

Have you ever received an email from your colleague and wondered, what was she *thinking*? Without the interpersonal communication cues we depend on in face-to-face interactions, such as tone of voice and body language, email messages can be easily misinterpreted. Below are some tips to keep in mind when composing emails.

## 1) *Be aware of etiquette, including verb and word choice*

Always include "courtesy words," such as "please" and "thank you." These words go a long way in ensuring that your recipient receives your email message in a positive light. Your choice of verb tense and sentence structure can also create a distinctive tone. Notice the difference here:

"Send me your feedback asap."

*versus*

"Please email your feedback to me as soon as possible."

## 2) *Consider your audience*

Consider your audience carefully. A buddy of yours in the office may understand your sarcastic tone and find it amusing, but a newer colleague or a client may not. Write for the "easily offended," to avoid potential misunderstandings.

Also consider regional or cultural differences. Expectations of appropriate tone can vary widely between American English and British or Indian English, for example.

## 3) *Wait before sending sensitive or "flaming" emails*

Most email tone issues result from reactive messages sent in the heat of the moment. Always wait at least 10 minutes after writing an angry or displeased email before hitting "send."

*Neat trick* - Set your send/receive preferences in Outlook to send all emails a certain amount of time after you click 'send,' and you can take back many potentially inflammatory messages.

Think about whether your tone is frustrated and angry rather than firm and urgent; firm emails are much more likely to be effective. Consider the difference here:

"Can someone please tell me why it is so difficult to get billing sheets in on time. Get them in on Friday this week."

*versus*

"We have an urgent issue with timely completion of billing sheets. If our record doesn't improve, we'll need to reflect tardiness in bonuses. Please make sure to turn in your forms on Friday."

## 4) *Consider your recipient list*

The same email message can take on an entirely different tone when other people are included on the recipient list, either in the "to" or "cc" line. Consider the following message:

"Your analyses are strong, but I'd like to see more creativity in your application of them."

This email may be seen as gentle coaching when sent directly from manager to subordinate. However if the manager's manager or peers were cc'd on the message, then the tone would be much more serious. Think carefully about the recipient list before you hit send.

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