

# STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

January/February 2004

## Personnel Pointers

### Conquering Communication Conundrums: Email Etiquette by Libby Maurer

*Mind your manners! Don't neglect email etiquette.*

Throughout the next few issues, we'll be using this column to discuss common communication challenges and solutions to remedy them. What are some of the communication obstacles that plague your business? What are the things that work for you to achieve effective communication? We want to hear from you! Email your thoughts to [communication@sbcmag.info](mailto:communication@sbcmag.info).

#### EMAIL ETIQUETTE EXPOSED

The Pony Express closed up shop around 1860, making way for the telegraph. Snail mail is just that: s-l-o-w. Phone calls can be rather intrusive. And facsimiles are such a bother, not to mention a colossal waste of paper. That makes electronic communication the fastest and most effective mode of correspondence in today's business climate.

Email can be a blessing because it is so easy to use; yet its simplicity is often the cause of embarrassment and misunderstanding. This is because email lacks the inflection and dialect cues that the phone call offers and does not convey emotion, tone and body language the way that face-to-face interaction does.

Wouldn't it be nice if everyone knew (and practiced) the "Dos and Don'ts" of email etiquette? Unfortunately, very few of us have taken the time to school ourselves in the virtues of proper and polite business email correspondence.

What is "Netiquette," you ask? According to the experts at [www.getnetiquette.com](http://www.getnetiquette.com), it means "using technology effectively to

communicate with others both personally and professionally with knowledge, understanding and courtesy." Here are some important "netiquette" tips to keep in mind before you touch that keyboard again.

**1. Check your tone.** Remember that without verbal and gesture cues, the receiver can easily misinterpret your tone. If you are unsure of the tone of your email, test it out on a coworker before hitting Send.

**2. Avoid all-caps.** WHEN YOU SEND AN EMAIL LIKE THIS, IT SEEMS LIKE YOU ARE SHOUTING IN SOMEONE'S EAR! Don't forget to turn off Caps Lock when you type. It's less offensive and much

easier on the reader's eyes.

**3. Keep it brief.** Don't write a novel. The receiver may have hundreds upon thousands of emails to sort through each week. The more clear and concise the message, the better the chances of it being read and understood.

**4. Don't forget grammar.** Spell-check is a handy feature built into most email programs that is easy to use and will catch misspelled words and punctuation. While good grammar and spelling are important to communicate a clear message, keep in mind that there are many people who do not type or write as well as they speak. Be careful not to judge the sender by the style structure and spelling of the written email; rather, focus on the content and concepts of the email.

**5. Be mindful of sounding sarcastic or condescending.** Avoid multiple strings like "!!!!!" and "???"

**6. Respond.** Unless it is junk mail, give the sender the courtesy of a return response. By not acknowledging the message, it may seem that you are ignoring the sender.

**7. Keep emotions in check.** Do not compose a message or click "send" if you are angry with someone. Take some time—maybe even a day—to cool off.

**8. Specify the type of response, if any, you expect.** Should the reader respond by email, by phone or is the email simply "FYI Only?"

**9. Consider efficiency.** Will it take you longer to convey your message via email than it would to make a phone call? If so, it's most efficient to opt for the phone.

**10. Limit junk.** Don't send chain emails with ridiculous ultimatums like "Forward this to 90 of your closest friends or something really devastating will happen to you within three days" unless you can be sure that the receiver wants it. If your inbox has ever been clogged up with these types of messages, preventing you from receiving important mail, you know how aggravating these emails are.

## **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN USING EMAIL**

The most effective use of email is to enhance efficient and effective communication. Given this, email is best used when you are sending the same information to multiple people or you have attachments (letters, pictures, etc.) that you would like the other person to see. For one-on-one communication consider calling or leaving a voice message—it is generally quicker and more effective.

Not all of us are as technologically inclined to board the email train or to readily admit there might be a viable alternative to the fax machine. But even if email really is the quickest, easiest and most cost effective way to communicate with customers and colleagues, we should still

extend to it the same respect and courtesy as we would the standard phone call. After all, you wouldn't SHOUT AT A CLIENT ON THE PHONE, would you?

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