

# The Language of Reassurance

We are all managing our businesses as best we can in a rapidly evolving crisis. In this environment it has become ever more important to communicate reassurance to your customers, colleagues and business partners. We have recently delivered a range of workshops online on how to effectively give reassurance and a sense of business continuity in email communications. From these workshops we have generated 10 principles that can help inform good email practice in these exceptional circumstances.

## **Principle 1: Making small changes to communicate empathy and compassion**

In the past we have talked a lot about the *email sandwich*. The idea that in more formal email writing you should have a layer of politesse - the bread before getting to the point of the message – the cheese, ham and tomato. You then need to finish with another layer of politesse to stop it being toast! For example; 'I hope this email finds you well', to start, and 'If you have any further questions, please do contact me', to finish.

We believe that this framework needs to be adapted to communicate greater empathy and compassion in this period of the coronavirus. Simply keeping to the same opening and closing expressions risks coming across as impersonal and mechanical in your business relationships. Just by tweaking a few minor words in your opening and closing expressions you can reset the tone of your email.

**Some examples:**

**Opening:**

- I hope you are well in these difficult/very challenging/exceptional times.
- I hope you and your family are safe and well.
- I hope you are coping ok in this very difficult period.
- Firstly, I hope you are in good health and you and your family are self and well.

**Closing:**

- We would like to reemphasise/highlight we remain available for any questions you may have in these difficult times.
- Please do get in contact with any issues or questions you have in this very challenging period.
- We remain determined to be available for any questions or issues you may have.

**Principle 2: Empathy without being intrusive**

Balancing professional distance with conveying a sense of empathy can require thought and attention. If you are communicating to a good customer but someone who you only know in a professional context avoid going too far in asking intrusive questions about how they are in managing the coronavirus. I have excellent relationships with my clients but I also recognise I don't know them personally and they are looking for me to maintain a calm and professional approach. By simply using some of the phrases in Principle 1 you can communicate that you are thinking of them.

**Principle 3: Business as usual v business continuity.**

I received one email from a supplier which dramatically overplayed

the 'business as usual' messaging. They left me with the impression that they were either not planning realistically for the impact of the coronavirus or playing a cynical game in terms of waiting for the customer to cancel the contract.

Highlighting you are still available for your customers can be done without pretending you can achieve superhuman miracles. In our workshops we concluded that the most powerful way to communicate was to restate a deep commitment to your customer while remaining transparent about the limitations you currently face, for example in working hours or people.

#### **Principle 4: The super calm and professional modal verb 'Would'**

In our discussions we highlighted the impact of expressions using 'would' in communicating reassurance and business continuity to customers. Examples of how to utilize 'would' are provided below.

- We would like to reassure you that we will remain available for any questions you may have.
- We would like to highlight...
- We would like to emphasize...
- We would like to inform you that...

#### **Principle 5: 'We' or 'I'**

A small but important point when communicating reassurance to customers was the use of 'we' or 'I'. Sometimes it is more reassuring if you use 'we' and speak on behalf of the company. This gives your customer the impression that you have the weight of the organisation behind you.

Sometimes it is more effective to use 'I' to highlight your personal commitment and the depth of your personal relationship with a

customer. Make a judgement based on the nature of your relationship, there is not right or wrong approach here.

- We are committed to ensuring a high quality of service in these difficult times.
- I am committed to ensuring a high quality of service in these difficult times.