

Taken from High Conflict Institute website

### BIFF Responses, Bill Eddy

Dealing with High Conflict People (HCPs) and their irate communications can leave you at a loss.

**The BIFF Response® Method** helps you get it under control. The [website](#) and [book](#) will give you the method essentials, so check them out if you haven't already. Then practice, practice, practice! In the beginning, you may find yourself staring at a blank screen wondering, **"What do I say?"**

The answer will vary from case-to-case, but let's review the ground rules and then go over a few examples. **Rule #1 is always to ask: "Do I need to reply to this at all?"**

Pause. Take a deep breath. Then read the email/ text with a critical eye: Is there anything that *really* requires a reply? (A deadline, an appointment, a PTA conference, a needed decision). Look for valid matters and ignore the barbs. A decision on an appointment time is valid. An accusation that you never communicate is invalid. Asking what time to pick up a child is valid. Saying everybody is mad at you/blaming you is not valid. Additionally, a decision needed for a concrete issue is only valid *if it's new*. Further demands to discuss the same matter are not valid and need no reply, or a shorter version- one time - of what you said last time. Don't take the bait when the next re-worded email with the same demand comes along.

#### If you need to reply, then follow BIFF:

- **Brief:** Keep it brief. Long explanations and arguments trigger upsets for HCPs.
- **Informative:** Focus on straight information, not arguments, opinions, emotions or defending yourself (you don't need to)
- **Friendly:** Have a friendly greeting (such as "Thanks for responding to my request"); close with a friendly comment (such as "Have a good weekend").
- **Firm:** Have your response end the conversation. Or give two choices on an issue and ask for a reply by a certain date.

#### Leave out the 3 A's

An entire chapter is dedicated to this in the [BIFF Response Book](#), but the highlights of what to avoid are:

- **Advice.** Are you telling the other person what to do, how to behave, or how to feel? If so, you can expect a defensive reaction and more email/texts. It's better to avoid unsolicited advice such as "You just need to do X." [Make a proposal](#) instead.
- **Admonishments.** Telling a defensive or upset person what they do wrong and how to fix it will just make them more defensive and earn you another accusatory reply. Things like "You're overreacting" or "You should be ashamed" are not going to help them hear you.
- **Apologies.** Most of us apologize sometimes, but it easily backfires with HCPs. "Sorry I was late" is OK as a social nicety. "I'm sorry my email upset you" is accepting responsibility for the other person's emotions. It's almost guaranteed to be taken as an admission of guilt, which an HCP will use against you to place blame and defend their actions.

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### **A workplace Example:**

Team member email:

"Who do you think you are? You're messing up the whole project and making me look bad!!!! You know we were supposed to turn in the figures yesterday, but noooo. You're so important you thought you could get away with a TWO-HOUR BREAK. I couldn't get it done and it's YOUR fault! You need to get your s\*\*t together, EVERYONE thinks so!!!"

You:

"Hi Coworker A, I appreciate your concern for getting reports in on time. As I mentioned in my email to everyone last week, my meeting could not be rescheduled. I've attached a copy of the email for you. You'll see that Ms. Boss gave us an extension until Friday. I am available all afternoon. What time can you meet to finish the figures? Have a good morning. –Me"

### **A Public Accusation Example**

Email cc'd to everyone in the office:

"In case you hadn't noticed, we are all busy around here. Why is it that you spend your whole day checking your Facebook and watching YouTube? I don't think this is the best use of company time so on behalf of everyone here, I ask that you get back to work."

You should respond with factual information when potentially damaging misinformation is sent to a wider audience and has the risk of doing some harm. You don't want your supervisor believing you spend all day watching cat videos, so you write:

"Hello everyone, Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address this. I appreciate my coworkers' attentiveness to the use of company time so I would like to clarify that I am doing assigned research for the new social media campaign and was asked to review how other companies use media platforms for trends and ideas. I'm sure we are all working hard to make the campaign successful. I wish you all a good day. –signed Coworker"

If you know what to expect from an HCP, and you have practiced and prepared, giving a good BIFF Response is a lot easier and starts to come naturally over time. Good luck!

### **RESOURCES:**

Get the skinny on the BIFF Response® method in our [20-minute video](#), with [personal coaching](#), or in the [BIFF Response book](#).