



Four Tips for Responding to a Hostile Email

We've all received a hostile email at least once in our lives. To find out the best way to deal with hostile emails, we asked [Bill Eddy](#), founder of the [High Conflict Institute](#), for guidance. Bill is an attorney, mediator and therapist, and the author of several books, including, [BIFF: Quick Responses to High Conflict People, Their Personal Attacks, Hostile Email and Social Media Meltdowns](#), among several others.

According to Bill, the first step in responding to hostile emails is to ask yourself if they truly need an answer; not all emails need a response. If your co-worker or boss is just on a rant with nothing important to say then don't respond, as tempting as it may be to fire back.

A hostile email may deserve a response, however, if it was cc'ed to others or has a lot of untrue information. For example, if the email claims you failed at your portion of the team's project, and the email is cc'ed to the boss, then you may want to respond – but only to the inaccurate statements. Avoid getting sucked in with your own emotions.

When responding, Bill suggests using his BIFF response:

Brief: A brief response reduces the chances of an angry back and forth. Brief signals you don't take the other person's statements seriously and keeps you out of sending anything resembling a personal attack. Focus only on the facts and make no comments about character or personality.

Informative: Remember the point of your response is to correct inaccurate statements. Focus on the accurate statements you want to make and offer facts only.

Friendly: A hostile response will elicit a hostile response back. A friendly response is focused on de-escalation, and other email recipients will notice that your response is clearly very different than the other person's hostile email. Try as hard as you can to sound as relaxed and empathetic as possible.

Firm: Avoid comments that invite more discussion. You might even try, "This is all I will say on this issue," or, "This conversation is over."

If you do get another hostile email in response to your **BIFF**, don't respond. You have stated the facts and attempted to end the conflict, so your part is done. Do not engage.

Bill says that if you absolutely do have to respond, try copying and pasting parts or all of your former email to show that you aren't spending time on the conflict and have moved on.