The Language of Reassurance – Part 2

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.

Last month we 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. Principles 1 to 5 were sent a few weeks back. Please find principles 6 to 10.

Principle 6: Giving thanks/appreciation

Simply saying thank you for a completed action can give warmth to your email exchange. When writing emails in a stressful period, it is too easy not to take the time to give a simple acknowledgement.

Examples:

- Thank you for your contribution to the meeting last week.
- I really appreciated your input into the project proposal.
- Thank you for calling earlier, it was good to speak to you in person.
- I am glad we were able to speak yesterday, it was good to clarify our next steps.
- It was good to meet you yesterday and I look forward too...

Principle 7: Active v passive

Using the passive voice to highlight completed actions, can be a clean and efficient way of communicating. It is often not necessary to know who has done something, just that it has been done. However, when communicating with reassurance to a customer, supplier or colleague the passive voice can appear detached and cold.

Example using the passive: Batch xxx has been received.

Example using the active: We have received batch xxx.

By using the active and starting with the subject the effect is more personal.

Principle 8: Keeping it simple but with empathy

There is a style of email communication which prides itself on being super direct, just focusing on the facts, avoiding any 'waffle'. It is about being a lean, mean email machine!

The principle of 'less is more', saying things in a direct and uncluttered way is the foundation of good email writing. However, this does not mean avoiding any emotion where appropriate. Simple statements communicating empathy can give warmth and reassurance alongside stating the facts.

Examples:

- I am pleased we could find a solution.
- I value your comments on this and will review the...
- I hope I can shed some light on the ....
- I am happy to offer a discount of .... in these circumstances.

- I appreciate your patience/understanding as
  we try and resolve the...
- It felt good to finalise the ....

Principle 9: Don't be afraid to ask questions

As we maintain relationships with customers, suppliers and colleagues avoid being formulaic or mechanical. Imagine you are communicating with a supplier and while you have never met, you have exchanged emails over 100 times. If you simply repeat a stock expression - 'I hope this email finds you well', your contact will get you are going through the motions. It matters in these difficult times that you take some time to 'check in' with a good contact and are not afraid to ask how they are doing.

Examples:

- How are you doing this week?
- Are you doing ok in the circumstances?
- How are your family doing?
- How are you adjusting to homeworking?
- How is your week starting/progressing?

These questions need to be used with care to avoid being too intrusive and are not appropriate for a very formal email.

Principle 10: A shift down in formality

In these difficult times, you can communicate empathy and warm up your email writing style, with small, nuanced changes in moving to a more semi-formal style.

Step 1: Consider using contractions - don't forget v do not forget.

Step 2: Consider using the continuous form in your greetings. I hope you are doing well v I hope you are well.

Step 3: Consider using phrasal verbs as a less formal equivalent to normal verbs. The meeting has been postponed v the meeting has been put back/put off.

We hope this has been helpful and would like to give our thoughts and power to everyone in these difficult times.