

# 11 Coaching Tips to Upgrade Your Email Executive Presence

Building executive presence (EP) is a hot topic from cubicle to corner office. A dash of swagger and reading the room when face-to-face are crucial; but how do you demonstrate EP on email? After all, the majority of our workaday communication involves hitting SEND. EP-busting email habits are rampant, according to my experience as an executive coach.

Yet with a few simple practices, and by breaking a few habits, you can use email as an instrument of greater influence.

## Coaching Tips

Here's a technique that works for my clients. When was the last time you re-read older sent email for the sake of self-improvement? Maybe never? Try this: Carefully select a sample of, say, 20 of your sent emails. Make sure they represent both smooth and stressful times, and a spectrum of people. As you carefully reread your sample, keep the following tips in mind:

### **1. Don't blow off your subject line**

Take the time to write a subject line that gets the correct attention and priority. Your email lands on long lists, and your most important recipients don't have time to click more deeply into your meaning. Be creatively concise on the headline and, if appropriate, time frame. "Project X Phase 2 Needs Your Approval by 5/15" works better than "Project X Update."

### **2. Don't bury the lead**

Once you have their attention with your effective subject line, if it takes more than a sentence or two to decipher importance and required action, you've buried the lead, and your email EP along with it. Why they should care and what you want from them should be right up front.

### **3. Be brief--very brief**

If you need to write more than a few paragraphs, you've missed a conversation that needs to happen. Keep your emails short and sweet. If you can't, then start an IM, pick up the phone, or go face to face.

### **4. Don't confuse an email chain with a conversation**

A string of emails and replies shouldn't be considered a substitute for a conversation, brainstorming session, or a decision-making process. It's a series of "tells" with varying lag

times that often lead to unnecessary churn. Voice to voice, face to face, and IM are much better forums for important interactions.

### **5. Don't use email to confront, vent or process**

Lasting EP problems spring from this mistake. As a therapist might say, "Write the letter and don't send it." Email isn't the place for processing an issue, venting, or confronting. Since email subtracts nuance and body language needed for deeper understanding, it makes thorny issues thornier.

### **6. Follow the New York Times rule**

You've heard this one before--now believe it: Email is barely communication. It's certainly not a forum for risky disclosure. As your General Counsel should say: Don't put anything in email today you wouldn't want to read in the New York Times tomorrow. All emails are or can be read by others.

### **7. Check your grammar, spelling and avoid text-speak in emails**

EP degrades with poor quality communication. Check your spelling. Read it out loud. Look for words spelled correctly but in the wrong place, such as "here" versus "hear" or "affect" versus "effect" or "your" versus "you're." Using text-speak like "ure" and "btw" and "LOL," even when sending from your smartphone, degrades your EP. Double-check these before sending.

### **8. Read the message you received carefully before sending your reply**

Too many people scan and reply in a rush, and miss the point. Before replying to a message, read it twice. Think. Prioritize. THEN BEFORE SENDING, read the original email and your reply together. If you don't have time for that, wait until you do, or connect with the recipient by another method.

### **9. Don't be lazy about forwarding emails**

We've all forwarded emails without double-checking what lurks below, earlier in the chain. Please scroll all the way down, and read the full chain. Delete irrelevant, outdated, or recipient-inappropriate stuff.

### **10. Check and double-check recipients**

Avoid sending the wrong thing to the wrong person. Before clicking SEND, check and double-check your recipients. This may seem obvious, but is a step too often overlooked.

### **11. Be calm about response time**

When you send follow-up emails too shortly following the original (e.g., "did you have a chance to review my email from earlier today?") you're degrading your EP, not to mention being an e-stalker. If you're going to need a response that quickly, then don't use email in the first place.

\* \* \*

As suggested above, self-test a sample of your previous sent email from time to time. What do you need to change? Answer that, and you can make email a vehicle to enhance, rather than hinder, your communication, influence, and build your own EP.

Written by David Peck, The Recovering Leader

*Notes: Many thanks to [Ray J. Kelly](#) for his expert editorial assistance on this piece! "*