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Email Etiquette – Manners & Tone

Last month we dealt with Email Etiquette. What Is It? Why Is It Important? And we came up with a fairly standard list of do's and don'ts for sending professional email communication. If you missed that article, click here:

This month our focus is on Manners and Tone, which are very difficult to convey with the use of email.

When we stop to think about it, communication between humans is approximately 90% body language, 8% tone of voice and the final 2% what you actually have to say. With email, you remove the first 98%. Be aware of this when you write an email.

Mind Your Manners

What three words have a total of only 14 letters yet carry a great deal of meaning? People may not notice these words when they're there, but if you forget to use them, you could come across looking disrespectful and ungrateful. Give up?

These very powerful words are "Please" and "Thank You." Please take my advice. You'll thank me later.

For example, you receive an email inquiry about your product or service.

When you reply do you start your response with:

Hello [person's name],

Thank you for your inquiry regarding [product/service]

And do you end your response with:

Please feel free to contact me again if you have additional questions.

While this may seem trivial, adding these three powerful words to your email communications makes you, the unknown entity, seem friendly, approachable, and respectful.

My name is Edwin, not Ed

While this isn't something that specifically bothers me, there are many others who are quite sensitive about being addressed by a shortened version of their first name, for example some people become extremely frustrated when their name is published on their website as "Edwin" and people send emails that begin with "Hi Ed".

Don't Use that Tone With Me

Remember when you were a child and your parents would say "Don't use that tone of voice with me, young lady (or young man)?" This was usually accompanied by a shaking finger and a somewhat harsh tone of voice from the parent in question. Your feelings had come across by the way in which you said something, and while it is easy to change your tone of voice when you are speaking, it is very difficult to do when you are writing.

When you write an email, read your message over several times before you finally hit send. Make sure that you come across as respectful, friendly, and approachable. The last thing that you want to do is come across as sounding curt, demanding, and unapproachable. Sometimes just rearranging your paragraphs or sentence structure will help.

If you are writing to someone you've communicated with before, and have established a relationship with, you might want to begin by saying "I hope you are well." or "It's good to hear from you."

Things to avoid

The following is a list of other things that you should avoid in order to be watchful of your Manners and Tone:

- Don't reply to an email message when angry, you may regret it later
- Don't keep mail on your server longer than necessary, especially large attachments
- Don't copy out an entire, long message just to add a line or two of text such as "I agree"
- Don't type in CAPITALS as it is considered SHOUTING. This is one of the rudest things you can do
- Don't over-use punctuation such as exclamation marks ("!") as these are meant to be for emphasis
- Don't send irrelevant messages, especially to mailing lists or newsgroups
- Don't send large attachments without checking with the recipient first
- Don't send excessive multiple messages to people who have no interest. Also known as "spamming" and is considered to be ignorant and may lead to serious trouble with your ISP
- Don't send chain letters or "make money fast" messages
- Don't criticize people's spelling, it is considered petty
- Don't conduct arguments in public, for example: on a mailing list or forum
- Don't "flame" people by sending them abusive email messages; if you are experiencing a problem ask for help in correcting the problem
- Don't make personal remarks about third parties. Email messages can come back to haunt you
- Remember that it is easy to offend someone via email

Emails are public documents, despite the fact that you may send an email to someone privately. Therefore, only include statements in an email that you can openly defend should your email be circulated or shown to other parties. Using emoticons (smiley faces) and other virtual gestures may be appropriate in some cases, but not in all cases.

It is important to always consider the type of relationship you have with the receiver of your message before including virtual non-verbals. If your relationship is more casual, then using the symbols is fine; but, if your relationship is more formal, then it is best to refrain from using them.

Until next month.....

Nancy

