



People Skills

by John Hogan, Ph.D., CHA, MHS, CHE

Email etiquette for hoteliers – An overview

Another great article from *The Rooms Chronicle*® the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com

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With the invention of email, the world of convenience has been taken to a new level. The proverbial game of “telephone tag” has been dramatically downsized. The cost involved with many types of mailings has also decreased and, in general, our ability to save time and speed up decision making all have led to a more effective work environment.

There are many different opinions that surround what is considered to be proper email etiquette; however, there are certain basic pointers that can be given to enhance its effectiveness. The following suggestions fall under that category.

Privacy

Despite what people may say or what you may think, your email correspondence is not private. *There is no such thing as private email.* It can be accessed at any time by a number of individuals. In some cases, the email administrator has the ability to “access” your email correspondence. In contrast, some companies make it a practice to “monitor” employee email on an occasional or regular basis; usually looking for misuse of company resources, correspondence that may indicate the unauthorized sharing of proprietary information or company secrets, or just to get a sense of what employees are saying amongst themselves and outsiders. It’s also good to remember that email is software and things can go wrong (like receiving someone else’s mail).

Finally, there is always the threat of someone hacking into your email account. Although not easy, it is a possibility. In any case, do not email anything that you would not want posted on the bulletin board at the office. If you want to send something personal and are worried about the security of your message, deliver it in person or send it by “snail” mail (postal or courier service).

E-grammar

With any form of communication, the question of grammar usage is inevitable. There are many important things to remember when typing and sending an email:

Punctuation: Don’t get caught up in the use of excessive punctuation. By ending a sentence with !!!!!!!!!!!!!, the only thing you show is your ability to use the shift+1 keys with great proficiency.

Abbreviations: Abbreviation usage is rampant in the world of email. In the pursuit of saving keystrokes, email authors seemingly trade clarity for confusion. Words like *thnx*, *luv*, and smiley face emoticons like :-) have found a common place on our computers. While this may be acceptable for personal use, it becomes a concern when used in the corporate world. Always remember that it is better to be clear than cute.

Salutations and signatures: It is always a good rule of thumb to play it safe, especially with those you do not correspond with on a regular basis. If you are sending informal business communications within your company, use of the addressee’s first name is acceptable, such as “Joan” or “Jose”. The more formal greetings, “Dear Mr. Smith” or “Ms. Espinoza” are good examples of using caution. In closing an email, the same format of a letter should be used, minus the signature. Your name, email and legal address, as well as your phone and fax numbers can usually be permanently pasted at the end of all emails. This makes it quicker in composing your messages and the full and accurate return information is always there.

Responding to an email

It is wasteful and frequently very annoying to include a complete copy of the original email message with the phrases “OK” or “I agree” at the end. On the other hand, if you send only the response “sounds good” to an email that had five different

parts to it, your response is vague and does not meet the needs of the sender. It is best to copy and paste only the parts of the message that require your specific feedback, such as:

>> *and do you feel we should join the co-op advertising plan at a cost of \$450?*

with

Yes. It is a good investment and we need to increase our brand and location awareness.

Formatting

Technology is moving at an incredible rate. There are ways being invented to increase options and space using HTML, Rich Text Formats, ZIP and more. It is smarter and easier to use plain text. Every system can handle plain text, but not all can handle the latest technology improvements, which means your messages may not get through as you intended.

Flames

To be “flamed” means that you have sent email to an individual or group of people to cause them to respond back in a less than desirable fashion. Basically, it is an electronic form of verbal abuse. The best thing to do is to ignore the message, as a response will more than likely just fuel the “flame.” There are some things you can or should not do to limit the flames that you receive:

CAPS: It is important to realize that only using upper-case letters is the same as shouting in someone’s ear. So if you don’t want to SHOUT, don’t use all caps.

Commenting on grammar: Nobody wants to feel patronized or have their typing errors or grammar skills brought to their attention. Be sensitive by over-looking these oversights.

Mass-mailing: This is a big time no-no. Nothing will generate more flames than this. The initiation or forwarding of chain letters, jokes, or unsolicited and/or inappropriate pictures throughout the workplace sends a clear message about one’s values, sensitivity (or lack thereof), and immaturity. Recognize that the workplace and company resources are meant to further the business interests of the company and not the personal interests of specific employees. Besides, these acts only give provocation and justification to a company to regularly monitor employees’ emails and productivity.

Email etiquette guidelines¹

Using proper email etiquette is as easy as applying a bit of empathy to your messages: send only what you want to receive. The following additional etiquette guidelines will help you consider a variety of issues when using email.

- Is your message really needed by the recipient(s)?
- Is your message for routine rather than sensitive messages?
- Are you sure your message is not “spam” (an annoying message sent repeatedly) or a chain letter?
- Have you carefully checked the intended recipient’s email address to ensure that your message is going where you want it to go?
- Has your wording avoided defamatory or libelous language?
- Have you complied with copyright laws and attributed sources accurately?
- Have you avoided humor and sarcasm your reader may not understand as intended?
- Have you proofread your message carefully?
- Is this a message you would not mind having distributed widely?
- Does your signature avoid offensive quotes or illustrations, especially those that are religious, political or sexual?
- Are attached files a size that your recipient’s system can handle?
- Are the files you are attaching virus free?
- Have you begun your message with the recipient’s name or used a greeting?
- Have you closed with your name or a closing statement?
- Is your message short and concise?
- Have you been careful to use asterisks, dashes, solid caps, etc., only as needed?
- Is your document free of unnecessary abbreviations?

¹ Lesikar’s Basic Business Communication, pp. 216-217. Lesikar, Pettit, & Flatley. McGraw-Hill, 1999.

The Complaint Corner

Mr. Worried Hotel Guest: (...calling the hotel front desk from his guestroom...) I see that the hotel’s check out time is 12noon, but my flight doesn’t leave until 6pm. May I remain in the room until 3 o’clock?

Bad Reply: I can’t grant you a late check out today, we need the hotel room for the many guests that are scheduled to arrive tonight. You must be gone by noon or we will be forced to evict you.

Slightly Better: Unfortunately, we are sold out tonight and expecting early arrivals. The best I can offer you is a 1 o’clock late check out. Alternatively, we can have a bell person secure your luggage in our locked storage room while you dine in our restaurant or relax in our lobby.

Best Reply: Mr. Worried Guest I see that you are a diamond level member of our hotel’s frequent stay program. We can certainly accommodate your request. I will make the arrangements for your complimentary 3pm late check out. We will just make sure to have the housekeepers clean your room last tonight after you depart.

Paper

Don’t print out every email that comes to you. One of the great things about computers is the ability to save paper and, in turn, trees. View the documents first on the computer and then use the delete key before the print key, if appropriate.

Conclusion

The Internet is an evolving encyclopedia of unexplored potential. Email is one beneficial tool that is being enhanced constantly. Use your Internet search function for email etiquette and to learn of improvements and accepted shortcuts. ✧

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