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The dos and don'ts of work e-mail

JASMINE OSADA shares e-mail etiquette tips that will impress your bosses

Here is an extreme example of how not to write an e-mail to someone whom you want to impress professionally:

Hey Dear,
REMEMBER THAT YOU NEED TO FASTER REPLY TO THIS E-MAIL ASAP, OK? :))

The recipient, who is no friend, will simply conclude that you are rude and that you do not know how to use the English language. Or simply so sloppy that you cannot even be bothered to find out his name.

Dressing right to make a good impression has caught on; but attitudes towards how one writes e-mail messages remain pretty cavalier. Yet, for most people living the wired life, it is the most frequently used form of work interaction with clients, bosses and colleagues.

Ms Eunice Tan, the founder of Image Flair Academy of Modern Etiquette, said: "Poor grammar, poor response time and an inappropriate tone can all send an impression of laziness, unprofessionalism, disrespect and even incompetence," she said.

Here are four tips from Ms Tan:

1 Don't use all-caps
Use both uppercase and lowercase letters in your messages. Writing in all uppercase letters will LOOK AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING. Even if you use only uppercase letters for a short phrase (eg. the report is due TOMORROW MORNING), you will still look like you are shouting.
"Many people also believe that if you cannot choose words wisely in an e-mail and need to rely on capital letters, you may not be a responsible, articulate or well-educated person. Caps are considered very, very rude," Ms Tan said.

2 Do not use bold or coloured text to highlight important information
Always present the key information first so that people will read the most important

points before everything else. You might also want to use single words like "key" and "note" in bold to get a reader's attention but never bold whole sentences.

While many people will associate colours such as red as important and green as a bearer of good news, it is best not to use coloured text as not everyone will interpret colours the same way.

3 Do address your recipients properly
When sending an e-mail to several people, address your recipients with "Good morning everyone" or "Hello Team". Trying to put all the names into the greeting might backfire if you forget someone or spell a name incorrectly.

Starting a message with "Hello" is recommended for casual work e-mail but "Hi" is too friendly and "Hey" is unprofessional, said Ms Tan.

"You should consider the fact that your e-mail could be passed on to a client or someone in a higher position, so always be professional."

She recalled an incident in which an inappropriate salutation was used: "I had a female client who took personal business etiquette lessons with me. Before we met up, we

corresponded via e-mail and phone. In one of her e-mail messages, she wrote 'Hello Dear'. I told her that was inappropriate and should never be used in business e-mail."

If you are sending an e-mail to someone whose name you do not know, such as a general mailbox, state the position of the person whom you will be corresponding with. An good example would be "Attention: General Manager".

4 Do not use emoticons
Smileys such as :) and ^_^ may be helpful in social messages but never, ever use them in work-related e-mail, especially in outgoing client communication, Ms Tan warned.

Adding emoticons might be problematic because people can misinterpret them, she explained. Instead, it is better to choose the right words to communicate a point.

Plus, people of different cultures might use different emoticons to convey the same thing, which could lead to misunderstandings. For example, the common :) smiley that we use in Singapore is not used in Japan, where ^_^ is used instead.

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