4 Steps to Clarity:

Sending Outlook Emails that Get a Response from Your Team

for the Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group

Introduction: Upgrade Your Emails

Don't you just love email? I do!

Email is one of the most powerful communication tools available. Unfortunately, it's also one of the most misused and abused, to the point that it often creates more headache than it does value.

Don't you hate it when your email languishes in someone's inbox, unread, un-responded-to?

There is a better way.

When used properly, email can be a wonderful means to communicate with others and get quick responses. There are principles and techniques you can use to send emails that your readers will open and respond to promptly.

In this guide, I will share four problems I see with email and four tips I use before I hit send. This method helps me get timely responses from the people I email.

Are you ready to send better emails?

Contents

The Four Fatal Faults of Email

If you're wondering why people rarely respond to your emails quickly, you may cause others to suffer from the following:

1. **It's not clear what action you want your reader to take.** You know what the action is. You want Mr. Smith to approve your vacation request. You want Janet to do an analysis and give you her opinion. But do *they* know that? Is it easy for them to figure out? Your job is to make it easy.

2. **Cramming too many topics into one email.** If your reader has to sort through more than one thing that you want them to do, that creates unconscious resistance in their mind.

3. **Info-dumping.** If you're giving your reader more than they need to know to do what you need them to do, you're giving them too much.

4. **Using the wrong communication method.** Email isn't always best. Sometimes, what you really need is a call or face-to-face conversation.

Ultimately, emails that resist response all have one thing in common: they take work to decipher. When your readers constantly have to figure out what you want, they'll dread seeing your name in their inbox.

What's the solution?

These are all things I teach in my email effectiveness workshop. On the next page, I'll share my favorite method to send emails that get a response.

4 Steps to Clarity: The PASS Method

The most fundamental thing here is to **make it about the reader.** Your email should focus on making sure that they know what they need to do.

The ultimate question you need to ask about any email is: have you provided your reader with *just* enough information to take the action you want?

I've evaluated many approaches to writing effective emails, and most can be distilled down to just a few essential steps. One of my favorites is frequently referred to as the PASS method.*

PASS stands for:

Purpose
Action
Support info
Summary

1. Purpose: Why are you writing?

Make sure you clearly know the purpose of your email. For example:

- to get JJ to approve my vacation request
- to get my boss to buy a new chair for my desk
- to get approval for an expense account

What do you need your recipient(s) to know, and/or what action do you need them to take?

2. Action: What should your reader do?

What is the one, specific action (if any) that you want your ready to take? Make sure this is clearly stated. Don't make them hunt for it!

People really like achieving things, and when you give them a single, clearly-defined action to take, that's an easy win for them. Even if you're giving somebody a project, it always makes it easier on them if you define exactly what the successful outcome is. *This saves your reader the work of figuring out what you want.*

Bonus: put the action in the subject line. For example: "John, please review the marketing sequence drafts (enclosed) and return with your comments." That way, your reader will know *exactly* what they need to do with your email.

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* I did not invent the PASS method. I try to cite my sources when possible, but I've seen many variations of this method and under different names without a definitive source. If you are aware of its true origin, let me know.

3. Supporting Information: Six questions to ask yourself

In elementary school, I learned the six essential questions for everything:

- Who?
- What?
- When?

- Where
- Why?
- How?

When you communicate, it's essential that your reader has answers to all of these.

You won't always write all of these explicitly. For example, when requesting a vacation, you'll supply the What and When, but the rest is implied:

- Who: you
- What: vacation
- When: given dates
- Where: irrelevant unless you want to include it
- Why: to get some rest and relaxation
- How: by your boss's approval

When you're writing an email, ask yourself: "Will my reader have the answers to all six questions?"

This is especially important for your cross-cultural partners and coworkers. Context that you take for granted may well be completely lost on them.

4. Summary: It's all in the subject

Write your subject and call to action last.

Don't put your thoughts in a box by writing your subject first. Just write your message: you might discover that what you have to say is different from what you thought.

Once you know what your message is and what action you want your reader to take, summarize it all in the subject line. *Include a clear call to action.*

Bonus tip: Post-It

Write the PASS method on a Post-It and stick it on your computer. Before long, you won't need that Post-It anymore, because the method will have become a healthy habit.

Conclusion

I've found the PASS method incredibly helpful over the last 20 years or so, but the benefits of this approach go far beyond just getting responses to emails. When you and your reader (or listener) both understand the principles of effective communication and the purpose and desired outcome, it saves time on both sides of the conversation, whether that conversation is by email, instant message, phone, or face-to-face.

This is one application of my fundamental principle: you can create greater value by **thinking differently** about what you **know**, how you **work**, and the **tools** you use. I've used this approach to help many organizations achieve more with less effort, energy, time, and stress.

This information is an excerpt of what I teach in my workshop, which includes techniques, training, tips and tricks for Office 365, email effectiveness, and meeting effectiveness.

I created this document to share with people who attended the MAPMG Leadership Development Program. I hope it helps you in your work. Feel free to share it with colleagues.

For more resources, see www.eproductivity.com/MAPMG

Upcoming Guide

I'm working on a guide to help people at MAPMG use Office 365 more effectively. To be notified when this guide is available (or participate in testing this material), email me at Eric.Mack@ICA.com.

About me

I've been a consultant and entrepreneur for over 30 years, working with over 200 corporate and government clients in the fields of leadership, information management, technology, and productivity and collaboration tools, always with two questions in mind: how will people get their work done, and will these tools make it easier?

I hold a Bachelor's in Organizational Management and a Master's in Information and Knowledge Management. My research and experience have led me to create my value framework, V=KMT, an approach I use in my consulting and workshops to help my clients understand the relationship between what they know, how they work, and the tools they use.

My vision for Kaiser Permanente is to help improve healthcare by improving the knowledge, skills, and tools of those who deliver it. I've used this approach time and time again to set people up for success.