolder when they're using e-mail? The meekest and mildest among us can suddenly grow 10ft tall with the attitude of Mike Tyson.

But alas, there is a downside. E-mail has become a victim of its own popularity. A colleague of mine recently came back to work after a two-week break to find his in-box jam-packed with 1,24

e-mails. Try stacking a thousand letters on your desk and see how many you get through before taking to the lot with a match.

With 100 more e-mails coming in every day, it took him the best part of the week just to get his correspondence under control. Which is precisely why I spend half an hour each day of my holidays dealing with e-mails — to avoid the crippling congestion when I get back.

Anyway, got to go. My daughter has just woken up. Time to tighten the bathrobe and start behaving like Thomas the Tank Engine. . . "Choo choo" I tell you, I might thank God for e-mail but I give equal thanks that videophones have never taken off.

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