

A JIVE eBook

THE BIBLE

OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

—

Tips to Improve Workplace Communications

INTRO



Business communications have advanced to the point that it's never been easier to reach out to a co-worker, or to collaborate long-distance. So why are internal communications between employees eating up an average of \$62.4 million in lost productivity every year?

Why are 70 percent of U.S. employees not engaged at work?

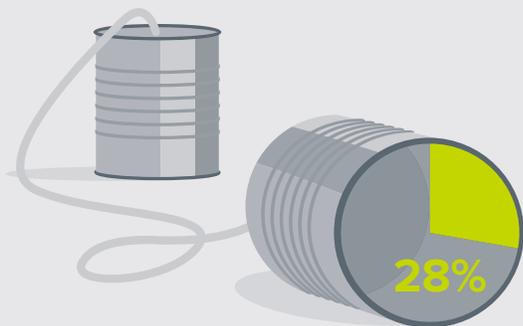


Here are a few possible reasons:

Confusing or unclear directions. An HR magazine survey revealed that 46 percent of employees receive unclear and confusing directions, forcing them to waste an average of 40 minutes a day interpreting these directions into actionable items.

Increased interruptions. More communications options also opens you up to a greater number of disruptions. More than a quarter (28 percent) of an average office employee's time is spent handling interruptions.

Poor communications practices. Access to more technology can highlight an organization's poor internal communications practices.



According to a survey of computer professionals, **28%** blamed their failure to deliver a project by deadline on **poor communications practices.**



So simply having business communications tech isn't the answer. We know because we're in the business tech market, and we understand that good communications practices are what will make your technology most effective.

That's why we assembled the Bible of Business Communications. These simple tips can help you transform a crashing tidal wave of communications into a streamlined feed of productive and effective collaboration.

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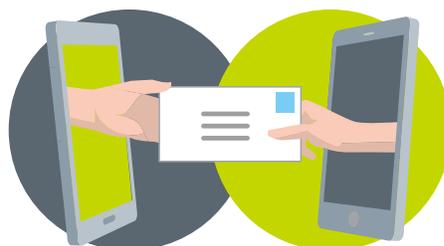
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CHAPTER ONE

EMAIL

Even with new communications options like chat or video conferencing, email is still king. Employees spend approximately half their work day, an average of four hours, producing the 90 billion emails exchanged every day. And that isn't changing anytime soon. By 2018, that number is projected to grow to 139.4 billion emails per day.

The problem is, most employees' exposure to professional business-writing practices is usually limited to one or two classes in college. Here are a few tips to improve your emailing habits, save time, increase productivity, and prevent misunderstandings and workplace conflicts.

EMAIL



ONE

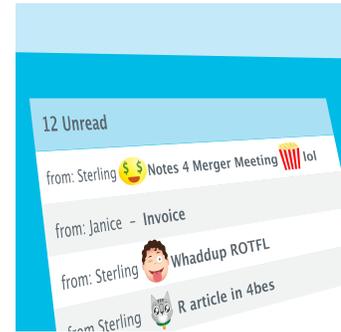
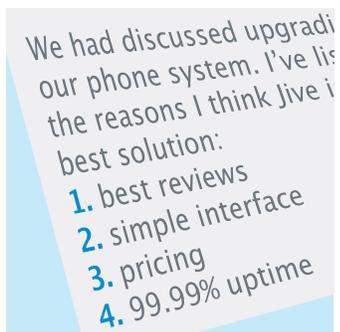
Thou shalt keep it quick, simple, and focused.

Cut out any preamble or backstory and lead with your main point. State your specific need in the first sentence, or in the subject line when possible. Be sure to communicate a time frame if there is one, especially if the request is urgent or time sensitive.

TWO

Thou shalt simplify with lists.

If your email is more complex, involving multiple questions or topics, then break it up into digestible chunks. Lists—both bulleted and numbered—can help you organize your thoughts and make it easier for your contact to respond.

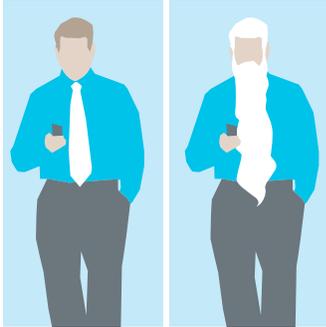


THREE

Thou shalt avoid jargon, buzzwords, all caps, all lowercase, emoticons, and all manner of textspeak.

None of these belong in a professional email. Don't use multiple exclamation points or question marks or your email may be mistaken for spam. And always make sure you review your email twice for any typos or misspellings before you hit **send**.

EMAIL



FOUR

Thou shalt not keep thy co-workers waiting for a reply.

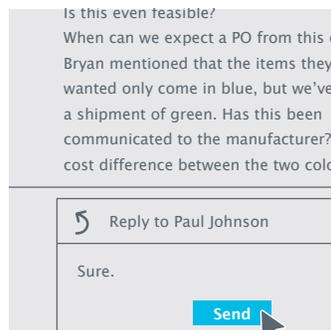
You can't take it for granted that the person who emailed you will assume you're going to respond. A lot can happen to an email. A bad connection, misspelled address, or an overzealous spam filter can prevent an email from arriving safely in your inbox. So don't wait too long to respond. A common threshold is 24 hours, but even that is stretching it.

Even if you don't have the information or materials requested by the email, you can always write back and say: "It's coming, it's just taking some time to gather what you requested." And always make sure you finish an email discussion with a "thank you" or a "got it" note.

FIVE

Thou shalt read and respond to the whole email. Seriously.

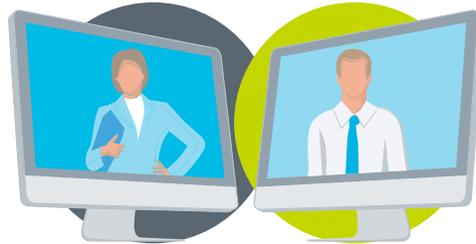
It's infuriating when the person you emailed only responds to the first item in your message and ignores your other questions and concerns. Don't be that person. Take the time to read the entire email before you respond. Address each item, but remember to always keep it short. If you can't—if there're too many issues or too many people involved—then it's time to escalate the issue to a phone call.



SIX

Thou shalt never hit "Send" when thou art angry.

Written communication is incomplete. It's easy to misunderstand the meaning of an email and perhaps get insulted. Do yourself a favor and walk away. Take time to calm down. Re-read the email later with a clear mind, and give the sender the benefit of the doubt. Only then should you begin drafting a response.



CHAPTER TWO

VIDEO CONFERENCING

In the past, you only saw video conferencing and video phones in sci-fi movies. These days, for 85 percent of employees, video conferencing is part of their everyday routine.

Unfortunately, a high percentage of workers are still uncomfortable with video conferencing. One reason for this is they don't know basic rules of video conferencing etiquette. In fact, only 23 percent of workers say they've received any video conference training. So here's a basic crash course in video-conferencing etiquette to get you ready for your close-up.

VIDEO CONFERENCING



ONE

Thou shalt test thy tech in advance.

Familiarize yourself with both the hardware and software involved in setting up a video conference, like your camera, speakers, and microphone. Know where the controls for these devices are located on your computer or device in case you have to tweak the settings. Call a co-worker before your conference to make sure everything is working.



TWO

Thou shalt pick a distraction-free background.

When you test your camera, check out your background for anything that could prove distracting for participants. Clean up any clutter, make sure there won't be any sudden noises or interruptions, and check the angle and lighting. Sometimes the glare through a window or from a lamp can do strange things to your appearance. Make sure your camera is angled correctly as well. You usually don't want it pointing up at you. Have it pointed directly at you, at eye-level if possible.



THREE

Thou shalt dress professionally.

Even if you're teleconferencing from home, dress to impress. Don't try to conceal pajama pants (or worse) under the desk. Something may come up where you stand up without thinking and embarrass yourself. Worrying about a wardrobe malfunction is simply one more thing that will keep you from focusing on the meeting.

VIDEO CONFERENCING



FOUR

Thou shalt identify everyone at the beginning.

It's good manners to introduce everyone on the call. Even if everyone knows everyone else, make a point to identify each person for clarity's sake.



FIVE

Thou shalt avoid multitasking.

Don't type notes, read, review emails, sleep, or perform other tasks during a video conference. It's very obvious to other conference-attendees, and distracting to boot. If you have to take notes, handwrite them.



SIX

Thou shalt maintain eye contact with the camera.

Look directly at the camera, not at yours or other images. If your eyes are elsewhere, you look like your mind's on something else. To help with this, when you're testing your equipment, try to position your camera at eye level.



SEVEN

Thou shalt speak up.

Speak clearly, but don't shout. This is something else you can prepare for when you're testing your tech. Check your microphone to see if it's picking up your voice. If necessary, move your microphone closer, or scoot your chair nearer to your desk, and be sure to talk just a hint slower.

VIDEO CONFERENCING



EIGHT

Thou shalt use the mute button when thou speaketh not.

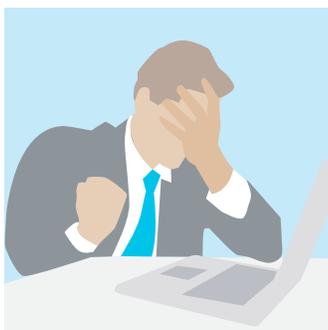
If you don't have anything to say, hit the mute button. This cuts down on any potential background noise from your end. Just make sure you remember to click it again before you start talking.



NINE

Thou shalt not depart from the video conference without saying something.

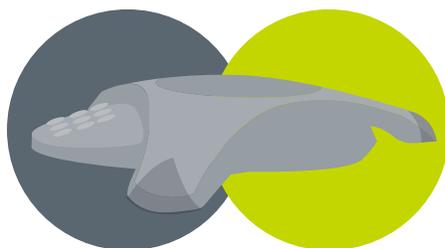
If you have to leave the conference for whatever reason, be it technical difficulties or another appointment, make sure you say something like, "Gotta go, everyone." Simply disappearing from a conference is jarring and leaves the other attendees wondering if you disconnected because of something they said or due to technical difficulties.



TEN

Thou shalt make sure thou art disconnected.

When the video conference is over, make sure you've completely cut off the connection and close the application before you say anything. Too often, participants will hang up and laugh or complain about something that was said, all while other conference attendees are still listening.



CHAPTER THREE

CONFERENCE CALLS

Conference calls, like any other meeting, can be extremely productive . . . or a tremendous waste of time.

Some attendees prepare well for a conference call. They arrive early, and they know enough good communications practices to reduce confusion and boost collaboration. Others see the phone, especially the mute button, as a way to hide their extracurricular activities (like eating, exercising, emailing, or attending another conference call altogether).

Is it any wonder most managers believe that between 25 and 50 percent of time spent in meetings are wasted? Here are 12 tips to help you prepare for—and hold—effective conference call meetings.

CONFERENCE CALLS



ONE

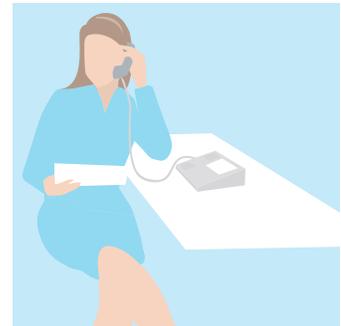
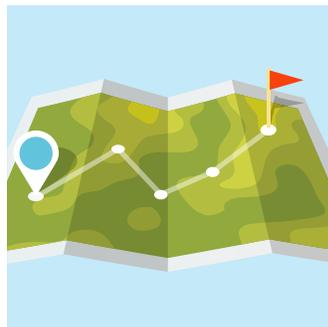
Thou shalt pick someone to head up the call.

This honor usually belongs to whoever convenes the meeting or has the most at stake. We'll assume for the sake of this exercise that you're in charge. If that's the case, then you're responsible for creating and distributing the agenda, introducing everyone on the call, calling on people for responses, and keeping the meeting on-schedule and on-topic.

TWO

Thou shalt create an agenda.

You'll want a clear game plan. Write up specifically what you want the call to accomplish, what questions you need answered, and what actions need to be assigned. Put this together in advance and send it out to all attendees—even if it's two minutes before the conference call. A late agenda is better than no agenda.



THREE

Thou shalt make sure everyone can get on the call.

Along with the agenda, make sure you send out any dial-in numbers, passcodes, or links your attendees will need to join you in the conference call. Along with this, you'll want to test out your conference call software and equipment and make sure you're ready to roll. There's always the inevitable technical glitches; your job is to eliminate as many of those as you can.

CONFERENCE CALLS



FOUR

Thou shalt select a quiet background.

When possible, pick a location without a lot of background noise. Be aware that you may be accustomed to certain background sounds that may distract others, like a noisy air conditioner or fan. Avoid calling from your car when possible. If you're stuck somewhere that's noisy, be sure to apologize to everyone on the call and use the mute or any chat option as much as possible.

FIVE

Thou shalt log on early.

If you're in charge, be the first one in the conference. Even if you're just an attendee, be on before the conference call is scheduled. Nothing is more disruptive to a call than someone popping in after the meeting's already started. Don't be the jerk who forces everyone to rehash what they'd only just discussed (unless you've got a great excuse—like a tiger attack, or aliens).



SIX

Thou shalt start the meeting on time.

When you're in charge, you've got to be a bully. No giving people more time to show up. Your attendees have other places to be, other meetings to attend, other projects to finish, and they're depending on you to start and finish the conference call on time. Just repeat this mantra over and over: "No mercy for the late."

CONFERENCE CALLS



SEVEN

Thou shalt introduce everyone.

As the leader of the call, you're the host. You introduce everyone, including yourself, at the beginning. Since it's hard to identify people by voice, ask everyone to preface any comments or questions with their name: "Bert here. I was just thinking . . ."

EIGHT

Thou shalt pay attention.

Don't multitask unless it has something to do with the meeting, like taking notes or looking things up. That means no eating, exercising, etc. when you're supposed to be on a conference call. Don't treat other people's time like it doesn't matter.



NINE

Thou shalt not leave conference call discussions open for comment.

You'll want to avoid saying anything like: "Any comments?" Inevitably, someone will get talked over or cut off. If you want to solicit feedback, list off the attendees in a sequence, like: "Why don't we hear from Gordon first, then Zoey, then Harry." This way, everyone gets a chance to have their say or to pass.

CONFERENCE CALLS



TEN

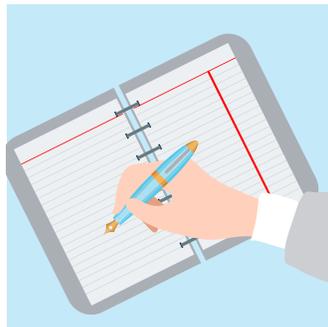
Thou shalt use the mute button.

If you're not talking, make sure you're on mute. But remember to unmute before you start talking.

ELEVEN

Thou shalt record the meeting or take notes.

One of the advantages of a conference call is that many phone services allow call recording. You can store and save the audio from conference calls for later use, or if someone missed the meeting. This can also help when reviewing decisions and action items.



TWELVE

Thou shalt follow up afterward.

After a conference call, make sure you follow up. Usually you'll do this in an email where you outline any decisions, action items, and assignments discussed during the conference call.



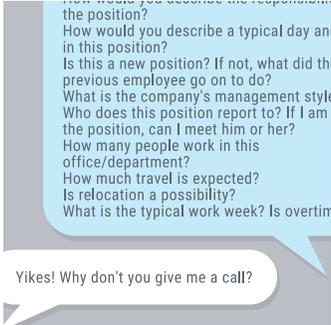
CHAPTER FOUR

BUSINESS CHAT

Business chat, or instant messaging, is a simple, convenient way to shoot short messages to your co-workers. Most people use it on a personal basis, but it's picking up steam among companies. Keep in mind that chatting someone is like walking into their office and striking up a conversation.

The rules for business chat are very different than the ones you'd use for an email or phone call. These 11 rules should help you use business chat effectively in a professional environment.

BUSINESS CHAT



ONE

Thou shalt keep it quick and to the point.

You can't ramble on for paragraphs. The subject of your chat should be simple. If there are several issues involved, or multiple questions you need answered, then chat isn't for you. In that case, you ought to escalate your issue to an email or phone call.



TWO

Thou shalt start with a polite greeting.

Before coming into someone's office, you'd knock first. The same principle applies to chat. Knock first by way of a short greeting like: "Hi, John. Got a minute?" If necessary, be sure to introduce yourself: "Hi Margie, this is Frank from Marketing." And always ask if now's a good time, or if they have a minute to chat.



THREE

Thou shalt respect offline or out-of-office status.

Don't use chat as a way to bypass an out-of-office email notice. If someone is unavailable, or it's after their typical office hours, don't chat them.

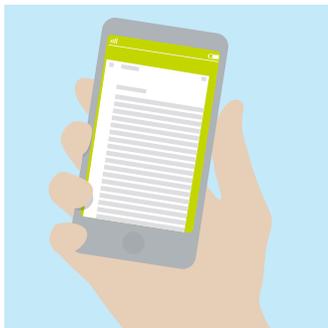


FOUR

Thou shalt use proper English.

Chat is famous for its abbreviations and lack of basic punctuation. However, business chat is different. The goal is to avoid confusion, which means you should use plain English, with no abbreviations and proper capitalization. Don't shout at co-workers in all caps. And lose the emojis while you're at it.

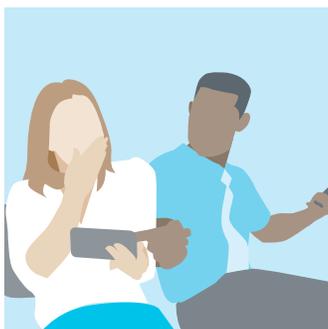
BUSINESS CHAT



FIVE

Thou shalt break it up.

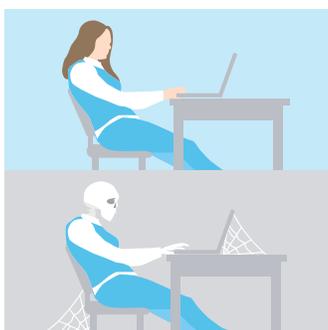
No one likes to wade through huge blocks of text. If your chat is going long, use line breaks. In this case, CTRL-ENTER (or SHIFT-ENTER for Mac users) is your friend.



SIX

Thou shalt keep it work appropriate.

Don't chat anything to a co-worker that you wouldn't want him or her to read out loud or share with your boss. Chat is usually saved, so don't spill confidential information. It's also inappropriate to use chat to make last-minute changes to meeting times or to share bad news. If you're changing a meeting time, use both chat and email to cover your bases. For passing on bad news, pick up a phone, or deliver it face-to-face.



SEVEN

Thou shalt respond promptly.

You can get away with waiting 24 hours to respond to an email. If you're responding to a text, don't take longer than a half hour. Even that long is an eternity in the chat-universe. If you're the one who sent the chat, give the other person a chance to respond. And don't add more to your initial chat if you see the other person is already typing a reply.

ue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
		1	2	3	4
3	7	8	9	10	11
3	14	15	16	17	18
:0	21	22	23	24	25
:7	28	29	30		

EIGHT

Thou shalt communicate deadlines.

When you're requesting help from someone on a project, make sure they're up to speed on any timeframe or deadlines you have.



BUSINESS CHAT



NINE

Thou shalt save the humor for later.

Contrary to common belief, business chat isn't the place for jokes, even if you know the other person really well. It's too easy to misinterpret a badly phrased chat, or to simply take something the wrong way. On the other hand, if you're on the receiving end of what looks like an insulting chat, withhold judgement. Don't take offense right away. Give the other person the chance to clarify what they wrote.



TEN

Thou shalt switch off the chat-ringtones on your device.

Don't be that person whose phone or laptop constantly chimes every time they receive a message via chat. Whether you're sitting at your desk or in a meeting, it's needlessly disruptive.



ELEVEN

Thou shalt say goodbye.

Don't just close the chat window or stop responding. Sign off with a simple: "Got to go," or "Thank you," or "Cheers."



CONCLUSION

That's it! Now that you're an expert on business communications, make sure your technology matches your know-how. Check out our communications technology at jive.com/products.

Learn how our suite of enterprise-grade Unified Communications helps you connect with customers and co-workers.

SOURCES

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