by **Joanne L. Smikle** | Smikle Training Services

Seven Practical Pointers for Electronic Communication

Editor's Note: This is part two of a two-part series.

When last we met to discuss communication, we covered the basics that will make you a better speaker, and, equally as important, a better listener. Now lets put all of that into a 21st century high-tech context — communicating by e-mail. This is a hot topic. There are seven practical pointers that facilitate better electronic communication.

1) Let's be brief. Like other forms of communication, it's best to get to the point. People get so many e-mails and so little time to review them all, so think about the message that you want to convey and then craft it with respect for the reader's time. This is not to say that you should ignore basic pleasantries like a greeting and appropriate closure.

2) Privacy please. If you must forward a message or send the message to multiple recipients, blind copy each person. This shows respect for the privacy of each of the recipients. This also makes for a shorter message when it's printed or appears on the screen.

3) Massage the message. When we're angry, hurried or harried, it's critical that we take the time to massage the message so not to offend, alienate or just annoy the receiver. Sarcasm isn't conveyed well electronically (not that it goes over especially well in person). Be sure to take the time to soften and finesse your message. Consider waiting two hours before sending an angry message; you may reconsider and try another approach to conflict resolution.

4) Attachments can attack. If you can include the information from your attachment in the body of the message, please do. Many viruses, Trojan horses and other problems are hidden in those seemingly innocuous attachments. And, if you just have to send an attachment, send the smallest size you possibly can. This is another trick that shows respect for the reader's time.

5) Grammar and spelling count. Just as grammar and spelling matter in every other written communication, they matter in e-mail too. Take the time to edit your work for good sentence structure and basic grammar. Since spell check is right at your fingertips, use it!

6) Discretion please. Your clients and colleagues really don't want to receive all of your jokes, religious diatribe and inspiration; they're just too polite to say, "Cut it out!" And guess what? They don't want to see pictures of your pets and children, either. Consider your relationship with clients and colleagues as well as the
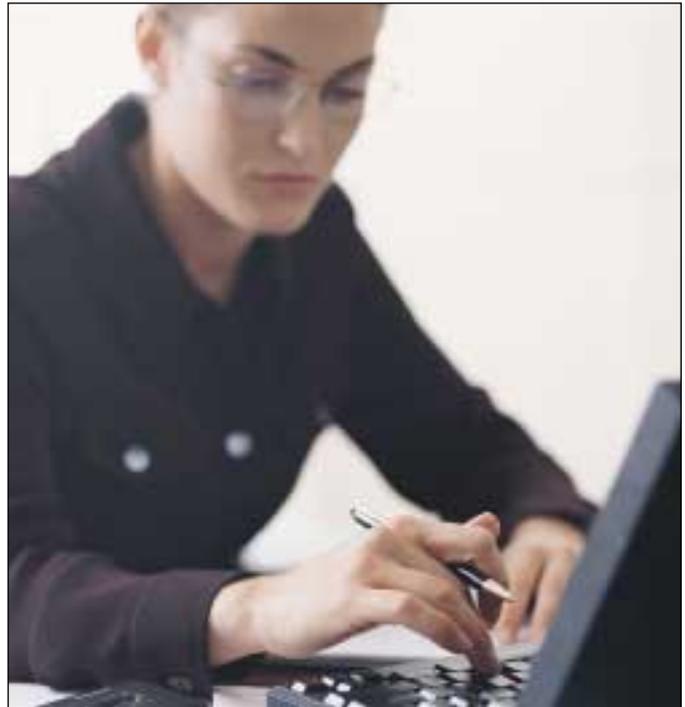
tone and nature of the humor before sending anything. Then, ask yourself, "Is this really worth sending?"

7) Nothing replaces the human touch, absolutely nothing! If you can just pick up the phone and make a call, please do. If you can get a nice card to send, please do. You will build stronger bridges by using the human touch.

These seven tips, when consistently applied, will help you master electronic communication. But wait! There's more! Here's the bonus tip: Get permission before using e-mail as a marketing tool. Because of the endless onslaught of messages, people are getting more and more irritable about getting solicitations and marketing messages electronically. So be sure to ask for permission before putting clients, prospects and suspects on your distribution list. Even if you have the most well-crafted message in the world, it's wasted if they immediately hit the delete button. ®

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