

5 Annoying Email Habits of Senior Executives

By Jeannie Bastos; February 28, 2016

Even the best business leaders send things via email that annoy their teams. According to the Email Statistics Report published by The Radicati Group, the average business user sends and receives 122 emails per day. How many are you sending to your team that may be lacking the information needed to execute efficiently?

Chances are you have fallen into one of these traps. You may be thinking, “My teams are smart, they know what I mean.” Even the smartest managers and employees can be discouraged with the lack of clarity in your direction.

Avoid these five pitfalls to improve your communication effectiveness:

- 1. “Let’s discuss”:** Forwarding an email with a line that says, “Let’s discuss” is passing the ball. The receiver is required to determine the sense of urgency, figure out why you want to discuss, and is often perceived in a negative way as “what did I do wrong?” Instead, add a little clarity. It doesn’t have to be long, but sharing the what and when helps your team prioritize what they need to do. It is better to say, “Let’s discuss this in our next team meeting. I have some ideas and would like to run them by you.” Or, “I like this idea, does your team have capacity to take this on? Can we speak at 2:00 today?”
- 2. “Thoughts?”:** This is more common than you might think. On a positive, you are sharing information and asking for their input. And yes, they have thoughts. Often there are multiple topics and the receiver needs to discern which specifically they need to focus on and how much information is needed in the response. Sometimes the context is even absent from the message. Instead, be more specific with what input you would like to receive. For example, “While this is only one example, we’ve received similar comments from other customers. What do you think is a better process to handle in the future?” It is specific, and provides the context your team needs.
- 3. “???”:** Sometimes used as “?” or “?????????”, including no text other than question marks is similar to #2. The number of question marks indicates your level of frustration. If you’ve been on the receiving end of a communication that starts with five question marks, you can relate. But if you’re the one sending it, then stop being lazy and type the actual question. “When will the update be available?” is much better than forwarding an email with question marks that came from another department complaining about the delivery date. Bonus points if you recognize the situation and offer assistance. “I know the customer has requested this a week earlier. Is there anything I can do to help?”
- 4. Not answering the question:** Many times a sender will ask a specific question seeking guidance. Providing a generic response without answering the question and expecting them to translate it is aggravating. If you don’t have enough information to answer the question, or if you would like for them to make the decision, just say so. And if there is more than one question, don’t just answer the first one.
- 5. “ ”:** If you have sent similar messages to people in the past and they know what needs to be done, it is fine to not add a comment every time. If the subject is new, or there is a specific action to be taken, indicate it so that it is certain what is expected. If you’re not clear with what needs to be done, you may likely be causing wasted time for the recipient – and you. For example, “Think about how we can incorporate into our value proposition” is very different than, “Update our sales presentation deck.” Both are better than no comment at all.

Speaking to your team in person is even better than sending emails, but if you need to send an email, avoid these common responses to help prevent you from annoying your team.

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