6. Message System Mores

*The great art of living easy and happy in society is to study proper behaviour, and even with our
most intimate friends to observe politeness; otherwise we will insensibly treat each other with a
degree of rudeness, and each will find himself despised in some measure by the other.*

--BOSWELL, London Journal (Dec.1, 1762)

What is this?

This section is an essay on manners, that is, message system manners. Laurel in its va
releases has been in use for over three years at the time of this writing. In this tim
patterns of message system user behavior have been discovered, and doubtless many more
patterns will be discovered in the future. This section gathers together several obser
Laurel user behavior in an effort to spread understanding of this new electronic messag
and to instruct users in proper behavior.

The contents of this section may be divided into roughly two kinds, objective observati
message system social phenomena and definitely biased suggestions of standards. The op
expressed herein are solely those of the author. These opinions are not based on scien
or samples, but rather on certain gut feelings that have evolved through a close associa
Laurel since its inception. I expect that several of the opinions set down here will r
vigorous debate, but so much the better to spread the word.

A brief outline of this section follows.

Communication patterns	A brief discussion of structures within which communication takes place.
The wrong number	What to do when you receive a message intended for someone else.
Rudeness and vulgarity	Why it appears in electronic mail.
Message system costs	How the way we pay for communication affects what we say.
Unsolicited mail	What it is and when it is or isn't appropriate.
The chain reaction	A description of a phenomenon peculiar to electronic mail. The Reply-To feature and how it helps.
Miscellaneous distribution list problems	Distribution list etiquette.
Off-the-record responses	When and when not to publish.
Hardcopy forms	How to permanently engrave messages properly.
Masquerading	Anonymous (or worse) messages.
Wizards vs. naive users	How to keep arcana to yourself.
The moral of this tale	Be considerate of others.

Communication patterns

Part of the evolution of a society is the structure within which its members communicate
to-face communication, both spoken and through gestures, has been with us for a very lor
Written communication and telephone communication have been employed for a substantiall
lesser amount of time. Nevertheless, these modes of communication have been around long
enough to have developed certain standards of conduct and a framework in which reasonable
communication can take place.

The electronic message medium has been available for a much shorter period of time, perh
twenty or so years.   I am purposely ignoring telegraphic communication, which has very different characteristics
due to its long delays and high cost.   Electronic message systems available on personal computers have
been available for even less time, certainly less than ten years. In this time, standar
electronic communication have not yet had time to mature, so we are still groping toward
workable electronic messaging society.

In any of the mature communication media, each society places limits on what is consider
acceptable behavior. Vulgar language or gestures are generally frowned upon in face-to-
communication, except in smaller sub-societies in which this mode of behavior is necessa
part of the group. Shouting at close range is similarly considered to be in bad taste.
dealing with such behavior in face-to-face communication run from mild rejection of the
to complete avoidance of that speaker in the future. As the number of human societies
and each has had much experience with this means of communication, the means employed fc
dealing with such situations are quite varied. Within each group, however, the methods
be quite effective in stifling unwanted behaviors.

I will try to list several kinds of situations that arise in the electronic message med
for dealing with them. Where possible, I will try to draw parallels to other more trad
modes of communication to illustrate acceptable manners. In addition, I will try to po
ways in which communicating via electronic mail is different from the traditional commur
media, and how this modifies the problems to be dealt with.

The wrong number

We all have dialed wrong numbers and received calls from people who have dialed wrong
numbers. The protocol for handling such situations is simple, and arises naturally as
the way in which standard phone calls are initiated. A typical wrong number dialog may
follows:

      Callee: Hello.
      Caller: Hello. May I speak to John?
      Callee: There is no one at this number by that name. I believe you have the wron
              number.
      Caller: Oh. Isn't this 555-1234?
      Callee: No it isn't. (And sometimes ...) This is 555-4321!
      Caller: Thank you. I'm sorry to have bothered you.

In postal communication, receiving misaddressed mail or mail for a former resident who h
moved is akin to the telephone's wrong number. The post office's suggested remedy is fo
recipient to line out the address and remail the letter. The post office will then atte
forward the letter to the correct address, deliver it to the proper address, or return t
the sender.

Note that in both of these situations, it was not necessary to begin the actual conversa
the letter. Enough information is exchanged at the outset to determine if the parties
communication are the correct ones. This is usually not true when comunicating via ele
mail.

In electronic message systems, it is seldom the case that a message sent to a particular
actually delivered to a recipient with a different name. A different situation is (unf
common when a recipient has a popular name. The problem is that several people may have
same last name, and Laurel (plus Grapevine) has not had convenient facilities for mappi
person's actual name into that person's message system name. Thus, a person named Doe
receive mail for ADoe, BDoe, etc. Here, the original error is committed by the sender,
not consider that ADoe's message system name was actually ADoe, but just assumed that i
Doe.

The parallel to this situation in the telephone medium is actually a bit more elaborate
dialog given above. It is more like:

        Callee: Hello.
        Caller: Hello. Is Johnny there?
        Callee: Hold on, I'll get him.
        John: Hello?
        Caller: Hey Johnny, let's boogie on down to the hoedown.
        John: Who is this?
        Caller: Come on buddih, this is good old Bodine!
        John: I don't know any Bodine.
        Caller: Oh. Ain't this 555-1234?

and so on. Notice that in this case a partial name match has occurred, and it is only
conversation that one of the parties discovers that something is awry. In the electron
it is nearly always the case that the message must be at least partially read to determ
reached an incorrect recipient.

This situation can be (and has been) handled in several inappropriate ways. First, (an
the incorrect recipient can just ignore the message. No one gains through such inaction
the incorrect recipient may send a response to the sender of the form "Stop sending me
trash!" This is a bit more helpful, but not quite the best that can be done. Third, t
recipient may send the correct recipient a message of the form "Tell your senders what
name is!" This is not even as good as the previous response, as a message system user
know all possible senders.

Proper consideration by all involved can alleviate the "wrong number" syndrome considera
Senders of messages should know their recipients. When sending a message, if you are n
of a person's message system name, look it up. In Palo Alto, the phone list has everyon

message system name correctly listed. Other organizations should do the same, and even
message system wide "white pages" will be published. All these help, but not if the se
use these lists.

When you realize that a message is not for you, use the **Forward** command to send it back
sender along with your polite comment that the message has reached a "wrong number".
Forwarding the message back is important, as the sender may not have a copy of that mes
any more. Once you have determined that a you have received a "wrong number" message,
STOP READING IT. The messages sent through the message system may have personal
material, and it is none of your business to peruse the entire message. It is for this
do not suggest forwarding the message to the proper recipient. Determining who is the
recipient is the job of the sender. It is presumptuous to believe that you know who th
recipient is; you may actually forward the message to yet another incorrect recipient.
determining the correct recipient may require reading more of the message than you ough
read. (If you think you know the message system name of the correct recipient by the t
realize that you are not the correct recipient, then you might include that name in you
covering note back to the sender. However, the mistaken sender should not expect corre
identification of the intended recipient, just as he or she would not expect it in the
postal mail systems.)

Some further points to consider are these. The "wrong number" mishaps generally happen
people who have common names and whose system names are exactly their last names. The
honor of having one's system name be exactly one's last name is generally historical ("
first Doe hired here, therefore I'm entitled to be Doe.pa forever!") A reasonable solu
be that no one have the plain name, but instead when ADoe arrives, then Doe has his or
message system name changed to BDoe (or whatever). In this way, the existing message s
facilities will catch messages sent to Doe and return them as being sent to a non-exist
which point the sender can look up the correct message system name. (Note of course th
author has a relatively uncommon name, and makes these observations knowing full well t
they don't apply to him.)

One final point: one often heard response to this and other problems is "Why doesn't La
it?" The answer is that some of these societal questions have been addressed by Laurel
many of them are so subtle that it would take a large amount of research into these pro
before workable institutions could be built into such a system. Piecemeal solutions wi
forthcoming (in the form of the "white pages" and some .laurel runnable programs). In
meantime, consideration for others can go a long way.

Rudeness and vulgarity

The electronic mail medium joins several disparate properties of other communication me
an interesting way. The display of mail on a personal computer is a rather personal exp
Certain feelings of privacy and ownership pervade a personal computer user's relationsh
his or her machine. Thus, the process of reading one's own electronic mail includes ma
personal aspects of face-to-face communication.

On the other hand, sending electronic mail is much more impersonal. The recipient is n
present, and nearly none of the social strictures that govern one's face-to-face comuni

present. The sender is also able to speak his or her piece completely, without any inte
exchanges with the recipients that might moderate the entire business. This situation
when the recipients are not named directly, but are addressed indirectly through an imp
distribution list. This imbalance in feelings between sender and recipient has wide ran
consequences.

An obvious consequence of this imbalance is that opinions expressed and the language use
express them in messages can be wildly inappropiate to the customs and expectations of
recipients of such a message. A reader may justifiably feel slapped in the face by a me
or she considers to be in extremely bad taste.

When rebuked for such behavior, errant senders have been known to say "I didn't intend
way!" This is not good enough. The damage has already been done. The only remedy is
senders to think about what they are saying and to whom they are saying it. The message
to date has been fairly unrestricted. Only as long as the society of message system use
self-restraint will such a free-wheeling communication medium be tolerated. There are
means of applying institutional censorship to the message system traffic, means that we
never need to be implemented.

Message system costs

Many of the problems associated with improper use of the message system are exacerbated
(caused?) by the lack of charging for message system usage. In nearly all other modes
communication, "sending a message" implies a certain cost (or risk) which rises with th
of recipients that are being reached. Free speech is, in this sense, not free at all.
free society, one can say what one pleases, but not without paying for the means to say
me illustrate this with some examples.

In nearly every communication medium, costs for the use of that medium are borne by the
sender of messages. Postal mail requires the sender to pay for a stamp for each copy o
message that is sent. Telephone service is charged to the originator of calls, and eac
general) goes to only one recipient. Broadcasting messages via radio or television req
investment on the part of the sender. The costs of printing handbills or posters are l
borne by their authors. Public speeches, if they are to reach a large audience, require
sound systems, etc., that are paid for by the speaker.

It may be argued that recipients do pay some of the costs for using some of these system
However, these costs (the price of a radio receiver, basic telephone service, etc.) are
constant; they do not increase as received message usage increases. A receiver's cost
electronic mail is similar in this respect in that the cost of a workstation on which L
borne by the receiver.

Some other modes of communication do require explicit payment by the receiver. Commerc
films, books, magazines and records fall into this category. However, publication of t
materials does involve a substantial financial risk. Material that is not likely to be
seldom published, and when it is, large costs are often incurred by the publisher.

Electronic mail as implemented in Laurel and Grapevine has a very different cost struct
cost for a sender is minimal. It essentially consists of the time it takes to compose a
message. If time is considered the major cost factor, then it is the recipients who pay
the messages they receive. When the amount of time each recipient spends on a message
a large distribution list (even if a quick scan of part of the message followed by a **Del**
summed over all recipients, this is easily much more than the time consumed by the send
that message.

While we would like to keep the free structure of a message system, where any user can
message to any other users, this freedom must be used with some care. When electronic
systems become widespread, they will undoubtedly change their cost structures to match
the more traditional communication systems.

Unsolicited mail

The existence of large public distribution lists in our message system makes it easy fo
reach a very wide audience. Each distribution list has a distinct purpose, e.g., lists
interested in particular topics, lists of employees in certain organizations, lists of
particular projects, etc. Some lists are used primarily to keep track of all users of
system. These include such lists as AllPA^.PA, AllES^.ES, etc., which contain the name
individuals in those particular registries. There are also some lists maintained on a
geographical basis, e.g., PaloAlto^.PA, which lists all message system users in Palo Al
California.   This is not necessarily the same as AllPA^.pa, which includes people in the PA *registry*, but who may
not actually work in Palo Alto.

The audiences addressed by these lists should not be considered a captive audience for
of the message system. The purpose of any distribution list may be discovered by any u
registry served by Grapevine) by running the Maintain.laurel program and using the Type
command for that list (Appendix B). The purpose of the list will be printed in the Rema
for that list. Although all lists are (currently) available for use by any message syst
lists, e.g., All*x*^.*x* where *x* is a registry name should not be used by anyone who doesn't
very good reason for doing so.

Many distribution lists exist for the enjoyment of their members who wish to receive ite
interest to them. One should feel free to send an anouncement of an upcoming musical ev
Northern California, for instance, to Music^.PA. Such a message is quite inappropriate
AllPA^.PA, PaloAlto^.PA, etc. There are lists of message system users who have agreed
through any and all messages. These lists (Junk^.PA, various CrankMail.dl files, etc.)
lists to which ridiculous messages may be sent without incurring the justifiable wrath
system users.

A Laurel user should understand when a message is appropriate to send to all people in
her work group. Social values are different in different locations, and the members of
should understand what they are. It has been observed that messages that are sent to a
wider than the sender's immediate group are the ones that cause the most trouble.

Unfortunately, unsolicited messages have continued to be sent to inappropriate lists.
inappropriate messages for standard organizational or geographic lists are:

    "Does anyone know how to get my Alto fixed?"

    "This is to let everyone in the message system world know that my phone number ha
    changed."

    "I want everyone to know that I really like my roofing contractor."

I'm sure that each user of the message system can recall some other similar gem. The f
sections explore some of the consequences of unsolicited mail.

The chain reaction

To add insult to injury, after some piece of particularly ridiculous mail has been broa
inappropriate audience, it invariably follows that some recipients cannot control their
make even bigger spectacles of themselves by sending their two cents to everyone who re
the original nonsense. While the original event is thought by many message system user
annoying, the latter is considered to be downright stupid. Remember that once you push
Deliver button and watch the last chance to cancel fade away from your screen, there is n
erase your comments from the collective memory of your peers.

Further on, I will give details of the facilities available in Laurel to counteract thi
now, I would like to list some of the typical responses that have been sent not just to
perpetrator, but to the entire list of victims.

    "Your message is inappropriate to send to all these good people."

    "If you don't like junk, then get off Junk^".

    "How do I get off Junk^?"

and, my favorite,

    "Do you realize that if all of us replied to all of us (as I am doing right now)
    number of messages that would be sent would exceed the number of atoms in the kno
    universe . . . "

It is my opinion that bombarding only the original sender of a ridiculous message with
nonsensical replies is poetic justice.   There have been many requests for a **Fed up** command to be added to
Laurel for just this purpose. Although I am sympathetic to such requests, for now we've just added them to the
collected Laurel annals.

An answer to the question "How do I get off Junk^?" (in a registry served by Grapevine)
the program Maintain.laurel (Appendix B) can be used to examine and modify public distr
lists. If you cannot modify the list yourself due to its access controls, then send a
of the people listed as an owner of that list.

The measures taken within Laurel to counteract the chain reaction phenomenon involve us
special header field in messages called the Reply-To: field. Please note the spelling
To": it contains a hyphen.

When an answer to a message containing a Reply-To: field is initiated with the **Answer** co
only the name(s) listed in that field (plus your own name in the copies field) are put
answer form as recipients. In conjunction with the automatic addition of Reply-To: fie
delivery, this gives a simple mechanism to break the chain of replies.

When a message is sent with the **Deliver** command, if that message contains a large number
recipients or any public distribution lists, and it has no Reply-To: field, then the de
interrupted pending user interaction to specify what kind of Reply-To: field is desired
will appear in the feedback region specifying the number of recipients and the number o
distribution lists to which the message is being sent. It also asks you to choose a "R
option, with the reminder

   "ESC = answers to self only, A = answers to all, DEL = cancel delivery."

At this point you must choose one of these options; delivery is postponed until you do

The recommended option when sending to a large list is for you to strike the ESC key. T
automatically insert a Reply-To: <self> field, where <self> is your name. Anyone who r
such a message and who initiates a response by using the **Answer** command will begin editi
form that includes only you and himself or herself as recipients.

There are situations in which replying to the entire list of original recipients is app
situations include sending technical messages to members of a project, scheduling queri
backgammon nights, etc. In these cases, strike an A (upper or lower case) for your "Rep
choice. This will send the message without a Reply-To: field, so that recipients who u
will get forms with all recipient names and lists included as recipients.

If you are hopelessly confused by this, or you realize that you would like to edit the
field slightly, then strike the DEL key (actually any key other than ESC or A) in answer to the "Reply-
To" prompt. The Reply-To: <self> line will be added to your message anyway, but the me
will not be sent. At this point you may edit your message, perhaps adding a few extra
the Reply-To: field, and then invoke the **Deliver** command again.

Note that you are not bothered by this prompt if you have already included a Reply-To:
your message. The reasoning behind this is that if a Reply-To: field is already in the
message, then you must have already noticed the wide distribution of the message and ta
appropriate steps. Good for you!

One final note on this topic. Although Laurel provides these mechanisms to help break
reactions, the ultimate responsibility for messages sent lies with their senders. Alwa
list of recipients in any message you are about to send. Excuses of the form "Laurel l
away." are feeble indeed.

Miscellaneous distribution list peccadillos

Here are several other tips to bear in mind when using distribution lists.

A private distribution list is reasonable only when you wish to control all messages to
there is any reason to allow others to send to the list, then set up a public list. In
doing so are found in section 3.7.

If you do set up a private distribution list, then do not include any public distributi
in it. Others may modify that list, thus indirectly modifying your private list.

Names included in any distribution list should always be fully qualified, i.e., contain
suffix. Only this way will the list be useable by others outside your own registry.

Off-the-record responses

There are many situations in which a user submits a question to a wide audience, say to
distribution list of people interested in such questions, and indicates that he or she w
responses and later make them public. This is a most reasonable thing to do, and it he
reduce the chain reaction effect. In Laurel 6, be sure to include a Reply-To: <self> f
performing such services for your audience.

A note of caution is in order here. Messages should be considered PRIVATE, unless othe
indicated. If your intention is to publish the responses, then by all means make that
clear in the same message that poses the original question. If your message did not ma
intention clear, and you decide that you would like to publish the responses, then foll
each response asking whether you may do so.

If the intention to publish responses is clearly indicated in the original message, the
of any response is fine, as long as that response does not explicitly mention that it s
considered private.

Hardcopy forms

The message system in Xerox is used for communication about Xerox related business and
personal messages. It is appropriate to put onto Xerox internal memo forms (electronica
generated or not) only those messages whose purpose is related to Xerox business. (The
corporation has specific guidelines relating to the use of the Xerox logo, internal mem
etc. Common sense is all you need to derive these guidelines for yourself.) Many of t
and defaults of Laurel have been designed to allow users of the message system to behav
properly with respect to these guidelines.

If a message you send to others is intended to be a Xerox internal memo, include a Prin
InternalMemo line in its header. When your recipients print this message in the normal
message will appear as an internal memo. On the other hand, if a message is truly friv
PrintForm: Blank line in the header of your message is likely to prevent inappropriate
Refrain from mentioning any custom hardcopy form in a PrintFrom: field unless you know
all of your recipients have included that custom form in their Laurel profiles.

Although it is possible to change the default hardcopy form (used for those messages th
contain a PrintForm: field), this change should not be made unless you have a real need
The Blank form is adequate for most hardcopies, and special printing is possible using
{brackets} in the hardcopy submenu on a case-by-case basis.

Masquerading

On occasion, people have received messages from fictitious senders, or even worse, from
masquerading as another real message system user. This is a most serious breach of mes
system etiquette, and should be considered so by all message system users.

A fictitious From: field is legitimate when a valid Sender: field is included. For ins
messages that are properly signed with an organization's name, say "The Laurel Group",
sent by explicitly typing a "From: The Laurel Group" line in the message header. Laure
notice that a From: field is already there, and it will include a Sender: <User name> l
delivered message instead of its usual From: <User name> line. Any time you receive a
that has a strange From: field, you may check the Sender: field for the actual sender.

By a "masquerader" I mean someone who subverts the normal mechanisms embedded in the
standard message system programs to send messages of dubious value, without having his
name appear in such messages. This action is possible not only in electronic message s
in other more traditional communication media as well. Masquerading as another may be
criminal act when committed using traditional communication media, with penalties speci
laws that prohibit libel, slander and fraud. Other situations, such as telephone "brea
similarly outlawed.

At this time, I do not know of any court cases involving libel, slander, etc. in an ele
context. Such cases are sure to arise when electronic mail does become more widespread
Masquerading in the message system is not cute or clever. Don't do it.

Wizards vs. naive users

This section is addressed mainly to the wizards who should know better. The population
message system users covers a broad range from those who have knowledge of the most arca
details of a system to those who just barely understand the basics of using that system
you send a message to a wide audience, be considerate of the naive users, who may get co
by technical jargon.

This admonition extends to those who are using a new, restricted program. It does not
recipient to hear "Oh you're using that old program. Well, I guess you're stuck." Jus
mention such things to users who cannot take advantage of them.

The moral of this tale

The moral of all this is simple: Be considerate. As we strive toward this goal, everyo
the message system will become even more of a joy than it already is.