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Before You Hit Send: Business Email Etiquette Tips

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Confused about business email etiquette? There are some rules when sending emails for professional purposes. Make the wrong impression in an email and you can break a deal you've been working on.

"Email represents your personality to clients and co-workers. If the tone is curt and unhelpful, potential customers may never contact you again," notes Dianna Booher, author of Creating Personal Presence: Look, Talk, Think, and Act Like a Leader and Communicate With Confidence.

Email sometimes allows for more direct communications. "It is important to have email etiquette because we are less inhibited by email than we are face-to-face. Also, email does not have a tone like your voice -- so it is open for misinterpretation," says certified etiquette instructor Callista Gould of the Culture and Manners Institute.

Remember, there are some major perks to using email—such as having proof of conversations—so make sure to utilize email correctly. "Email is the new form of communication because it is fast and efficient. It allows people to keep track of conversations and leaves a virtual paper trail to refer to. Because everyone has a business email account, it makes getting in touch with someone easy to do," Kristin Borostyan, a success strategist for business women and creator of Straighten Up, points out. "You can directly contact someone, introduce yourself and connect. Email was designed to be a quick and easy way of breaking the ice to establish a rapport without the hassle of phone tag."

There are some common mistakes people make when sending business emails. Here's what to avoid:

- **Forgetting to include a greeting before the person's name:** "When you use a greeting word before stating his or her name, it sets the tone for a nicer conversation. Always start an email with the salutation before the person's name," explains Dr. Richard J. Atkins, managing director of Improving Communications, LLC.
- **Having a confusing "subject" line:** "Make the 'subject line' relevant, short and to the point so they know what the email is about. Also, make it eye catching," offers small business owner Mona Safabakhsh, CEO of What Goes With This, who has taught a workshop at the Wharton School School of Business.
- **Lack of immediacy in response time:** "A rule of thumb is that it's correct to respond to email within 24 hours. After that period of time, if someone is specifically expecting your response, they will wonder if you received their email. I suggest to young adults, who are less inclined to check their email, that they do so at least twice a day," suggest Allison Cheston, career advisor to executives and young adults/adjunct faculty member at New York University.
- **Skipping a rapport-building statement before starting the text of the e-mail:** "It is extremely important, because when people have a connection, they become more human to each other," explains Atkins. "They're more likely to interact and engage to help each other. When people are treated robotically, they are more likely to act as such. Adding one kind statement at the beginning of the email is a sure way to set a positive tone for the rest of the document.
- **Composing emails that are too long:** "Keep the email short; use short sentences and simple

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words. People will only scan, so make sure it's easily comprehensible by someone just scanning what you have to say. if the email is long they will close it before they've even started reading it," notes Safabakhsh.

- **Using business email for private messages:** "We can't open a newspaper these days without reading about someone who has ruined their career by sending really stupid things by email or text. Email is not private -- especially business email," says Gould.

- **Writing in text language, instead of spelling things out:** This is too informal for business. "Always default to the formal way of writing. It is professional and respectful," says Borostyan.

- **Sending an email when you are angry:** "You can't reach into the computer and take it back" reminds Gould. Take a few hours to settle down and think about a more diplomatic way to address the situation.

- **Not checking your grammar.** Always spell check and re-read before hitting send. Make sure the name of the person and company are spelled correctly.

- **Getting too cutesy:** "Emoticons and smiley faces are unprofessional," explains Gould.

- **Not making the email relevant:** "Ask yourself why the other person cares about this email and make sure your first sentence gets straight to that point. So many business emails end with why the other person should care and usually they don't even get to that point by then," says Safabakhsh.

- **Using email for every situation:** "Realize that some messages are more suitable for face-to-face communication. Do not fire anyone by email, for example," says Gould.

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