

“How to “speak” effectively to that faceless email”



One of the outcomes from the email is that we all really need to communicate in a different way. The problem is that as the email is faceless we have to do this without the benefit of body language, facial expressions, intonation and other non-verbal clues, which safeguard against misunderstandings.

Another problem is that when we communicate face-to-face we tend to expect those we are talking to to process what we are saying in the way we are speaking. We no longer have this privilege when using the email and so cannot gauge the reaction of our readers. Unfortunately many of us do not care. But if you are interested, there is something that you can do to improve the effectiveness of what you are emailing. This will require that you understand more about your own communication style, as well as that of your peers, subordinates, and your boss.

The key is to learn to “speak their language”. If you can then it will help you get your message across with greater accuracy, understanding and less likelihood of giving unintentional offence. Interestingly the way to do this was developed by a Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, who taught that there are four personality types and that each has its own characteristics in face-to-face communications. And these can equally apply to email communications.

The key is that if you can determine the style used by the person you are communicating with, you can then express your communication in language they understand.

This technique has often been used when counselling people facing career change. Because they are being interviewed and can determine the interviewers communication style then they can communicate their answers to questions in a way that the interviewer will identify with. This may seem a bit OTT but it does work. So here is an introduction to these styles that you can practice using when emailing. The four styles are:

1. **“Thinker”**: These are people who feel that a sense of order, logic and sound reasoning are essential when they communicate. They will want to look at alternatives before coming to a decision, will want to reflect and will try to take any emotion out of the communication. Having said this taken to an extreme they can be rigid, and somewhat unfeeling. So when they email they can be viewed by other styles as being unnecessarily long and containing too much detail. So if you are emailing a Thinker try to ensure that your message is logical, based on fact and that any suggestions are supported by relevant data. Also where possible try to show that you’ve considered alternatives before you arrived at your conclusion and/or recommendation. Probably most importantly do not use emotional sentences.

2. **“Feelers”**: These are people who are people centred and have deep sense of loyalty. (Almost the opposite of the Thinker). Their concern is to ensure that the right process is being carried out, because they are sensitive to the reactions of others. They don't like it when they have to implement processes that have negative effects on their peers and so can be seen as being a bit “soft” in making hard decisions. They respect tradition and will accept hard or bad news provided they know that the issues that are important to them were considered before the decision was made. When they email they can be viewed by other styles as being inclined to send chain emails and messages of encouragement.

So if you are emailing a Feeler be friendly and include a greeting, as they will prefer messages that are value-based, and sensitive to people's feelings particularly their own.

3. **“Sensers”**: These are people who want to act on facts not theory. They need evidence, not hunches, before they will want to make a move. They can be seen as being blunt, insensitive and short on patience. They are people who if asked when they want something will reply “yesterday”. They are bottom line driven and short on the small talk. So when they email they will tend to use capital letters and in bold type.

So if you are emailing a Senser do not beat about the bush. Get straight to the point as they appreciate messages that are factual and measurable rather than “touchy feely”. They'll like emails that use a lot of bullet points and that make suggestions for possible actions. For them the key is to demonstrate a sense of urgency and practicality.

4. **“Intuitor”**: These are people who often see things that others miss. They see the “Big picture”, are visionary in their thinking and so do not like detail. In this sense they are quite the opposite of Thinkers. They tend to expect others to see the big picture in the way they do. So when they email they will tend to jump from one logical reason to another, which can cause puzzling reactions from the Thinker, Feeler and Senser.

So if you are emailing an Intuitor remember (s)he is an ideas and forward thinking person. You will therefore need to be novel and original and give them praise for their useful suggestions if you want to strike a cord with them. They are the sort of people who should be on your email list if you are looking to introduce change or piloting a new programme or product.

The problem of course is that we all tend to use all four styles depending on the situation. But never the less each of us will tend to use one more often than the others. So the skill is to try to identify the style that “best fits” your main style of communication. Then you should try to do the same for your peers, subordinates and boss.

A pointer that might help is that you probably get on better with someone whose style preference matches your own, and you may well have email difficulties with those whose style differs from yours as it is with the latter that misunderstandings/misinterpretations occur and with whom umbrage is taken.

So try to do the following if you want to improve your email communication skills:

- Avoid the negative traits of your own predominant style once you have determined it
- Take into account the positive aspects of the other persons predominant style and use them to get your point across
- Take your lead wherever possible from the other person.

If you can do this then you could just, enhance your reputation as being imaginative, fair, sensitive and decisive.