

Welcome to the latest issue of Basis Points! Every other month, we provide you with tips and techniques to help enhance your business life. In this issue, themed "Email Etiquette", we provide you with six essential tips to improve your email etiquette. From when to respond, to how to respond, we're sure you'll find them useful. Have you heard of the "The Crossword Puzzle Rule"? Apply this rule to determine when it is and isn't acceptable to check and respond to emails.

The Crossword Puzzle Rule

For most of us, email requires about as much attention as doing a crossword puzzle: a little thought, a little manual dexterity and a little preoccupation. When doing a crossword, it's impossible to maintain constant eye contact with other people who might be around. One method to help evaluate if you should email or send a text message from a portable device is to imagine yourself with a blank crossword puzzle instead of a handheld device.

Try asking yourself if you would work on a crossword puzzle at any of these events:

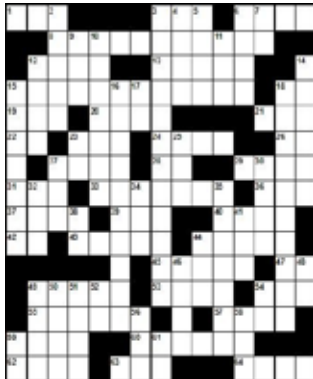
At a lunch meeting?

During a networking event?

While driving?

A night out with your spouse or partner?

In the middle of a seminar?



If you wouldn't pull out a crossword in these situations, then you shouldn't email in them, either. When *can* you email or do a crossword? Whenever you are alone (except driving, of course) or whenever you are with a group of people who are ignoring one another, for example, during the downtime before a meeting or presentation begins.

Source: "SEND", David Shipley and Will Schwalbe, 2010

"Good manners will open doors that the best education cannot."

- Clarence Thomas

Six Essential Tips for Email

1) Keep formality in your follow-ups. People tend to read their newest emails first, even if they still have older unopened messages. If you are sending multiple messages to the same person, remember that your recipient will probably read the newest one first. This means the politeness in your initial email might not serve you if the follow-ups are too abrupt.

2) Saying "No" is really hard. Most people don't like to say no and don't like to hear it either. Email can insulate us from the situation, making it easier to put off delivering bad news. But the sooner you can get it over with, the better both parties will feel. Leaving the door open doesn't help either. Jack Welch, the former head of General Electric, believes that responding to an email request with an absolute "There's just no way I can do that, but good luck" is a greater kindness than answering with a "Maybe" that is never going to happen.

3) "Out-of-office" is OK. If you aren't in a position to respond – and remember, half the world expects you to do so within hours – don't hesitate to activate your "out-of-office assistant". Whether you are actually out of the office or in the midst of a time-sensitive project, this courtesy tells people not to read anything into the time it takes you to get back to them.

4) Try to respond with equal effort. If you feel the sender has worked hard on his or her opening message to you, it's important to be sensitive to how you respond. If you are busy or responding via a handheld device, a phrase like "On the run, more to follow..." or "Let me take a look and I will get back..." indicates to the recipient that you would reply at greater length if you could, but you can't. It's easy to respond to a subordinate's proposal with a cursory "OK" or "No" but that doesn't mean that you should. In fact, it's when you are in a position of authority that people scrutinize what you write for clues as to how you feel about them.

5) Faster isn't always better. The faster we respond to emails, the more we train our correspondents to expect a quick response. The approach that Dr. Richard Ferber advocated for teaching infants to put themselves to sleep (letting them cry a little longer every night) works for email, too. People may start to email you less about little things and learn to be more understanding when you take a bit longer to get back to them.

6) Put the phone away. There's something about leaving your phone out in the open that can seem intrusive. What if you started each meal by taking off your watch and putting it on the table just to look down every few minutes to check the time? That would indicate less than full engagement with the other diners. The same can be true for displayed handhelds. And it's not just the virtue that makes it a good idea to tuck your phone away before a meal; there's a far less chance that you will accidentally leave it behind if it's in your pocket rather than sitting among dirty dishes.

Source: "SEND", David Shipley and Will Schwalbe, 2010