

Message Boards: Moderator Ethics

By Richard Lowe

Message Boards: Moderator Ethics

Richard Lowe
articles@internet-tips.net

Internet Tips And Secrets <http://www.internet-tips.net>

Copyright (C) Richard Lowe Jr. and Claudia Arevalo-Lowe, 1999-2001.
Permission is granted to reprint the following article as long as no changes are made and the byline, copyright information, and the resource box is included. Please let me know if you use this article by sending an email to <mailto:articles@internet-tips.net>

Article Title: Message Boards: Moderator Ethics
Author: Richard Lowe, Jr.
Contact Author: <mailto:articles@internet-tips.net>
Publishing Guidelines: May be freely published w/bylines
Web Address: <http://www.internet-tips.net>
Autoresponder Address: <mailto:article-191@internet-tips.net>

A properly moderated message board is one of the true pleasures of the internet. The constant interaction of dozens or even hundreds of people in continuous conversations is a sight to behold and a joy to participate in. I have fond memories of the countless hours I spent "talking" with friends whose faces I have seen about an endless variety of subjects.

On the other hand, an unethical moderator creates friction, annoys people and causes an incredibly large number of problems. These message boards tend to consist of flame wars, derogatory comments and massive posts about the moderator (justifications and vilifications). Oftentimes, the moderator will desperately attempt to control the board by deleting posts and banning members (with virtually no success), and occasionally they may shut down the board in disgust (leaving with a vile comment or two back to the members).

An ethical moderator should be a friendly presence, someone who is always present, yet is virtually invisible in many ways. Their job is to make the conversations flow smoothly, keep them on topic and keep people interested.

Some of the tasks performed by an ethical moderator include:

- Promoting the board to obtain new blood - all boards need a constant flow of new members to survive and prosper. Without new people lurking and posting, the board tends to become stale and useless.
- Gently keeping the subjects reasonably on topic - There is usually no need to bring out the

sledgehammer. A simple note here and there is all that is necessary in most cases.

- Keeping the old guard happy and making new people feel welcome - This is a very critical function of any moderator. The board must be useful to both groups to thrive.

- In extreme cases, removing hostile entities - some people just want to cause trouble. A good moderator knows the difference between a trouble maker (constantly flaming everyone, for example) and someone who is upset or does not have the best social skills.

- Actively contributes - This is a must for all good moderators. They must contribute constantly to their own boards to keep the conversations going.

A very important fact that must be remembered by all ethical moderators is they don't need to agree with a post - they just need to keep things more-or-less on topic and civil. Boards with moderators which attempt to crush all opposing views quickly degenerate to hell holes of deleted posts, banned members, flame wars and constant disruption and agitation.

Some examples of ethically run message boards include:

Webmaster world (<http://www.webmasterworld.com/index.htm>) - This board has a number of topics of interest to all webmasters. I like this board because it makes both old hands and newbies alike feel at home. You can tell other people like it as well because of the massive number of posts.

Ring Manager (<http://www.topica.com/lists/ringmgr>) - Want to learn about webring from a group of great, caring, intelligent people? Join this message board and you will feel like you are part of a friendly group.

The best example of unethical moderators that I have ever witnessed was during a three or four month period starting in roughly August 2000 with a Yahoo Club known as WebRingNews. I found this club (a club is a kind of enhanced message board) and immediately thought I had found a great group of people. There were quite a few people posting their views about webring, which was a topic in which I had an interest. The community was closely knit and virtually everyone enjoyed themselves.

At that time there was a rumor going around that Yahoo was going to change webring into a new and wonderful place. There were some vague letters supporting this - which naturally led to many discussions about the ramifications and possibilities.

In September 2000 Yahoo destroyed webring, which caused the Webringnews group to get very active. Everyone was extremely unhappy, because the Yahoo implementation was, well, severely lacking (this is an understatement if I ever heard one). The conversations grew heated and the anti-yahoo sentiment got high.

The moderators did not like this kind of behavior and began deleting posts without warning. They banned people who refused to bow to their demands to cease discussing alternatives to webring, and even went through ALL of the old posts going back months, deleting each and every one. These moderators became shrill and totally desperate, until the group finally fell apart.

This is the perfect example of completely unethical behavior on the part of message board moderators. Yes, on occasion a moderator may need to delete a post or two (especially in regards to spam), but it is completely wrong for mass deletions to occur. When moderators start banning people right and left, perhaps they should step down and let someone else hold the reigns.

In fact, a good indicator of a moderator who is out ethics is a vast number of posts from the moderator attempting to explain his actions, and a large number of posts from others (sometimes on other message boards) who have things to say against the moderator. Note that sometimes this is not bad - a good moderator may have to ban or annoy someone once in a while.

The key indication is that the topic of the message board changes to protecting the message board. In addition if the moderators seem to be spending most of their time keeping out individuals and deleting posts, then perhaps they need to take a hard look at their ethics.

It's as simple as that. Good message boards almost run themselves, and the effort required by the moderator to keep it going smoothly and on-topic is minimal. Bad message boards require huge amounts of effort by the moderators and become barren wastelands in short order. There are few things on the internet that are more sad than a once-proud message board reduced to rubble by an incompetent or malicious moderator.

NOTE: The following information must be included if you reprint this article:

Richard Lowe Jr. is the webmaster of Internet Tips And Secrets. This website includes over 1,000 free articles to improve your internet profits, enjoyment and knowledge.

Web Site Address: <http://www.internet-tips.net>

Weekly newsletter: <http://www.internet-tips.net/joinlist.htm>

Daily Tips: <mailto:internet-tips@GetResponse.com>

Claudia Arevalo-Lowe is the webmistress of Internet Tips And Secrets and Surviving Asthma. Visit her site at <http://survivingasthma.com>

List of articles available for reprint: <mailto:article-list@internet-tips.net>

[Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.](#)

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)