

Communicate like a pro

Business etiquette is vital to profits and relationships with colleagues



E-MAIL ETIQUETTE

Create more effective e-mails with the following tips:

■ **Subject:** The subject line will often determine if your e-mail will be opened right away, set aside for later or trashed altogether. It should clearly indicate the topic of your e-mail. Rather than simply hitting "reply" in a series of e-mails, change the subject line periodically to reflect how the conversation is evolving.

■ **Greeting:** Greet the recipient using their name.

■ **Layout:** Break up text with a space after three or fewer lines. Don't use a font size smaller than 12 and use black Arial, Manor advises. "How it looks and feels is the 'feng shui' of an e-mail."

■ **Copying:** Copy only those people who need it. "Don't copy everybody and think that makes you more effective. It just fills up people's inboxes," Manor says. Never blind copy. "Don't be covert. You'll get caught and that doesn't create a high value relationship."

■ **Abbreviations:** They may be acceptable in texting but abbreviations aren't appropriate in business e-mails. "It looks juvenile and it's not savable information," says Manor.

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Special to QMI Agency

E-mail represents 85 to 90% of business communication but unless we apply the rules of common courtesy and follow proper business communication etiquette, our relationships with colleagues and clients will suffer, a communications expert warns.

"Creating a high value relationship — which is the etiquette of the communication — ends up being difficult," says Natalie Manor, CEO of Natalie Manor & Associates (www.nataliemanor.com).

More powerful, respectful and conscious business communication, on the other hand, will open the door to increased profits, confidence, knowledge, respect and will improve your efficiency, advises Manor, an executive business coach and business development consultant based in Tennessee.

But many people don't realize they need to improve their business communication etiquette until they land in hot water. Effective e-mails should set the context of why the e-mail is important and the kind of information you want to deliver. Be brief and informational, and answer all questions asked.

Timely responses are also important. Proofread before hitting the "reply" or "send" button. Being busy is no excuse for not responding to people you're doing or want to do business with; those who can refer you to business or were referred by someone.

"We respond by rank of what we think is important," Manor says.



"Many people make up their own rules if their company doesn't have guidelines and policies around how to deal with and store e-mail."

The sender should establish accountability in an e-mail. "Let someone know when you'd like to hear from them; then you can follow up if necessary," Manor says. "You can put it in your subject line. The idea of business communication etiquette is to help people communicate well, accurately and in a timeframe that works for you and for them."

When setting a timeframe, be respectful of the other person. "People operate in their own talents and strengths," Manor says. "Giving them time to be brilliant and accurate helps create a high value relationship that builds trust, re-

spect and ensures you're getting good information."

Text or e-mail?

Wondering if it's appropriate to text rather than e-mail? That all depends on the purpose of your communication. "E-mails are a flow of information to help us be clear and create process. Texting is sharing immediate information such as, 'Going to be late' and 'Do you want me to bring the contract?'" Manor says.

"I think you need to have a relationship with a colleague before you begin texting. E-mail replaces a physical letter that is stored in a file. Texting doesn't have that place."

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Protecting your biz idea



ROGER
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Starting Up

Sixth in a 10-part series about finding your business idea

"Shhh — don't tell anyone my idea!" If you're thinking about starting a business, it's natural to worry about someone stealing your idea. The fame and fortune belongs to you, right? Why share it with anyone?

Here's why that notion is false.

■ An idea is worthless

Every day, billions of people create billions of ideas. Good for them. The ones who succeed in business take steps to turn an idea into reality. They run with it. They understand that an idea by itself doesn't guarantee riches — you've got to make a plan, raise financing, develop the product/service, market, sell and ship. Then, maybe, you'll see some money.

■ Trust everyone

The likelihood of someone stealing your idea is slim. Aspiring entrepreneurs get too excited about their own ideas to care much about yours. Professional investors, financiers and advisers deal with thousands of entrepreneurs and aren't in the business of stealing ideas. Family and friends only wish you well.

When you speak publicly about your idea and your intentions, you'll find other people will offer you help in unexpected ways. So, tell the world.

■ Patents

If you've invented a truly unique process or product — and you can prove that it is unique — you may desire a patent. A patent may thwart competitors for awhile. However, it can be an expensive and time-consuming process that ends up giving your invention very little marketplace protection. Speak with a patent expert to understand the advantages and disadvantages.

Your best defence is a good offence. Protect your business idea by making it a success. Make a would-be competitor think twice about copying your idea because you are already the market leader.

Next week: Launching your idea.

— Startup expert Roger Pierce has launched 11 businesses in 20 years, co-authored a book and advised thousands of startups worldwide. E-mail Roger at johnrogerpierce@gmail.com.

3 GOLDEN RULES OF VIDEO CONFERENCING

Make the most of real-time video, such as Skype, by following these three rules:

1. How do you look? Ensure you look professional and know how others on your video conference will view you.

2. What's the background your colleagues or clients will see? Should it be confidential? Is it littered with leftover lunches or stacks of files? Ensure it's pleasant and reflects the image you want to project.

3. Remember that you're dealing with other people who can see your body language

and will know if you've got a double screen and are reading e-mails while you're in conference. Treat it like an in-person meeting.

Body language represents 55% of how we communicate. Tone and pacing accounts for 38% and words represent just 7% of how we communicate, executive business coach Natalie Manor reports.

"Real time video supports a high value relationship ... and lets us move away from just e-mailing or texting," she says.

