



Quick Tip:

Make good use of your subject line to increase your email's visibility and the speed of a reader's response.



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Get a Better Response

Effective communication practices increase the success of your project!

Whether you are using email or other communication channels, few things are more frustrating to a project manager than not getting adequate responses to

important requests. By practicing some specific communication habits, you can improve both speed and quality. These practices are centered on one principle, R.E.S.P.E.C.T, and you receive better email responses by Respecting People's Time.

Clear Specific Actions

Place your request for action at the beginning of the email. Better yet in the subject line. This informs the reader that they are being asked to do something which increases the chance of them reading the message. Although some may find it annoying, including the words ACTION PLEASE in the subject line gets attention. Specific requests will get a more rapid response so if you have complex work or multiple actions, break them down into a bulleted list. The reader may be able to immediately respond to a few items, while working on other actions which helps you maintain momentum.

DON'T write a long story at the beginning to explain why and how the reader needs to respond. Place the specific action and important dates up front and if necessary, provide context later in the message.

A reasonable timeframe for your request

Inform your reader of the specific deliverable dates for action. If your request, is likely to take some time, ask the reader to respond so you know your message was received. For significant work, people are more committed if they can set their own deadlines. If you have some flexibility in the due date, let your reader know. They will appreciate your transparency and likely be more responsive to urgent requests in the future.

DON'T make it a habit that all your email requests are urgent.

The benefit of responding

Let your reader know why it's important for them to respond. For example: "The information I've requested is needed for a leadership presentation on Friday" or "Your action item needs to be completed for marketing to prepare the product brochure". This helps the reader understand the importance of their contribution, prioritize their work and anticipate consequences for a delay in their response. This practice also establishes some personal accountability to not make trivial or unreasonable demands.

DON'T make significant urgent work demands by email. Urgent projects may require an urgent demand but those are better communicated in person or by phone with a subsequent message to document the discussion.

In a logical and understandable way

Use basic email etiquette and make sure your communications are clear. Here are some helpful tips:

- * Consider differences in culture and language and avoid humor if you are requesting action. Make sure the words you use can't be mis-interpreted.
- * Use Spell Check and review your message to make sure the request is clear, and the words and grammar are correct. A misused word can waste time and may even be embarrassing.
- * Remember that messages often get forwarded, so don't write things you wouldn't want others to see. If you need to convey something confidential, pick up the phone.
- * Add the email address last to avoid accidentally sending a partially complete message. Validate the email addresses you are using before hitting send.
- * If you exchange an email thread more than a couple times, put the full request and due date back at the top of the message to eliminate any confusion.

After using these reasonable practices and efforts, consider other approaches if you don't receive adequate responses. Realize that people have busy schedules and busy lives, so give them the benefit of the doubt and call them. If that is unsuccessful, send a second email that documents your prior email and voice messages and politely make the request again. If you still experience a complete lack of communication, you can be confident that you have made the best effort and should escalate your request.

Talk to Me!

Do you need another set of eyes on a critical project email? I'm glad to help you get a better response!



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Additional Resources:

Consider the importance of **Persistence** in getting a better response to your project requests.

Maybe you should improve your writing skills! If so, Phil Vassallo has an enjoyable blog with lots of tips. For this month's theme of R.E.S.P.E.C.T in Communications, consider his advice on: **Defining Tone, Knowing the Risk of a Bad Tone or Checking Your Tone**

For your most critical communications to different audiences, you may want a content management and communications coach. If so, consider **Debra Kahn**. Here is some of her insight: 1. You are not your audience; 2. All audiences are not equally important; 3. Learning about your audience is going to make your content better.

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About Annette

Annette is a business transformation coach focused on creating more effective operations and greater business value. Both vision and execution are key to motivate people to transform work. She guides leaders to develop transformation vision and strategy, structure implementation projects and roadmaps, and mentor project teams to be successful. Her blog and newsletter share transformation tips, resources and best practices.



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