

E-MAIL ETIQUETTE

Who would have thought we would be communicating in cyberspace? On line interaction is becoming as common as picking up the phone, faxing correspondence or dropping by someone's office. However, in order to communicate effectively via e-mail, courtesy guidelines should be followed.

Rather than being accused of not minding your manners when communicating electronically, this information has been created for you. It is meant to assist you in putting your best electronic self forward. It also is meant to help you create messages with the same tact you use when talking with others. Get ready, get set. Lets begin to communicate electronically! You will learn:

- How To Add Warmth To Your E-Mail Message
- The Way To Put Your Best Message Forward
- The Importance Of Follow-Up When Sending E-Mail
- When To Print A Hard Copy Of Your E-Mail Message
- How To Integrate Tact And Diplomacy Into Your Message
- When E-Mail Messages Should Not Be Sent
- The Most Commonly-Made Electronic Mail Faux Pas

HOW TO ADD WARMTH TO YOUR E-MAIL MESSAGE

With hard copies, you have the texture of the paper, with voice-mail messages, your inflection sets the tone, with in-person interaction your body language communicates the message. However, with e-mail, the only "non-verbal" on which the receiver has to base the message tone are your words. Here are three ways to add warmth to your messages: 1. Use a form of thanks in the first 12 words of the message (e.g., "It was a pleasure receiving your e-mail message," or "Thanks for responding to my last message so promptly.") 2. Use the person's name in the first 12 words of your message. 3. Use "You," before "We," before "I."

PUTTING YOUR BEST MESSAGE FORWARD

The Importance of Spelling And Grammar

Like it or not, when sending an e-mail message, a letter or a fax, you are judged by the quality of your writing. No matter how casual you choose to make the tone of your message, capital letters should be used at the beginning of sentences and with proper names. One way to ensure correct spelling is by using spell-check. Also, proof your message content by reading it aloud or printing a hard copy before sending it.

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When Replying To E-Mail Messages

Make it a joy for others to receive your e-mail messages. When replying to messages, include the original message or excerpts of it in your response. By doing this, you will save time by not having to start a message from scratch. You also will save the receiver a few minutes by not having to retrieve the original message that was sent to you.

YOUR MESSAGE TONE

Maintain Professionalism

Whether you are sending a message to a colleague or are transmitting a proposal to a potential client, certain e-mail formalities are required. Just because an e-mail message is more immediate than other forms of communication doesn't mean that the tone should be more casual in nature. Your e-mail message should carry the same degree of professionalism as a document that is printed on your organization's letterhead.

Tailor Your Message For The Receiver

Although your message is a reflection of you, the style of your message should be tailored to the person receiving it. For instance, if you have a rapport established with the person and your message deals with a "light" topic, a more casual tone is acceptable. However, if you are at an arms length distance with the recipient, and your topic is more serious in nature, a more formal tone is in order. When unsure of the appropriate tone, write the way you would talk to the person.

THE USE OF FIRST vs. LAST NAMES

Within Your Organization

Just as it is more appropriate to address some people on a last name basis when sending letters, it is also correct to do so when sending them messages. Here is a rule of thumb to follow to determine whether a first or last name should be used: If the person is either on the same level as you on your organization's structure, or is one level above or below you, the first name may be use. If the person is more than one layer above you, and your organization encourages the use of last names, play it safe by using, "Mr., Mrs., or Ms." and the person's last name.

With Clients And Potential Clients

When in doubt, be conservative. If you have not yet met face-to-face and the person,s title describes him/her as being a few layers above you, address the person using his/her last name. However, if you have met the person face-to-face and your sixth sense tells you that you would appear "stuffy" if you addressed this person by last name, make a point of using the person's first name in the message.

With International Clients

If you are sending messages outside the United States, by all means address the person on a last name basis unless the person has made a point of requesting that you use his/her first name. The reason for this is that formality is much more common across the globe than it is in the U.S.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOW-UP WHEN SENDING E-MAIL

Many people find it frustrating not to receive responses to their e-mail messages. One reason is that many people make checking their e-mail boxes a low priority on their list of "things to do."

When You Need A Prompt Response

When you need a prompt response to an e-mail message, consider leaving a brief message in the person's voice-mail (if live beings are available, with that person). Briefly explain that an e-mail message about "XYZ topic" was transmitted. Let the person know that you need a response by a given time. Note: Be sure not to "cry wolf." In other words, if you do not need a prompt response, request an answer within a few days rather than later that day or within 24 hours.

When To Print A Hard Copy Of Your E-Mail Message

Some people call it a "C.M.A." (Cover My Tail). Others consider it as a paper trail. As you are deleting your messages, consider printing out a hard copy of those that may be useful for you to have at your fingertips (new company guidelines, added responsibilities, etc.).

HOW TO INTEGRATE TACT AND DIPLOMACY INTO E-MAIL

When E-Mail Messages Should Not Be Sent

Think about it. Your voice intonation and body language can account for the way others interpret your messages. That's why in some instances, picking up the phone or meeting with others face-to-face may prove to be more effective than delivering news electronically. Here are a few instances in which you might think twice before transmitting that e-mail message:

- When you are uncertain how a person will react to a touchy subject (e.g., a company downsizing, price increases for clients, etc.) consider an alternate form of communication.
- When receiving a message that is confidential in nature, treat it with respect by not sharing it with others.
- Before copying people on your messages, ask yourself if the information is pertinent to them. If it isn't, spare them from receiving another message by not sending it to them.

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THE 10 MOST COMMONLY-MADE ELECTRONIC MAIL FAUX PAS

1. Not checking your e-mail with the same regularity that you do your voice-mail messages.
2. Not labeling the subject of your message to reflect the message content.
3. Not responding to e-mail messages in the same prompt manner that you do other forms of communication.
4. Not proofing an electronic message with the same attention that you give to a document in hard copy form.
5. Being verbose in your e-mail communication rather than being succinct.
6. Sending out unsolicited mass-mailings that could be considered junk mail to recipients.
7. Labeling a message as "Urgent" so that the receiver will give it priority unnecessarily.
8. Not listing a phone number and fax in your message so that the recipient has this information at hand.
9. Trying to be humorous in your messages when it could be misinterpreted as sarcasm.
10. Sending copies of e-mail to people in address groups rather than being more selective about who is receiving messages.