

DON'T HIT SEND

Six phrases you should never feel compelled to put into a business e-mail

E-mail is easy, no doubt about it. But sometimes shooting off a quick message is not the best idea. "E-mail works great for 'I'd like to talk to you Thursday morning; how does your calendar look?'" says Wayne Turmel, director of instruction for the central region of Communispond, a business communication training company based in New York. "But when you have open-ended questions and want to understand the other person's side of the story, you want two-way communication." Here are key phrases that should never be delivered via e-mail:

"WE CAN'T WORK TOGETHER ANYMORE." Whether you are firing a salesperson or ending a contract with a client, you should always explain your reasons to them in person, says Todd Duncan, founder of the Duncan Group, a sales consulting company based in Atlanta. By communicating voice-to-voice, you can engage in a dialogue, answer any questions they may have, and possibly even maintain a friendship after the business relationship ends.

"GREAT JOB!" "If the salesperson has just closed the biggest deal of the year, a congratulatory e-mail isn't enough, no matter who you copy on the message," says Steve Schiffman, founder and president of D.E.I. Management Group, a sales training firm based in New York. Rather, Schiffman suggests sched-

uling a conference call or making an announcement at a public meeting so the salesperson feels the pride she deserves.

"IN RESPONSE TO YOUR QUESTION..." When a client e-mails you a question, more often than not your first reaction is to hit "Reply." But your response probably doesn't answer the question he didn't ask yet. "When a customer asks a question, there's frequently a question behind the question," Turmel says. If you call your client instead of e-mailing him back, you can respond to his real concern, be proactive, and prevent a barrage of e-mails that can tie up your time.

"YOU NEED TO IMPROVE." Sending an e-mail makes the uncomfortable task of evaluating your employee easier - though much less effective. "E-mail is too sterile an environment for such sensitive issues," says Paul Sniffin, president of CPI/New Options Group, a career consulting firm based in Baltimore. Moreover, comments made in an e-mail can be misconstrued. Communicating face-to-face allows you to discuss the reasons behind any problems and help your employees improve.

"I'M UPSET." Even though you may just need to blow off some steam, it's better to get your frustrations out in the open before they get a chance to build up. "Never underestimate the power of venting," Turmel says. However, when vent-

ing is done via e-mail or an instant messaging program, others can't hear your tone and as a result may blow your comments out of proportion. The best thing to do is write your thoughts in an e-mail that you never send, "because once it's out of your system you can resume civil conversation," Turmel says.

"HERE'S HOW TO DO IT." The first 30 to 60 days at a new job are critical in any employee's life, because they help determine whether she wants to stay there and how committed she'll be. Duncan says it's important to communicate the company's standards and values in person, and in turn, this interaction will help you better understand your salesperson's visions and goals. "Once you know the key to a salesperson's heart," Duncan says, "you can communicate positively via technology by sending memos of encouragement and letters of help."