

## 22.5: Reading- Appropriate Business Communications

### Appropriate Business Communications

You probably learned about table manners, thank-you notes, and other forms of etiquette when you were younger. The way you conduct yourself says a lot about who you are in life and, by extension, in business. Although many companies have a casual dress code, don't be quick to assume that protocol and established practices aren't important. It would be easy to misinterpret lack of formality as lack of professionalism.

#### Letters and Memos

Despite the use of electronic devices in business, formal written communication such as letters, memos, proposals, reports, and presentations are still major methods of communication in selling. These more official methods of communication reflect factual statements that you are making on behalf of the company. Here are some tips for writing business communications:

Use company letterhead where appropriate. For example, letters are always written on letterhead, whether in hard copy or in an electronic format that can be sent via e-mail.

Use the formal elements of a business letter shown below in Figure 22.5.1,



Figure 22.5.1: Business Letter Format

For a company memo, use the company format. Most companies have a set format for hard copy and electronic memos. See an example of a company memo below in Figure 22.5.2

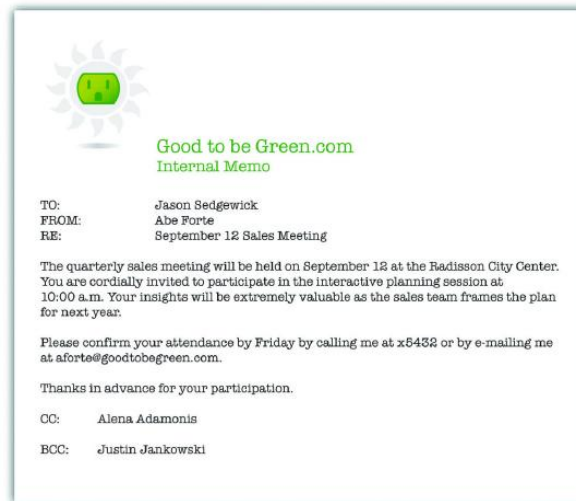


Figure 22.5.2: Company Memo Example

Spell-check and proofread your document carefully before you send it. Be sure it is complete and factually correct and does not include any grammar or spelling errors.

Use CC to indicate the names of other people who should also receive a copy of the letter or memo. The term “CC” is short for “carbon copy,” which dates back to the days of typewriters when carbon paper was used to make multiple copies of a document. It can also mean “courtesy copy”: an additional copy provided to someone as a courtesy.<sup>[1]</sup>

### Conversations, Meetings, and Presentations

Although common sense should prevail in all business communications, here are some tips that will help make your conversations, meetings, and presentations more effective forms of communication:

- Be prepared; don’t waste anyone’s time or focus.
- Prepare a written agenda and hand it out at the start of the meeting to keep the group focused on the desired topics.
- Speak clearly and at a volume that is easy to hear, but not too loud so as to be distracting.
- Be professional and respectful; don’t interrupt when others are speaking.
- Use eye contact.
- At the end, recap your key points and identify next steps.
- In business, time is money so conducting effective and efficient meetings is critical to your success.

### High Tech, High Touch

The year was 1982, and the world was just beginning to realize the amazing potential of computer technology. John Naisbitt wrote a book called *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*, in which he coined the term “high tech, high touch,” which he defined as the contradictory state in which people are driven by technology yet long for human interaction.<sup>[2]</sup> In his 1999 book, *High Tech/High Touch*, he wrote about how the United States has been transformed from being comfortable with technology to being intoxicated with technology, a state he calls the “Technologically Intoxicated Zone.” You probably can’t imagine living without your cell phone or personal digital assistant (PDA), iPod, computer, or other electronic devices. In fact, it’s likely you can’t even remember what communication was like before the Internet.

Technology, with all of its efficiency and benefits, cannot, however, become a substitute for old-fashioned human efforts. “Technology makes tasks easier, but it does not make our lives easier,” July Shapiro said in an article in *Advertising Age*.<sup>[3]</sup> Shapiro’s observation is true, especially as it relates to business; sometimes, the crush of technology takes precedence over business etiquette. However, people have begun to rethink the lack of personal interaction and its corresponding etiquette in the workplace. Yes, “there’s even an app for that”; a firm named Etiquette Avenue has recently launched an iPod app for business etiquette. The fact is, technology isn’t personal and can’t behave in the right way at the right time with your customer or on an interview; that’s completely up to you.

Now, we’re seeing a bit of a reverse movement: Technology is so pervasive people are actually pushing back on their managers and asking them for more face time and less gadget time.

## Being Connected vs. Being Addicted

In a recent pitch to a potential client, a marketing executive in Manhattan thought it was strange that his potential customer was so engaged with his iPhone that he hardly looked up from it during the meeting. After ninety minutes, someone peeked over the customer's shoulder and saw that he was playing a racing game on his iPhone. This was disappointing, but not shocking according to the marketing firm that was doing the presentation; they continued with their pitch because they wanted the business. Some are not as tolerant. Billionaire Tom Golisano, a power broker in New York politics, recently announced that he wants to have State Senate majority leader Malcolm A. Smith removed from office because Smith was focused on his iPhone during a budget meeting with him. Recently, in Dallas, Texas, a student lost his opportunity for an internship at a hedge fund when he checked his phone to check a fact during an interview and took an extra minute to check his text messages at the same time. <sup>[4]</sup> According to Maggie Jackson, author of *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*, we are living in “an institutionalized culture of interruption, where our time and attention is being fragmented by a never-ending stream of phone calls, e-mails, instant messages, text messages, and tweets.”<sup>[5]</sup>

The need to be connected should not overwhelm respect for colleagues and customers. Although texting has become a national pastime, especially among teenagers, it's important to know the appropriate etiquette for the use of handheld electronic devices in the business environment.

First, it's best to turn off your electronic devices before you enter every meeting. If you think you can't live without checking your text messages, think about how you would feel if you went on a job interview and the person with whom you were meeting was checking his electronic device during your interview. Just because some people demonstrate bad behavior and check their electronic devices for messages during a meeting doesn't make it appropriate. In fact, it will help you stand out as a good listener.

## Telephone, Cell Phone, Voice Mail, and Conference Calls

Sometimes, however, the use of technology is entirely necessary to conduct business when personal interaction is impossible. It's important that verbal communication that is not face-to-face is effective and professional. Because you don't have the benefit of using or seeing the receiver's nonverbal communication, the challenges for effective and appropriate communication are even greater.

Here are some dos and don'ts of telephone etiquette:

- Do be aware of the volume of your voice when you are speaking on the phone in the office or on a cell phone.<sup>[6]</sup>
- Do, when using a speakerphone, conduct the call in an enclosed or isolated area such as a conference room or office to avoid disturbing others in the area.
- Do, when leaving a voice mail message, speak slowly, enunciate, spell your name, and leave your number (this makes it much easier for the recipient to hear your message the first time).<sup>[7]</sup>
- Do, when you leave a voice mail message, be specific about what you want: make it easier for the caller to get back to you and include what time you will be available for a callback to avoid playing telephone tag.<sup>[8]</sup>
- Do customize your voice mail message: create a different message for each of your customers or prospective customers so the message is personal and relevant.<sup>[9]</sup>
- Do speak with enthusiasm: it's best to convey a smile in your voice, especially if it is the first time you are calling or leaving a message for someone.<sup>[10]</sup>
- Don't take another phone call during a meeting.<sup>[11]</sup>
- Don't discuss confidential or personal issues during business calls.
- Don't discuss confidential issues in public areas—you never know who might overhear a conversation in the hallway, on a train, or in other public areas.<sup>[12]</sup>
- Don't leave a long, rambling voice mail message: be prepared with a message that is no longer than sixty seconds.<sup>[13]</sup>
- Don't multitask during a long phone call or conference call—give the other person or people the courtesy of your full attention.

## E-mails, Text Messages, Instant Messages, and Social Networks

Written communication has evolved to include multiple methods, all of which have appropriate places in selling. Notice the operative word here is appropriate. E-mail has become an accepted method of communication in most businesses, whereas text messages, instant messages, and social networks are commonplace for only some companies. That's why etiquette is especially important when using any of these methods of communication, and you should take time to choose your method carefully. Letters, memos, proposals, and other written communication are considered formal, whether they are sent on paper or transmitted via e-mail. However, text messages, instant messages, and social networking are considered informal methods of communication and

should be used only to communicate less formal information, such as a meeting time when schedules have been adjusted during a factory tour. Text and instant messages should never be used to communicate company policies, proposals, pricing, or other information that is important to conduct business with customers. It's also worth noting that in all these methods your communication is permanent, so it's a good idea to know the following dos and don'ts of electronic communication:

- Do use an e-mail subject line that clearly tells the recipient about the content of the e-mail.
- Do create a short, concise message that uses proper grammar and spelling—use spell-check to be sure all words are spelled correctly.<sup>[14]</sup>
- Do, in all electronic communications, use uppercase and lowercase letters as grammar dictates.<sup>[15]</sup>
- Do use e-mail, text messages, and instant messages when appropriate, according to your company's practices, and with your customers to communicate factual information such as to confirm meeting date, time, and location.<sup>[16]</sup>
- Do use social networking sites to join the conversation and add value—you can build your personal brand by creating a blog or joining a professional conversation on social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook.<sup>[17]</sup>
- Don't use all capital letters in an e-mail; it appears that you are shouting or angry.<sup>[18]</sup>
- Don't use "Reply to All" unless it's absolutely necessary that all the recipients see your response—be selective to avoid mailbox overload.
- Don't send an e-mail, text message, or instant message when you are angry: take the time to think about what you send because you can't take it back after it's sent.<sup>[19]</sup>
- Don't use abbreviations like "ur," "2b," and others—this is not appropriate business communication.<sup>[20]</sup>
- Don't use company e-mail, text message, or instant message accounts to send personal correspondence, and don't check your personal accounts or pages during company time, as all communication that takes place on company hardware and servers is property of the company.
- Don't use electronic communication to transmit bad news: talk to the person first, and if follow-up is necessary, reiterate the information in written form.
- Don't use text messages, instant messages, or social networks to communicate information such as pricing, proposals, reports, service agreements, and other company information that should be sent using a more formal method.

### Music to Your Ears

When is an iPod or other MP3 player or a handheld gaming device appropriate at work? Only when it is used for business purposes. "You're isolating yourself," says Dale Chapman Webb, founder of The Protocol Centre in Coral Gables, Florida. "You are sending a message that my music is more important than the work at hand."

### Check Your Understanding

Answer the question(s) below to see how well you understand the topics covered in this section. This short quiz does **not** count toward your grade in the class, and you can retake it an unlimited number of times.

Use this quiz to check your understanding and decide whether to (1) study the previous section further or (2) move on to the next section.

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.com/assessments/213>

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