

I'm John Sturtevant, and this is Say What?! A weekly podcast with quick tips to help you communicate clearly at work, at home, and everywhere else you go.

Welcome to Say What?! Episode 9.

This week, the fifth episode in our series: Ten Quick Tips for Terrific Email

And today's Quick Tip is: Add some emotional intelligence to your email.

We humans are emotional beings.

Although you're smart, creative, logical, analytical, and practical, your emotions influence your decisions, and the way you communicate.

Because after you've weighed all the pros and cons, and analyzed the data, and predicted the outcomes, you make decision based on what feels right.

That's your emotions at work. And building your emotional intelligence skills, will help you be a better communicator.

Even as emotions affect how we make decisions, emotions can also get in the way of communication.

Especially when writing email.

Because email does not allow us to express the subtleties of communication like voice inflection, pauses, and body language facial expressions, and other elements like grunts and sighs.

And while we try to imply emotions in our email by using emojis, much of the subtlety of in-person communication is lost in email.

And an honest statement I write, might sound like sarcasm to the reader.

If I write “Really great email, Mike.” My colleague Mike could easily interpret that as “Wow, Mike, I’m surprised how blunt you were in your email to Karen.”

So if I pay more attention to what I say and how I say it, it helps me control how my reader will interpret my words.

If I write “Wow Mike, your email to Karen was excellent. You did a great job describing the revisions you want!”

Chances are good that Mike will know I’m complimenting him.

And personalities affect how we communicate too.

We all care about our jobs and our coworkers. But sometimes, people just do things or say things that annoy us.

And we might want to set the record straight, or explain, or confront the person.

I suggest you resist that urge, especially in an email.

Here are a few ways to be more aware of the tone or emotional impact of your communication.

Instead of firing off a sarcasm-laced tirade written in all upper-case, wait a day before you respond.

You may discover what you thought was so important on Thursday, is actually quite trivial on Friday.

If you're dealing with a sensitive situation or a difficult employee, or maybe a customer complaint, consider making these ideas your priority:

Be patient, be tactful, be calm. Focus on facts rather than opinions.

Use the ideas from my May 20th podcast and imagine having a conversation with your reader. How would you handle a difficult situation in person?

There's a permanence to email that conversations don't have, so never say in email what you wouldn't say in person.

And, start your email with a greeting. It could be as simple as hi Mike, or hey mike. This adds a more conversational tone to your message.

And you might start with a sentence or two that gives your reader some context, or a description of why you are writing.

Ask yourself if you have something meaningful to contribute in your email, or are you just trying to prove something.

Consider the idea from last week's podcast when I talked about adding the why to your writing.

In this case, if you're asking your reader for something, or you want them change something, include the reason why you want the change.

That helps turn a command into more of a request. It shows a degree of empathy toward your reader, and helps build trust.

Also, read your email out loud before you send it. It's a great way to hear your tone, and recognize where your reader might be confused or might misinterpret what you're saying.

And finally, ask yourself if the situation really needs your reply. Sometimes, the best way to respond to a difficult situation is to ignore it.

So this week, when writing your emails, consider how emotions may affect the messages your readers get.

Who knows? It just might make you feel happy!

That's Say What?! for this week. Thanks for listening!

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