E-Mail Best Practices & Etiquette

Subject Lines:

- Use explicit text, like "ACTION:", "FYI:" or "NOTICE:", at the beginning of your subject line to better indicate the purpose of your message. You may also include dates in the subject to further clarify your intent. Example: *ACTION: Policy Document for Review, DUE: 7/12*, or *NOTICE: Spring Seminar, April 12th, Denver, CO.*

Priority Setting:

- Use the priority settings for individual mail message only when absolutely appropriate. Misuse of an urgent setting can result in "cry wolf syndrome" rendering the priority stamp useless.

Attachments:

- Use attachments only for information that is not easily integrated into your message text. For instance, if you are sending a simple announcement, put the text in your message body, not an attachment. Exceptions to this would be for complicated documents or documents that are too long to easily fit in the message body. If your attachment is primarily graphics or if you are unsure if the reader has the application that your attachment was created in, you may want to include a brief summary of the critical points of the attachment in the message body. If changes are not necessary to the attachment, the .pdf format is the best for global access.

Addressing:

- Use the "To:" line for recipients that are crucial to the message. For others, use the "Cc:" line to indicate that the message is for their information only. Use the "Bcc:" line when you want that recipient to get the message but do not want anyone else to know that they have been copied. Do note, however, that this is not a polite practice, and could prove to cause difficulties later.

Message Text:

- Use normal capitalization when drafting a message. Capitalized text is harder to read than lower case or mixed case. Upper case is also considered the written equivalent of screaming.

- Use appropriate punctuation and blank lines to separate your paragraphs. Make your message inviting to your potential readers.

- Use caution when drafting your messages. Try not to make statements that can be interpreted as official positions or offers to do business if you are not in the business of doing so. Also, don't rely on the ability of your readers to tell the difference between serious statements and satire or sarcasm. It's hard to write funny, It's even harder to write satire. Remember that no one can hear your tone of voice. What may seem innocent to you, could be construed differently by your reader. If you believe that the meaning could be unclear, you might consider using emoticons - :) - or parenthetical statements (grin) to better illustrate your intention.

- Stay away from huge signature blocks at the bottom of your text. Only include information that is important to your reader. A good rule of thumb is to keep your signature block as concise as a business card. It is, however, okay to include personalized statements, just keep them brief.

Forwarding / Replying:

- Be careful not to forward messages without ensuring that all of the information in the original message is appropriate for other readers. Read the "To:" and "Cc:" lines before you send your message.

- Try to remove as much irrelevant information from the original message as possible when forwarding messages. If the message header is large and includes a long list of original recipients, you may want to remove the entire "To:" line. The "To:" list might also include addresses that are inappropriate for viewing by the new recipient.

- Use the "Reply" or "Reply All" features whenever possible. This inserts a "Re:" in the subject line, and allows the recipient to see the "thread" of the message conversation. Also, when replying to a message, always put your message atop any earlier text. This allows the reader to see your input without weeding through previous text.

Managing e-Clutter & the Flow of Electronic Information

Any mail program can be helpful in managing electronic information from a technology standpoint, but nothing will help as much as regular attention to your Inbox and folders. Use the DRAFS Discipline to review new messages and handle them promptly:

Delete – Have your address removed, or Unsubscribe, from unnecessary lists. Create Rules or Filters to automatically file non-urgent, informational mail to a designated folder. Purge junk mail, spam, jokes and other unofficial mail regularly to immediately reduce clutter.

Reply - Reply to actions immediately, even if the message is "I'll get back to you later…" or "I need more time…status update". Three replies indicates a good time to talk face to face.

Act - Take two minutes to review new messages and do something with them. Group important messages in an "Action Folder" and clean it out once each day. Use the Flag feature to indicate messages that require follow-up.

Forward – Immediately forward delegated items and flag the message for follow-up. Try not to forward messages more than three times without cleaning the subject line and text. Going beyond [Fwd:Fwd:Fwd…] is messy,messy, messy.

Save - Print hard copies of documents that require long-term archiving. The rule for archiving mail is still Print and File. Develop a filing system within the mail program and use it.