

# ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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# FIRST THINGS FIRST

- Introduction
- What I'm going to talk about
- What I'm *not* going to talk about

# BASIC RULES TO REMEMBER

- Everything can be forwarded
- Everything will be judged
- The message must stand on its own



# AVOID CASUAL WRITING

- OMG, LOL!
- WTF?
- U2
- IDK
- YMMV
- BRB
- IMHO
- TMI!



# MINIMIZE ACRONYMS AND JARGON

- ROI
- TAT
- BOA
- DBA
- POC
- ETC.
- High barrier to entry
- Potential for confusion/delay/expense



# AVOID VAGUENESS

- Kind of/sort of
- Pretty
- Like
- Could of
- Many
- Most
- Some
- ...unless you're being intentionally vague



# OTHER ISSUES

- Unnecessary wordiness
- Sexist language
- Be cautious with humor
- Obviously:
  - Avoid racism, classism, ageism, and other prejudices



# IDENTIFY YOUR ISSUES

- Basic grammar and punctuation
- Repeated phrases
- Forgotten attachments
- Accidental reply-all
- Hostility
- Impatience
- Etc.





# TECHNIQUES

- Re-read; read aloud
- Drafts
- Trusted reader
- Checklists
- Remove address
- Start with attachment



# DETAILS MATTER

- U.S. tariff act of 6 June 1872
  - Single misplaced comma, cost US Government about \$1 million
- Rogers/Aliant contract termination in Canada
  - Single misplaced comma, multiple expensive court battles
- Lockheed Martin sales contract
  - Misplaced comma cost \$70 million



# CONFIRM VERBAL AGREEMENTS

- Follow-up e-mails
- Responsibility
- Dates
- Details
- SCOPE



# SAMPLE CONFIRMATION E-MAIL

I am writing to confirm our arrangements for our annual meeting, to be held on May 17-19, 2013 at the Crowne Plaza at 919 N. 77<sup>th</sup> St, Seattle, WA. As we discussed, we would like to reserve a block of fifty guest rooms for the two nights that the meeting will encompass. In addition, we will require use of the auditorium, as well as three large meeting rooms (minimum capacity, 40 people) for each of the three days of the meeting, from 9am to 5pm each day. We will need an additional ninety minutes for packing up at the end of each day.

Please confirm your receipt of this e-mail and let me know right away if any of this does not match your understanding.

# UNDERSTANDING OTHERS' LIMITATIONS

- Technological
- Habitual
- Temporal
- Etcetera



# THE IMPORTANCE OF COUNTING

- Count to...
  - 10
  - 100
  - 1000
  - More?



# ANGRY PEOPLE

- Usually easy to disarm
  - “I’m sorry”
  - “Let me fix that”
  - Listen
  - Validation
  - Empathy
  - Solutions, not excuses
  - (Good) reasons are good
  - → But don’t start there



# THE HIGH ROAD

Nothing gives one  
person so much  
advantage over another  
as to remain always  
cool and unruffled  
under all circumstances.

-Thomas Jefferson



# APOLOGIES

- Offer them
- Mean them
- No weaseling
- Don't overdo
- <Legal disclaimer>



# EUGENE TRANI STATEMENT

I have spent the last 18 years trying to help raise the value of a VCU diploma. And I am told, over and over, by our graduates, that in fact, that has happened. Therefore, any instance in which that value of the VCU diploma is under question is of enormous concern to me.

Because I was named in the anonymous allegation in regard to the awarding of an undergraduate degree to then Richmond City Police Chief Rodney Monroe, it was necessary for the Board of Visitors to oversee an investigation of the allegations, and I know the Board is satisfied that a comprehensive and professional investigation has taken place.

Of course, I had no involvement whatsoever in the matter of the awarding of the degree, other than expressing my view that the possibility of Chief Monroe completing his degree at VCU was a great idea. While I am satisfied that the investigation found no involvement on my part, I am also now more aware than ever that an enthusiastic, energetic President with lots of ideas may, however inadvertently, impact the behavior of others. Yet, people should know that I expect them to implement ideas within the boundaries of university policies.

# TRANI STATEMENT

Although the findings of the investigation reveal lapses in judgment both in the original events and in terms of cooperation with the investigation, the findings also reveal, very importantly, that our overall degree-granting policies and procedures are sound and well administered. This instance was an isolated one. That in no way diminishes the seriousness of the matter, but should give the Board, the public and our accrediting agency confidence in the overall integrity of our degrees.

The Board has charged the administration with responding appropriately and forcefully to the issues, and it will be done with the full involvement of the Provost, as these are academic and academic personnel matters.

As President I accept that this happened on my watch. Even a single instance that calls into question the integrity of our degrees is too many. Ultimately I am responsible for setting the moral tone at VCU, and I intend to do so with even greater clarity and purpose.

# REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE

Subject: **hello everyone**

hi my name charlotte would like to have more insite about forensic science.

currently pursuing information systems sciences in college.

want to work as an invesigator in forensics.

help me out.

this is ma email address

[cutylipsy@...](mailto:cutylipsy@...)

# THE RESPONSES

- “Communicating with professionals requires a different style than chatting with your friends - it requires professionalism. This means using complete sentences, proper capitalization, spelling and grammar, and professional etiquette (i.e., manners - when asking for assistance, politely request it, don't demand it).
- “Also, for your own good, please don't ever correspond with your university's administration or any potential employer with your current e-mail address/screen name, as it will not be well received and you will not make a good impression.”

# MORE RESPONSES

- “If there is one common thread that I have heard from laboratory supervisors, managers, executives, commanders, wardens, police chiefs, and administrators, it is this sort of a quote: ‘Send me somebody that can WRITE! I can train them to do almost anything else, but I don't have the time to train them how to read and write!’”
- “I must tell you that this is serious business and that sloppy and/or non-literate writing will prevent a person, no matter how well qualified, from getting a job, a promotion, or a good personnel evaluation. I have seen this happen often.”

# TECH SUPPORT

Meriah,

Company X does not presently have nor have we in the past had any site licenses for Adobe Acrobat Pro, nor is there any way to recover such licenses from an installed system. If your department kept track of license keys, we might have a prayer, but I somehow doubt that's the case. As such, you'll have to speak to Bob and/or Suzie about ordering a new license. I'll be glad to provide a quote, if necessary.

As for the driver, there is no guarantee that this particular model will even be issued as one of the standard models, so any issues about drivers will need to be addressed once the standard models are chosen. Should your unit become a standard model, I'll ensure that a thorough testing is done before any wide-scale deployment. Dr. Spock will likely be in charge of that model selection process, with whomever else he designates.

For wireless networking, your best bet is to call helpdesk at (804) 222-2222. They can offer on-demand assistance with the recent changes to networking. Though I can set an appointment with you to have a look at it, I'm booked for the next few days at least.

Jack Black

# SCENARIO 1

You received a shipment of purple sparkly widgets from Wacky Widgets, Inc., and they are the wrong size. You ordered extra-huge and they sent petite. You get a copy of the order, number 10314, showing the correct size, and speak on the phone with Bob Boron at Wacky Widgets. You want them to ship the correct widgets overnight at their expense because you must have them by Friday for a conference, but Bob refuses, saying it's not their fault you didn't order earlier.

What should you do?

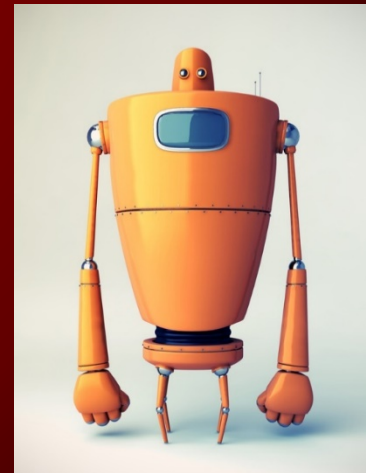




## SCENARIO 2

You received a shipment of orange sparkly widgets from Wacky Widgets, Inc., and they are the wrong size. You wanted extra-huge and they sent petite. You get a copy of the order, number 10314, and you realize you ordered the wrong size. You must have the correct widgets by Friday for a convention, but there's no budget for extra shipping or product.

What should you do?



# THE POWER OF THANK YOU

- Extraordinary service
- Great attitude
- Help when you needed it
- Send thanks to their boss
- (Make sure they didn't help by breaking the rules!)



# RESOURCES

- Grammar exercises:  
<http://www.chompchomp.com/exercises.htm>
- Handling complaints  
<http://www.slideshare.net/jeanet10/customer-complaints-management-system>
- Being persuasive – click through to videos  
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonnazar/2013/03/26/the-21-principles-of-persuasion/>
- Responding to complaint letters  
<http://www2.elc.polyu.edu.hk/cill/eiw/adjustmentletters.htm>
- And...google.com

# FINAL THOUGHTS

- Strive for continual improvement
- Learn from every mistake
- You'll never regret taking the high road
- Take your time
- Measure twice, cut once

