

HYBRID WORK NORMS TOOLKIT



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Email

The Audience

Hierarchy may matter. In certain corporate cultures, people can read a lot into where they're placed in the order of recipients. Think of the To, Cc, and Bcc lines as the old-school order you would sit in a meeting or at the family dinner table. The boss goes at the head, and everyone else falls in line after that depending on their importance.

Mirror the culture. In general, this channel is the appropriate one for the more formal digital communications in your workplace. If you work in a staid, conservative culture, remember to include the appropriate formal greetings, closings, and signatures. If you work in a more informal culture, use your best judgement but make sure to mirror the formality of the other party appropriately.

Do: Dear Mr. Robinson, Sincerely, Erica Dhawan, CEO

Don't: Mr. Robinson, Erica

The Timing

Email is getting faster. A 2015 study by the USC Viterbi School of Engineering found that 50% of email responses were sent within an hour. For those between the ages of 20 and 35, that number went down to a mere 16 minutes. Participants between ages 35 and 50 typically answered within 24 minutes; and those above the age of 50 took about 47 minutes to reply. In the time since that study, I would argue that we are only getting faster. More of us are responding using our mobile phones, leading to a halved response time.

Value others with a "read receipt." Because email is becoming a faster paced channel, try to let the other party know if you've received their email but need more than a few hours to respond. It's better to reply with a quick "Got it! I'll get back to you by Tuesday," than to leave the recipient waiting and potentially getting anxious or feeling disrespected.

The Structure

Use the subject line to set the tone. Leaving it blank is a wasted opportunity. In addition, it can be interpreted as informal and maybe even disrespectful, especially by an older recipient. Consider this: how do email marketers get you to click on their message? Why do you click on a specific marketing or ad email over the flurry of other emails flooding your inbox? Hint: it's the catchy subject line that draws you in. At work, you're marketing yourself. You want others to prioritize your requests. Think like a marketer selling those requests, starting with a specific and action-oriented subject line.

Do: Roadside Inc Project Report Final Edits / Review by EOD 4/10

Don't: Project Report

Be direct. There's no need to restate the subject line right away, but skip the pleasantries. For the most part, business emails don't necessitate asking questions like, "How's your day?" or wondering how the kids are doing. Get to the point.

Proofread for clarity, not just grammar. Just because you're writing to coworkers who see you every day doesn't mean they will automatically understand you. Don't be cryptic. Reread your email and ask yourself, If I wasn't in my own head, would I understand my message? This can be a difficult skill to develop, so ask for feedback from the receiver or another proofreader and take note of when your recipient responds with something other than what you wanted or asks for clarification.

Do: Let's remove the last page and reduce the total number of pages to 20

Don't: This document is too long

Pro Tips

- 1) Use "Reply All" sparingly. Generally, this is only necessary if it's a one-time team announcement or notification.
- 2) Clear the deck. If your email chain has gone on for more than three or four rounds of back-and-forth, your entire subject line is likely now a row of Re: and Fwd:. Replace those with a relevant, concise, action-oriented subject line for the email you're about to send.
- 3) Avoid anxiety-inducing subject lines like "Please call me" or "See CEO in his office." They're the workplace equivalent of "we need to talk" and are never necessary. This is not what we mean by "action-oriented." Brief does not mean lacking context.
- 4) If you need to add a link, embed it into text by highlighting the relevant words and using the Insert Link function available in most popular email programs. If your company works on an internal server, you can highlight the location of a document and embed that into the text in the same way.

When should an email conversation switch to a different medium?

Emails longer than 5 sentences tend to get skimmed over! For more complex topics and assignments, either opt for a phone call or meeting or make sure you're using bullet points, bold and italic text, and highlighting the action points at the close of the email. Do I or the other person need more context outside of email? If so, then the discussion requires a face-to-face or phone meeting.

Text and Instant Messaging

The Audience

It's casual. In general, your audience for these channels should be informal. The shorthand, emojis, and exaggerated punctuation we use to create tone in texts and IMs are not generally appropriate for formal discussions. In a professional setting, try to write in complete sentences, but don't feel the need to write out every word. Common abbreviations are okay.

The Timing

These channels are meant to be, you guessed it, instant. For the most part, responses are expected within the hour, although most come within 3 minutes or less! If you receive a text during a meeting and are unable to respond within that hour-long timeframe, it's best to let the recipient know the reason for the delay in your response. It may seem unnecessary, but it can help to diffuse any anger or annoyance that started to develop as they waited for a response.

Create boundaries. Unfortunately, the instant nature of these channels can be misleading. People are often tempted to use text and IM outside of work hours and still expect a quick response. It's perfectly reasonable to set boundaries if you wish to do so. If it's the first time, respond to the off-hour text with a quick message alerting the sender to the fact that you won't be responding until work hours. That way, you show that you received the message while avoiding frantic follow-ups and sticking to your own boundaries.

The Structure

Less structure is better. Because these are informal channels, there is no reason to include a subject line, formal greeting, or signature. Doing so demands an awkward increase in formality that has no place in this shorthand medium.

*Do: Hey, so nice to connect! Just wanted to shoot you a text so that you have my number.
- Erica*

Don't: Hello Stephanie, This is Erica. We met at the 2020 World Leadership Conference Dinner. I enjoyed connecting with you! Here is my phone number. Best, Erica

Choose your shorthand wisely. Only use abbreviations that are widely known and that you would say aloud. For example, "LMFAO" is widely known, but you probably wouldn't say that aloud in a professional context. On the other hand, "np" (no problem) is both widely known and something that you could say in the office.

Do: np, talk soon

Don't: LMFAO ya sure man, cya

Get to the point. Even more so than emails, texts and instant messages should only be used for information that doesn't necessitate an in-person conversation or a phone call. Keep texts to 2-3 sentences max.

Do: Hey Erica, are you available to meet to discuss a new project this week? Would anytime Tuesday and Thursday 1-5pm work for a 30 min call?

Don't: Dear Erica, How have you been? I'm starting a new project around collaboration in our office and thought of you. I would love to catch up.

Pro Tips

- 1) Create a standard acronym list for common phrases. (NNTR = no need to respond; SOS = urgent)
- 2) Don't send confidential information via text and IM! Remember even encrypted texts can be recorded by a screenshot.

When should a text or IM conversation switch to a different medium?

1. Don't text or IM someone "hey, do you have a minute" and then go on to explain an entire task in a follow-up paragraph. In that case, just call them.
2. If it's enough of an emergency to warrant a text outside of reasonable work hours (7am-7pm), it probably warrants a phone call. If it doesn't, it can wait.
3. If you need a record of the conversation, switch to email.

Hybrid Meetings

The Audience

Recognize the dynamic. It can be difficult to engage colleagues both in a room and those coming in on a screen or on a phone line. In a hybrid meeting, if you have 10 people in-person and 2 people attending virtually, the dynamic is going to benefit the in-person group. On the other hand, if you have 2 people in-person and 12 people attending virtually, the remote group is going to naturally benefit. Be cognizant of the dynamic and adjust your interactions so that everyone is engaged.

Align and communicate your needs. Everyone's schedules have changed and they have new norms in their professional and personal lives. Understand what those norms are and plan your team work around these commitments for both in-person and virtual work. If you need the daily 15-minute touchpoint at 10am ET instead of 4pm ET because you are picking your kids up from school, make that known!

The Timing

Keep it short and sweet. We've all been in meetings that could have been emails, had too many people, or commuted to be in person when it could have been done virtually. If a meeting is by default 30 minutes long, but it can be done efficiently in 10 minutes, make it happen. Show respect for everyone's schedules and use their time effectively. Productive hybrid meetings have a predetermined time frame and also a predetermined number of ideas that each member will bring.

Do: Ask your team to bring 3 solutions to a hybrid meeting that will be capped at 60-minutes.

Don't: Schedule a 3-hour hybrid meeting and forget to send out an agenda that your team can use to prepare.

The Structure

Break the ice. Depending on the meeting length, consider spending the first five minutes in breakout rooms or in smaller groups, or asking a question in the chat that gets everybody warmed up for the day. For instance, put in the chat, 'What did you do over the weekend?' Or 'what does success look like for you today?' Or 'what's your win of the week?' Studies show that people are much, much more likely to participate if they have participated in the first 5% of a meeting. With this, you're creating a norm for openness ahead of time and not just hoping for a positive result.

Choose facilitators. When running hybrid meetings, have a virtual host and an in-person host and have them co-facilitate the meeting to remove potential disengagement of remote attendees. Proximity bias is a real challenge that we must fight to engage all colleagues.

Require that all participants be on camera. The camera gives us back some of the body language cues that are usually stripped from digital communication. It also allows your team members to see that everyone is fully engaged in the conversation. If you're scrolling Instagram or having a snack, everyone in the room can see you. For remote employees, make sure the camera is pointed to the in-person attendees, so they can see the body language of their peers in the office.

Pro Tips

- 1) Test your technology. Especially if you haven't used it in more than a few days, open your software before the scheduled time and test both your video and microphone quality. This will save the entire team time and will allow you to skip the "CAN YOU HEAR ME?" section of the schedule.
- 2) Use the virtual chat tool during a hybrid meeting for everyone to brainstorm ideas and write them down before you discuss as a group. Be willing to try hybrid brainstorming in new mediums, such as Microsoft Teams or a whiteboard app like Mural.
- 3) Slow down. Practice the 5-second rule and wait 5 seconds before speaking after you ask a question. This gap allows your team to process and accounts for the few seconds that an individual may wonder "Is someone else going to speak up first?" before speaking up themselves.
- 4) Call on those you haven't heard from or who are remote first to speak up and share their ideas. Otherwise, the same people who feel comfortable will talk and the people who don't, won't.
- 5) Rate your meetings and always ask: What went well? What could be improved? Have champions who are assessing what works and what needs to be refined.

When should a hybrid meeting switch to a different medium?

Just like in-person meetings or virtual video calls, ask yourself the 5 P's and cut out any hybrid meetings that don't have a clear purpose or are missing a key factor for success

Purpose: Does the meeting have a clearly defined purpose?

Participants: Are all of the relevant parties (and only the relevant parties) invited and able to attend?

Probable Issues: What are the concerns that could likely arise?

Product: What do we want to have produced when we are done?

Process: What steps should we take during the meeting to achieve the purpose, given the product desired and potential issues we may face?

Checklist

Value Visibly

- Do we feel our time is respected?
 - Do we feel like our best work is acknowledged and celebrated?
 - Do we feel comfortable voicing concerns?
-

Communicate Carefully

- Do we feel there is a common understanding of priorities and next steps?
 - Do we have a clear understanding of which channels to use and when?
 - Do we have clear language and word choice to foster understanding?
-

Collaborate Confidently

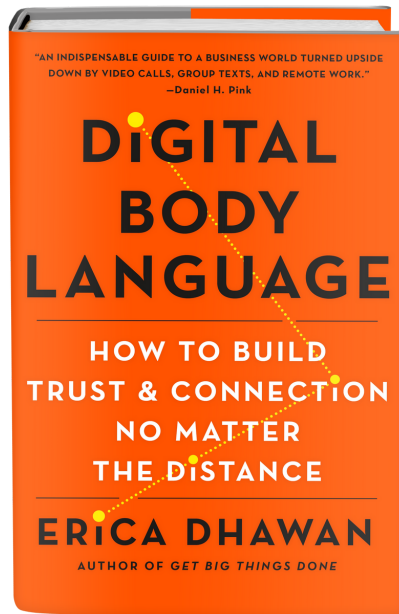
- Do all of the appropriate stakeholders feel identified and aligned?
 - Do we feel that the correct people are informed? And are they cascading the messages appropriately?
 - Do we feel there is consistency in communications across teams?
-

Trust Totally

- Do we give each other the benefit of the doubt when facing uncertainty?
 - Do we show vulnerability?
 - Do we create moments for informal social connections?
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About the Author

Erica Dhawan is an internationally recognized leading authority, speaker and advisor on 21st century teamwork, collaboration and innovation.



When leaders want to break team silos, drive exponential growth and innovate through team work, they call Erica Dhawan.

Named as one of the top 50 management thinkers in the world by Thinkers 50, she is the author of two best selling books, *Get Big Things Done: The Power of Connectional Intelligence* and *Digital Body Language: How to Build Trust and Connection, No Matter the Distance*.

As we continue to experience an increasingly digital world where work practices are changing at a blistering pace, Erica shares innovative strategies to unlock the collective power of teams, build a culture of trust across any distance and create authentic engagement to ensure competitiveness. Rated #1 on the Top Women Keynote Speakers list, Erica frequently appears in the Harvard Business Review, Fast Company, and The Wall Street Journal. Erica speaks on global stages ranging from the World Economic Forum at Davos, to the US Army, to companies such as Coca-Cola, FedEx, GoldmanSachs, Walmart, and Cisco.

She holds degrees from Harvard University, MIT Sloan, and The Wharton School.

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