Teaching Online: Lessons from a Hostage Negotiator

Educator techniques for deescalating situations online
WHO WE ARE

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TRUE STORY:
TALES FROM THE
COMPUTER
Hello Student,
I'm concerned that you haven't submitted any assignments since week two. Is there something going on that we can talk about?
Are you not getting any of the messages that I have been sending to you regarding what’s going on? First, there is this coronavirus going on. Second I am in the center of the severe Earthquake zone that kept me from having the internet for weeks. It would come back on or they would get ready to turn it back on and boom another earthquake prevent or shut it off again. Not to mention no power, water, or gas for almost a week. Then lastly they thought I was asymptomatic and had contracted the COVID-19 virus. Luckily, it was just severe allergies which trigger my asthma. So let me know what your plan is at your earliest convince so that if needs be I can start an appeals process.
Hello Student and advisor,

First, yes I have received those emails, however I haven’t received anything else as to how you would like to move forward in the class. I sent the below email in an attempt to see where you’re at and if you would like to move forward. Second, I understand it’s trying times. I too am dealing with the COVID-19 issues and concerns and yet I still find ways to be caring and human, reaching out to a student I haven’t received any follow up from or any submitted assignments. Third, with all the concerns and obvious stress you’re under I would recommend withdrawing from the class. Your stress is coming out in your tone. Please remember we are all facing difficult times.
...as you called them, uncaring and inhumane ways and “tone” in which allegedly I had spoken to you in. As the evidence within this email proves –where– that tone comes from, I am left no other option it appears then to turn it over to the appeals process/department and report this to the Dean. What I will also not do is allow you to belittle me, attempt to make a mockery of me, treat me as though I am in boot camp and you are my superior. Do not ever forget who pays your salary, Professor. As quickly as it is given it can be lost and taken away...
Let’s create a word cloud on issue you face with online communication.
The use of progressively heavier contentious tactics – is by no means an inevitable outcome of conflict, but it is an important one because of the great human cost it often produces. Escalation is commonly accompanied by several other transformations: issues proliferate, parties become increasingly committed to the struggle, specific issues give way to general ones, the desire to succeed turns into a desire to win, which turns into a desire to hurt [the] other, positive feelings give way to negative feelings, and both sides grow by recruiting formerly neutral individuals and groups (Pruitt and Kim 2004: 99–100).
Glasl’s Conflict Escalation Model shows how an interaction between student and teacher can go off the rails.
In a negotiation, for instance, when our counterpart issues a threat and we feel an impulse to retaliate, mindfulness helps us to insert a “wedge of awareness,” which allows us to examine that impulse and decide whether retaliation is more appropriate than another move that would more likely foster value creation, understanding, and healing (Riskin, 2006: 242).
Potential for emails, discussion posts and announcements to come off as cold or impersonal

Students can easily misinterpret meaning of an instructor’s email

Concise may be misinterpreted by students as short-tempered or unsympathetic

In online learning, instructors must go out of their way to generate communications that help students feel safe, comfortable and welcome
### Research: Impact of Email Tone

**Term 1: Faculty “Efficient” Communications**
Students interpreted as potentially harsh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message 1</th>
<th>Message 2</th>
<th>Message 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I will not accept homework that is emailed to me”</td>
<td>“Do not ask for homework explanations if you have not read the chapter”</td>
<td>“Contact me if you have technical difficulties with the exam”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Term 2: Changes in Communication

| “I am happy to help you if you are struggling with the assignment.” | “I can tell you put a significant amount of effort into your work, and I greatly appreciate what you did.” | “Have a safe weekend” |

**RESEARCH: IMPACT OF EMAIL TONE (CONT.)**
Results in student success comparing the two terms with different communication styles.

**Table 3: Student Success Rates in Online Courses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Number Enrolled</th>
<th>Successful</th>
<th>Unsuccessful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TEACHER ARCHETYPES: BAD COMMUNICATORS
Poll to see which archetype is the most problematic at your institution
"This is the last week of the class. I am not sure what you want me to do with your situation"
"IT IS MY JOB TO UPHOLD SNHU POLICY, ESPECIALLY WITH PLAGIARISM WHICH IS NOT TAKEN LIGHTLY"
"I RECOMMEND THAT YOU TRANSFER TO A DIFFERENT SECTION OF ENG-123."
"YOU NEVER MENTIONED YOU DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THE ASSIGNMENT OR HOW TO PROPERLY CITE A SOURCE"
**CONSEQUENCES BAD COMMUNICATION**

- Higher number of student complaints
- Higher number of grade disputes
- Lower course completion/retention
- Lower success and satisfaction
GOOD COMMUNICATION: DE-ESCALATION

Chris Voss

Never Split the Difference
1. Build rapport and trust
2. Convince them of empathy
3. Calibrated questions
1. Build Rapport and Trust Online

- Modeling tone
  - Calm
  - Kind words
  - Acknowledge the other person

- “Smiling” through text-based communication

- Be predictable

- Find ways to do this proactively
  - First week discussion/email outreach
  - Grade on time/early, especially the first few weeks of class
  - Respond in a timely manner
MENTI

Ranking instructor messages by how much “smile” they have
Voss uses “Tactical Listening” techniques to show empathy with his negotiating counterpart.
Let's practice labelling the emotion in a student email
“You have fallen behind quite a bit. I would recommend focusing on the Milestones, because this will be apart of your final project. If you can get Milestone 1 & 2 this week. Then you can work on the first blog, next week with that weeks assignments. Let me know if you have any questions.”
3. CALIBRATED QUESTIONS ONLINE

- Tactical questions to reveal their true needs
- Focus on How and What questions
- Use to coach and plan for success
MORE TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Make the most of your new skills
**KEEPING YOUR COOL**

- Faculty Triggers:
  1. Not doing citations
  2. Not reading syllabus
  3. Lack of communication from student
  4. Late work

- Individualized Consequences and Next Steps

- Build on listening
What are your triggers in the classroom?
INTERACT WITH DIGNITY

Be in the right state of mind

Reread before you send

Golden Rule/Platinum Rule

Consider long term relationship
RESOURCES TO TAKE AWAY

The Negotiation Edge Blog

Printable docs grab bag

Further Reading
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!
REFERENCES


