



March 2009

## Communication Tip of the Month

### Helping Your Words & Actions Speak Volumes

#### What We Can Learn from Twitter about Writing Emails

I don't Twitter. I use Facebook and LinkedIn with abandon but, for some reason, I can't bring myself to Twitter.

Maybe it's because I don't think anyone cares that I'm deciding on yogurt or cereal for breakfast. Maybe it's because one more thing on my "to do" list will throw me over the edge. Or maybe I don't want to be limited to 144 characters.

As I was contemplating this over my morning cup of decaf, I opened an email that went on...and on...and on. When I finished reading, I had no idea what this person was asking me to do, so I called her.

Her request was simple. (About three sentences worth of simple, as far as I was concerned.) I realized that this woman probably didn't Twitter because she did not want to be "limited" by 144 characters...or by anything else, for that matter.

I have no idea if a "Twitter Rule" actually exists, so I decided to create my own definition:

*The "Twitter Rule" means being concise and to-the-point in your communications.*

Do you follow the "Twitter Rule" at work? Is your communication style enhancing -- or detracting from -- your professional image?

Take email, for instance. Email is such an essential part of the workday that most of us don't give it a second thought. And that's the problem. No one *thinks* about their email anymore, that's why you receive some of the most incoherent correspondence ever known to humankind.

I'm not saying you need to dish up significant prose every time you hit "Send." I'm only saying that keeping a few simple rules in mind will help you shine as the professional you truly are.

*Get your email opened faster with a specific subject line.* If someone has a full inbox, your subject line of "Agenda for today's meeting" or "Need stats on XYZ's account" will stand out from subject lines like "Question" or "Invoice."

*White space is your friend.* Take a quick look at your email. Do your eyes glaze over because there are long, dark blocks of content? Writing for the screen works best with short sentences, short paragraphs and lots of white space.

*Email is less formal than a written letter.* If you're writing to a colleague you know

well, write as if you're speaking directly to that person. If you don't know someone, a simple "Hello" will work. A salutation such as "Dear Mr. Smith" is too formal for an email.

Details, details, details. When your email requires details, consider using a brief overview or summary as the first paragraph. This lets your readers quickly determine the topic-at-hand. Subheads are also a good way to break up copy and divide your content into easy-to-read sections.

And a few etiquette notes:

Leave the thread of messages intact. This lets the recipient scroll down to refresh his/her memory of the topic. It also serves as a written history of decisions made, actions taken and the like.

Signing off. Signatures can give readers a little insight into your personality. If you use a quote or adage in or after your signature, be sure it's tasteful and appropriate for the workplace. And always include your phone number in your signature.

Use "Reply to All" carefully. I'm sure you've seen replies such as "Do not 'Reply to All' if we do not all need to know!" and "How will we know if you need to know or not?!" coming over your desk. Don't be the cause! Think before you send.

Powerful communicators don't limit themselves to one communication vehicle. Now and then, set up a face-to-face meeting, pick up the phone, or send a handwritten note.

**Never underestimate the power of simplicity.** Sometimes the simplest communication can make the biggest difference.

*One more thing: In the next few days, I'll be sending you some bonus materials that will improve your communication efforts dramatically!*

Wishing you a Refreshing and Productive Day,



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## About the Communication Tip of the Month

The Communication Tip of the Month is distributed at the beginning of each month and offers tips for professional and personal communications. If you have a suggestion for an upcoming Communication Tip, feel free to email me at [Michelle@MichelleZavala.com](mailto:Michelle@MichelleZavala.com).

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