

## Choose A Tone That Produces Results

by Jack E. Appleman, CBC



**W**hen you speak, it's fairly easy to control your tone. Whether you're happy, excited, frustrated or panicked, your mood comes across loud and clear, exactly as you meant it.

It's a different story when you write. If you've had a few years experience in the corporate world, you've undoubtedly read countless harsh or condescending e-mails from clients, colleagues and others and thought, "What's their problem?" If a co-worker who just sent you an antagonistic e-mail needs your help, forget about it. The last thing you want to do at that moment is lend assistance to someone who needs a major attitude adjustment.

Let's turn the tables. At one point or another, you've probably sent a seemingly innocent e-mail, only to have a co-worker later ask if everything is okay because the e-mail sounded unkind. You might be thinking that things are fine and that you're not upset with anyone. Looking back, you wish you'd chosen different language. You may need to do some quick damage control.

### Right Words Make A Difference

When you write, assume that everyone is sensitive. With the wrong choice of words, you risk offending colleagues, clients and others, which can damage relationships and make you appear self-centered and unprofessional. See the hidden meaning in the examples below and the difference you can make by selecting the right text.

#### Blaming others for your confusion

*What you wrote:* Your budget report was confusing.

*What you communicated:* You're an idiot! You don't know how to write a coherent budget report.

*Better communication:* Please clarify a few points about your budget report.

#### Pointing out mistakes with a bad attitude

*What you wrote:* Your payroll system is in bad shape. It's absolutely imperative that you provide advanced training to the bookkeepers immediately. It's the only way to correct this damaged process, which apparently has been seriously neglected.

*What you communicated:* You better fix this mess or else.

*Better communication:* To improve your payroll system, would you be agreeable to offering advanced training to the bookkeepers by June 15?

#### Getting personal with criticisms

*What you wrote:* I don't really understand your request for a three-

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hour time management training for the finance managers. Three hours is hardly enough time for us to properly train these people. We need two days at least. Without this process, we'd be wasting our time. So if you want to do this program right, contact me.

*What you communicated:* Do your job right and that means doing it my way.

*Better communication:* Let's get together and go over the schedule for training the finance managers so we can map out how much time will be needed. Please contact me at your convenience and we'll review the details.

impressions about you through the text of your e-mails, which help create your personal brand in the organization. See the difference in how you would be perceived in these two e-mails handling the same scenario.

**Requesting assistance**

*What you wrote:* Three of our assistants just called in sick! We're already down two people. Can we borrow three assistants from your division today? I need to know immediately!

*What you communicated:* I'm panicked and can't handle this crisis.

*Better communication:* Since three of our assistants called in sick this

morning and we're already down two people, would it be possible borrow three of your assistants today? Please let me know by 9:30 a.m.

**Convey Professionalism And Get More Done**

Due to daily stress, we often get agitated at others for countless reasons, sometimes right after reading their e-mails. At that moment of anger, frustration or other negative emotion, you have a choice to either write a harsh e-mail or manage your negative emotions and write an evenhanded, efficient e-mail that best accomplishes your goals.

If you must unleash some rage so you don't explode, go ahead and punch out that offensive message, but be sure to leave the "To" line blank. Give yourself at least 30 minutes to cool down so you can re-read your message in a more composed frame of mind. At that point, you'll have a better perspective on the situation. It will be easier to judge what you wrote and determine if it conveys your professionalism and your commitment to being a team player.

**Words Shape Your Personal Brand**

Your tone also says a lot about your professionalism and on-the-job capabilities, especially in the eyes of clients and coworkers whom you may rarely meet in person. These individuals form

**About the author:**

Jack E. Appleman, CBC, writing instructor and coach, is author of *10 Steps to Successful Business Writing* (ASTD Press), a top seller in its category. His corporate writing workshops have consistently earned outstanding evaluations. Subscribe to Jack's free writing tips newsletter and contact him at [jack@successfulbusinesswriting.com](mailto:jack@successfulbusinesswriting.com), 845-782-2419 or [www.twitter.com/writecoachJack](http://www.twitter.com/writecoachJack).

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