



# HIGH TECH TALK

An etiquette brief on electronic communication  
by Civility Experts Worldwide

## Introduction

Most professionals achieve success in business based on their ability to perform a skill, or to make some contribution, that somehow meets the needs of someone else.

The more consistently a person can exhibit the characteristics of a professional, and the extent to which a person can surpass a client's expectations for service and product quality, the greater success that individual will achieve. Making your way in today's very competitive business world is all about setting and achieving standards.

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## Electronic Communication (Excerpt)

Things change, and none so quickly it seems, as technology. These days it's hard to keep up with all the changes. And, there's no question technology is here to stay however, so if you want to do business in competitive corporate circles, you need to continually learn and adapt to all the new gadgets that are available.

Technology does have its perks; you can streamline your office, you can get a lot done in a short time, you can do business half-way around the world with the push of a button, and so much more. But, there are pitfalls too. If you've ever experienced a computer crash or had a server down for three hours, you know how frustrating technology glitches can be.

A lot has changed in the world and in our modern workplaces. For most of us how we communicate is now much more technology-based; we use electronics and wires for most interactions.

And change, especially when it comes to technology, has a way of racing past us. Consider the Internet. Currently, the World Wide Web may seem like an old story, but let's pause to remember that as a commercial product the Internet is less than two decades old.

One of the big issues about keeping up with technology is that things are developing so quickly that in many cases we don't have time to iron out the finer points- all the "rules" for using the technology. As a result many of us do the best we can and sometimes make the rules up as we go along. Others take advantage of the "grey areas" and use them as an excuse to be lazy or rude. In spite of all this technology is not an etiquette-free zone and whether you are communicating for business or socially, pretending that it is, is a very serious mistake.

It is important to recognize that in almost every instance where a technological device is used for communication, we risk sacrificing "human-touch" for "high-tech". For example, one of the reasons people like video-conferencing for example is because they can put a face to a name and add back an element of touch. When you are deciding what modes of communication to use, always remember that sometimes convenience costs- you may save time, but your relationships might pay the price.

So how do you choose which mode of communication to use?

- What is the right medium for the message?

- That is the right message?
- What impression are you sending?

The MOST IMPORTANT thing to consider with any communication is the recipient- what does she/he want? Before you send any communication, you should consider the:

- MESSAGE / TOPIC
- RECIPIENTS (CULTURE, LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE, ETC.)
- RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SENDER AND RECIPIENTS
- CONFIDENTIALITY / SECURITY
- TIME / TIME OF DAY
- ACCESSABILITY

Ask yourself, “What gets my attention, what makes me listen, why do I read certain things and not others?” And then try to apply your responses to your approach to e-communications.

**Communication Experts at Civility Experts Worldwide suggest that:**

1. Everyone in every situation should get exactly the same respect and consideration every time. (This is the Four E’s Philosophy) This means that you do not make decisions about whether to communicate in a respectful, considerate way on the basis of who you are talking to, their rank, their age, the time of day, or the mode of communication. Everyone in every situation gets the same respect and communication every time.
2. Time is the most sought after commodity, wasting time is the rudest thing you can do.
3. The average business professional looks at/skims 50% of correspondence he/she gets, reads 30%, and understands 20%. So, you should format your communication to hi-light key points (use headings, color, font, etc) for skimmers.
4. Most people admit they won’t read anything more than one page. (or one screen in the case of email)
5. People generally don’t hear the first seven words when listening. This means you only have 8-15 words when writing to get a reader’s attention.
6. In business settings, most of us really just want to know, “What does this reader want from me?” And, “How is this going to impact me?” Effective e-communicators answer those questions right in the subject line.

7. Good communicators say talk less and listen more. Accordingly- in email, write less and “listen” more- e.g., pay attention to tone, response time, and word choice of the people emailing you.
8. Clarity is key; be specific. Don't waste the reader's time making him/her figure out what you are trying to say.

One of the best approaches to making smart high-tech communication choices is to remember your purpose or priority. (Remembering the business priority means that over the course of your workday, all your choices are based on doing what is best for business. You choose what to wear, what to say, where to go, who to call, etc, based on whether or not doing whatever it is will get you closer to accomplishing your business goals.) Get to the point, quickly!

So what are the guidelines for mannerful telephone behavior? Canada's leading business etiquette experts at Civility Experts Worldwide have a few suggestions:

If you're able, answer the phone. This saves wasting a lot of time returning calls, playing telephone tag and sending mixed messages to callers.

When you speak on the phone speak clearly and slowly in a voice loud enough to be heard. Turn the volume down on the stereo or TV and take calls in a quiet room if possible.

Act as though the person you were speaking to on the phone were standing right in front of you. People can sense your mood through the phone, so smile when you speak to them. If you're not in the mood to take the call, ask the person if you can call back rather than sound bored, preoccupied or rushed when you speak to them. Don't eat, chew gum or carry on another conversation with someone in the room while on the phone.

Always say “Hello” and ask who is calling if you don't recognize the voice. If you are making the call, always identify yourself to the listener. It's rude to answer the phone by saying, "yeah" or "what's up?"

Don't just put people on hold. Always ask them if they mind first and if they say they do mind, let the other call go to your voicemail. If you are expecting a call, let the first caller know so that he/she can anticipate a beep in the ear and they won't feel "dismissed" when the second call comes through.

If you put the phone down to do something, remember that the caller can hear. Speak quietly and put the phone down gently.

When you are finished speaking, say something like, thanks for calling, to let the

## High Tech Talk

caller know you need to go and then say good-bye. Try not to be abrupt, cut people off in mid-sentence or suddenly announce, "I've got to go" and then click the phone in someone's ear.

If you are leaving a message, be sure to leave your first and last name, telephone number and reason for your call. People are more likely to return the call if you leave adequate information.

If you use a voicemail or an answering machine, leave appropriate messages. While it's not always safe to say "I'm out of town until Friday" you could at least say, "I will be checking messages but unavailable to return calls until Friday".

Have a personal policy for returning calls. Etiquetely speaking, calls both at home or at work should be returned within twenty-four hours. Cell phones and pagers typically come with user's manuals but they rarely include etiquette guidelines. How much do you know about etiquette and technology?

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