

Coffee Talk: Two Sugars One Life

The Email I Didn't Send

Clayton M. Myhill

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I almost ended my career on a Thursday.

Not with a scandal. Not with a dramatic exit speech or a chair through a window. With an email. A beautifully crafted, meticulously worded, emotionally radioactive email that I typed in eleven minutes and almost sent in one.

My manager (let's call him Todd, because every bad decision in corporate business today involves a Todd) had taken credit for my project in a leadership meeting. Not partially. Not ambiguously. He'd presented my entire framework, my research, my late nights, as "something I've been developing." Used the word "I" fourteen times. I counted. Fourteen.

A colleague texted me: *"Did Todd just present your project as his?"*

My hands went numb first. Then hot. Like someone had plugged my fingers into a toaster and set it to "righteous fury."

I opened my laptop. Began typing. Not to Todd. To his boss. To the person who could actually do something about the fact that Todd was wearing my work like a stolen jacket at a company party.

If you've ever written an email so honest it could double as a resignation letter, you know exactly what I was composing.

The email was gorgeous. Every sentence landed like a legal brief written by someone who'd been crying. I named dates. Included screenshots. Used phrases like "pattern of behavior" and "intellectual dishonesty" and "I have documentation." It was professional enough to survive HR review and devastating enough to end Todd's next promotion.

My finger hovered over Send.

And then — thirteen seconds.

That's it. That's the whole story.

STOP, DROP, and ROLL.

STOP. Three seconds. My right eye twitched. Gary, the little stress alarm system in my body, screaming at volume. I noticed. Not what Todd did. Not the email. The twitch. The heat in my chest. The fact that I'd stopped breathing somewhere around "documentation." I was physically on fire and hadn't even registered it.

DROP. Ten seconds. I named it: "I'm at a 4 on the Dumpster Fire Index, and Gary's at a 5. The fire is real but the firefighter is cooked." Just saying that (out loud, to nobody, in my kitchen at 9:47 PM) broke the spell. The email stopped being justice and started being what it actually was: a grenade with my return address on it.

ROLL. I closed the laptop. Walked to the kitchen. Filled a glass of water I didn't drink. Stood there like a malfunctioning appliance for about forty-five seconds while my brain recalibrated from "scorched earth" to "okay, what actually serves me here?" Thirteen seconds from rage to pause. Not thirteen days of meditation. Not a therapist appointment. Not "sleeping on it." Because we all know "sleeping on it" means lying awake composing worse drafts until 3 AM.

If I'd sent that email, Todd would have been embarrassed. Briefly. Then he would have reframed me as "difficult," "emotional," "not a team player." Todd's boss would have remembered my name, but for the wrong reason. I'd have been right but unemployed. Instead, I went to Todd directly. The next morning. Calm. With documentation. Said, "I noticed my framework was presented without attribution. I'd like to discuss how we credit collaborative work going forward." Todd stammered. Apologized. My name was on the next presentation.

Same facts. Same injustice. Completely different outcome. The only variable was thirteen seconds.

The email I didn't send is still in my drafts folder. I read it sometimes. It's genuinely well-written. Devastating, even. It would have ruined exactly one career.

Mine.

Here's to the emails we don't send. To the thirteen seconds between what we feel and what we do. And to Gary, the overworked alarm system who earned his overtime that Thursday night.

Cheers, Clayton

Coffee Talk 2.0: For everyone with a drafts folder full of unsent emotional warfare.

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