“What would you do if I weren’t here?” When employees come to you with problems to solve, resist offering them a solution. Instead, ask, “How would you handle this if I weren’t here today?” Often you’ll hear that the employee could solve the problem after all. And at the very least, his answer will give you a glimpse into his creativity process, or lack thereof.

Don’t let those emails slip through your fingers. If you read an email that requires a task or an action, mark it as “Unread” until you’ve taken care of what needs to be done. That way, it’ll be considered new email each day it lingers, and won’t sneak into your archives to be forgotten.


Take the “Hi” road. There are two types of people: Those who make eye contact, smile and say hello in the hallway, and those who don’t. Think how much more pleasant it is to encounter someone from the former group. Vowing to become a “Hi” person is a major step toward creating a friendlier workplace.

You’re human. You’re entitled to say some obnoxious things now and then. But your employees absorb and weigh your words, and they’ll give you a pass on annoying expressions for only so long. Spew these at your peril:

1. Hold that thought. OK. For how long? Later today? Tomorrow? Or until I forget about it? If an employee has a thought, hear it out. “Hold that thought” is code for “I’m not interested in what you’re about to say.”

2. That’s above my pay grade. Congratulations. You’ve just turned yourself into rank-and-file. You have essentially told an employee that you not only can’t solve the problem, but you’re afraid to poke anyone higher on the totem pole for a solution.

3. Because I pay your salary. Unless you own the company, no, you don’t. The employee knows his pay is not coming from your wallet.

4. I need that yesterday. Now that’s a clever retort when an employee asks, “When do you need it?” The cliché that it is, it’s no longer funny but demeaning to the worker who’s seeking a meaningful deadline. If something is urgent, say so with a brief explanation why.

5. I don’t believe in giving employees a perfect score. This performance review classic is a great way to convey that there’s no point in truly excelling. Your misguided motivational technique will guarantee you’re branded an A+ doofus.

How to shine at a meeting: 4 tips

Stand out with your contributions at meetings. By saying the right thing at the right time in the right way, you will position yourself as a valuable member of the group. People will listen closely when you:

• Don’t state the obvious. Saying what others already are thinking will cause them to pay less attention to you in the future.

• Take notes while others are speaking so you don’t forget to make an important point when it is your turn.

• Speak deliberately. If you rush to make your comments, you run a greater risk of mis-speaking.

• Focus your point. Deliver the bottom line first. If you start by describing how you reached your conclusion, you’ll lose people’s attention. Say your main point and then add detail if needed.


For 7 more turn-off phrases, visit www.CommunicationBriefings.com/jerk.
**Twitter tricks and tips**

With over 500 million tweets sent each day, it’s easy to feel insignificant. So make the best of it. Here are some tips and tricks to get the most out of your 140-character experience.

- **Decide if you are going to “talk” as yourself or as a company.** On Twitter, people prefer to talk to a person, not a company. It is OK to have a company name on the account, but identify yourself in the description.

- **Twitter is great for “driving traffic.”** That means posting a short blurb and getting your audience to click on a link. This makes it ideal for offers, articles, promotions, and more.

- **Research the trending “hashtags” or the topics with a “#” to see what people are talking about and join the conversation.** This will increase both your exposure on Twitter and your follower count.

- **Engage your followers and make sure to follow others as well.** Retweet others’ posts and respond when others send you a message. Twitter is a real-time social media. Those who contact you expect a fast response.

- **Monitor your Twitter account for replies and direct messages.** Often customers will use Twitter as a way to get in touch with customer service. This is a perfect opportunity to quickly resolve issues and increase customer loyalty.

- **Consider posting a link to a press release, and use hashtag “#pr” to attract the attention of journalists.**

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**Kimberly Deas**

Combines her 10+ years’ experience in telecommunications with a background in personal coaching and results-oriented training.

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**Great subject lines to grab readers**

Pique readers’ interest by taking advantage of a buffet of styles in your writing. Choose from among these options for subject lines:

- **“How to.”** Tell your readers which question you will answer or problem you will solve. *Example:* How to capture more customers.

- **Question.** Draw readers in by appealing to their curiosity. *Example:* Are your sales methods out of date?

- **Order.** Tell the audience what to do and what they will gain as a result. *Example:* Use these methods to capture more customers.

- **Number.** Readers love to know in advance how much they will gain after reading a piece. *Example:* 5 ways to capture more customers.

- **Anecdote.** Tell your story through a testimonial. *Example:* “We doubled our customer base in one month.”

- **Tease.** For these headlines to work, you must deliver on the promise. *Example:* The sales method your company must use to survive.

- **Breaking news.** Pretend you are writing a newspaper headline. *Example:* New techniques draw more customers.

- **Straightforward.** Sometimes the direct message is the best. *Example:* Sales methods.

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**Be a smooth operator on the phone**

Connect better with people over the telephone by projecting a caring and enthusiastic image. *Tips:*

- **Check first.** Before you say too much, ask, “Is this a good time for you?” Be willing to call back later if you can have the person’s full attention then.

- **Block distractions.** Turn away from your computer or the open doorway, or close your eyes so you can focus only on what the person is saying.

- **Add energy.** Stand up when you talk and gesture as if you were having a conversation in person. Your enthusiasm will come through.

- **Invite comments.** Ask open-ended questions, and use the word “You” more than “I.”

- **Smile.** It does make a difference in your voice tone, even if the other person can’t see you.

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*Kimberly Deas combines her 10+ years’ experience in telecommunications with a background in personal coaching and results-oriented training.*
Here are four conversation “fillers” that all of us have used at one time or another. They simply have a way of escaping our lips—trouble is, they tend to be used in all the wrong places.

• **“With all due respect ...”** This phrase usually precedes something slightly offensive to or dismissive of the person being spoken to. 
  
  **How to fix it:** If you’re worried about offending someone with what you’re about to say, think of another way to say it.

• **“Does that make sense?”** If you’re actually relaying complex information, the phrase is appropriate. If not, you’re likely using it as a conversation filler, or as a way to engage the listener. The trouble is, it tends to make a speaker sound insecure about his own words, and that he knows he hasn’t put them together well.
  
  **How to fix it:** Substitute with “What are your thoughts on that?”

• **“I hear what you’re saying, but ...”** In any conversation, a speaker wants to be listened to. Hearing this phrase is likely to make him feel less—not more—heard.
  
  **How to fix it:** Show that you heard what he said. Try “So you’re saying ...” Then repeat back his words. Make sure you don’t start your next sentence with the word “But.”

• **“Do you mind some constructive criticism?”** This sentence brands you as a know-it-all and it unfairly leaves the other person with no way to respond but with a grudging “Okay ...”
  
  **How to fix it:** Press the rewind button on this one and erase it. Then just get to the point swiftly.

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**Write better emails to your boss**

Show your boss just how professional and smart you are—and encourage him or her to act on your email message—by following these tips:

• **Time it just right.** Breaking bad news first thing in the morning while the boss is battling traffic likely isn’t wise. Send messages when your boss is ready—or at least able—to process and act on them.

• **Write an informative subject line.** Include the topic of the email and any directives that emphasize that the content is time-sensitive or urgent.
  
  *Example:* “Response requested by 12/14: Safety Meeting Date.”

• **State your purpose in the first sentence.** Your supervisor should immediately know what the email is about and how you need him or her to respond.

  **Keep it short and direct.** Briefly outline your points and attach additional details in a document if you need to provide further information.

  **Don’t use email as a sounding board.** If you need to complain or vent, talk to your boss in person. You never know if your boss will forward your gripes about a co-worker, an employee or another department in an email to others in order to quickly rectify a situation, and your words could get back to the person with whom you are frustrated.


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**Write it right**

**The law of averages**

Consider this sentence: *The average police officer earns $45,000 a year.* What is an average police officer? One who is 5-foot-10 and issues five speeding tickets a day? The *average*, in this case, applies to the number, not the police officer. So the sentence should be: *Police officers earn an average of $45,000 a year.*

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**Say it right**

**Correct thyself**

Use a reflexive pronoun only when you are referring back to another word in your sentence. That is the only time to use *myself*, *himself*, *herself*, *itself*, *themselves*, *ourselves*, *yourself* or *yourselves*.

**Correct:** I will take care of that *myself*.

**Incorrect:** Deliver that report to Susan or *myself*.

**Correct:** Deliver that report to Susan or *me*.

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**Spell it right**

Presto! Now you know when you use your hands to deceive or confuse onlookers, it’s *sleight of hand*, not *slight of hand*.

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**Wise Words**

“Do you know the difference between education and experience? Education is when you read the fine print; experience is what you get when you don’t.” — Pete Seeger, American folk singer
One of the best ways to tell if applicants have the skills to perform specific tasks is to directly ask how they’ve used those skills in the past. These sample questions can help hiring managers spot 11 important “soft” skills:

**Initiative** “Tell me about a time you did more than was required in your job.”

**Decision-making** “Describe a work-related problem you had to face recently. What procedures did you use to deal with it?”

**Communication** “Describe when you had to pitch a proposal. How did you do? Why do you think it went that way?”

**Humility** “Tell us about a time you made a whopper of a work blunder, and had a good laugh about it afterward.”

**Integrity** “Should some rules be obeyed more than others?”

**Leadership** “Describe how you solved someone else’s problem.”

**Persuasiveness** “What was the best idea you’ve ever sold to a superior? How did you do it?”

**Planning** “How do you determine your top priorities?”

**Sales** “What’s the best way to find new prospects?”

**Supervision** “What is the No. 1 thing that distinguishes a superior employee from a typical one?”

**Technical skills** “What is the most important development in your field today? What impact do you think it will have?”


### From a stinging email, enlightenment

About 10 years ago, Jim McCann sent a memo to his technology staff. He wrote about corporate news and some online strategies for the business he founded, 1-800-Flowers.com. Minutes after emailing his memo, he noticed that one of the recipients had already replied. Opening the email, McCann was surprised to see that a newly hired tech employee had sent the memo back to the CEO with reams of corrections.

“He had torn my memo to pieces,” McCann recalls. The employee didn’t just mark up the memo with corrections. He also provided references that McCann might find helpful to gather more information about e-commerce and business opportunities.

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“How dare you?” he thundered as he entered the employee’s office. Initially scared, the employee calmed down when McCann smiled and assured him he was kidding. Then the CEO sat down and said, “Tell me more about this.”

This led to a stimulating conversation in which McCann picked the techie’s brain. They discussed then-new Facebook as a potentially rich business tool. McCann also asked about social networking and how it might affect the company’s sales. He wanted to get a better sense of how the firm’s online reputation could attract more customers.

Over time, McCann involved the employee in many of the company’s initiatives. Thanks to his willingness to seek out the staffer—rather than take offense—McCann wound up a more enlightened leader with a better sense of how to capitalize on social networking.

— Adapted from *Talk Is (Not!) Cheap*, Jim McCann, New Harvest.

### Grammar Slammer

What’s wrong with these sentences?

Correct any punctuation errors in the following sentences. Caution: Some sentences may already be correct, so don’t be fooled.

1. Whenever Dan is in the office, he keeps his door open.

2. Yes, Eloise, you were right.

3. The deadline for applications will be Tuesday, June 20, 2017, and two copies of the application will be required.

4. The deadline for the applications will be the third Tuesday of June 2017. (Correct)

5. He is a brilliant, highly creative author.

6. “Do you understand why Roger was angry,” she asked me?

7. We had insurance but still owed $80 in copayment fees.

**Answers:**

1. Whenever Dan is in the office, he keeps his door open.

2. Yes, Eloise, you were right.

3. The deadline for applications will be Tuesday, June 20, 2017, and two copies of the application will be required.

4. The deadline for the applications will be the third Tuesday of June 2017. (Correct)

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Employee lying? Here are the signs

Pamela Meyer, author of *Liespotting: Proven Techniques to Detect Deception*, says to look for these common tip-offs that someone is lying:

- **His upper body freezes.** When telling a lie, “the cognitive load is huge,” says Meyer. Liars are so focused on telling their rehearsed story, they may freeze their upper body, look down or slow their breathing and blink rate.

- **He doesn’t use contractions.** He’ll say “did not” rather than a more relaxed “didn’t.”

- **He’ll use inappropriate detail, as if he’s trying to prove he’s telling the truth.**

- **His eye contact may feel excessive.** A liar may think that extreme eye contact conveys honesty. People telling the truth only make eye contact a comfortable 60% of the time.

- **He can’t tell the story backward.** Because he has memorized a sequence of events, but has no emotional memory of the events, it’s difficult for a liar to tell his story in reverse order.

3 public speaking myths busted

Here are a few public speaking “rules” you can forget:

- **Memorize everything.** You can have notes; just don’t read them. Instead, fully know your subject matter. Then create an outline, and jot down key words and phrases to jog your memory.

- **Don’t greet your audience.**

  Experts have long suggested that you forgo “Nice to be here” and other pleasantries and choose a powerful introduction. Those first few seconds offer you an opportunity to connect with your audience.

- **Admit you are nervous.** The idea behind the advice is that the audience will empathize with you and forgive your nervous tics and mistakes. However, most of the nerves you feel are internalized and unrecognizable to others. If you say you are nervous, people will look for signs that you are rather than focusing on your talk.

  — Adapted from “Debunking 7 Common Public Speaking Tips That Do More Harm Than Good,” Gary Genard, *Fast Company*.

**Gain the edge in negotiations**

Use the following tips to boost your negotiating power:

- **Emphasize the relationship.** If someone’s demand is too hard to meet, look for a possible compromise that emphasizes your desire to preserve the relationship for the long haul. For example, if a supplier’s quote is high, consider saying: “I’d like to work with you for a long time to come. Of course, this has to work for both of us so I wonder if you could come down 10% for a guaranteed two-year contract? Then I can stay within my budget.”

- **Emphasize mutual interests.** Suppose you’re told to cut your budget 10% across the board. You know it is going to hurt, but it’s a downsizing initiative and every manager is getting the same directive and will have the same complaint. Thus, your negotiation position is very weak. Consider your boss’s goals and motives as carefully as possible. If you can present a compelling case as to how you can meet his or her goals provided you retain the same, or nearly the same, staffing and expense levels, you may be able to trim the cut to something you find more digestible.


*What to Say When ...*

... an employee is chronically tardy

- **Schedule a meeting with the person to openly discuss the issue.** Example: “Lately, your tardiness is becoming a real issue. I saw you come in the building 30 minutes late on Monday and Friday last week. That’s an hour of lost work time.”

- **Discuss the impact on workplace performance in economic terms.** Example: “You make _______ per hour. If you are tardy one hour a week, that is equal to stealing _______ per year from the organization. Also, when you are late, someone else must cover for you. That’s unfair and unacceptable.”

- **Allow the person to explain, but don’t accept excuses.** If the person blames traffic or child care issues, for example, ask him or her to provide you with a plan for correcting the issue so that the problem doesn’t continue.

- **Set expectations and gain agreement.** Example: “I expect you to be here at 8:30 a.m., no later, going forward. Will you agree to that?” If the person won’t agree, let him or her know what disciplinary measures you will take, such as docking pay or even termination. Then stick to your word.


**Online resource**

Having trouble getting employees to show up on time every day? If so, check out “Managing Employees With Attendance Problems” at www.CommunicationBriefings.com/attendance.
Rumors rampant?
You can control them

What’s something everyone does and is nearly impossible to stop?

The answer: Gossip! Just because there is nothing you can do to completely eliminate it from your workplace doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do a thing about it.

On the contrary, managers can and should take steps to combat the toxic gossip and rumors that circulate in the workplace.

Why? At best, gossip saps morale. At worst, it can spawn a costly lawsuit.

Take these steps to control the rumor mill in your company.

1. Pump as much accurate information as possible into informal channels of communication, using spontaneous meetings, lunches and even social events to get the company’s messages out to its workers.

2. Provide employees with clear and honest communication, even if the news is negative.

3. Use formal methods of communication—newsletters, memos, bulletin boards—to spread information. Copy appropriate manager information to give to an entire department.

4. Let employees know that they have a place to go with concerns and questions, so they will not turn to the company grapevine for information.

Don’t offer employees that unsavory feedback ‘sandwich’

Many managers have been taught to “sandwich” constructive criticism between two positive statements.

Example: “Barb, you are a wonderful communicator, but the last three meetings you’ve dominated the conversation and even interrupted others while speaking. I’d appreciate you being more aware and giving others a chance to contribute.”

“And by the way, your recent report outlining team goals was well-written.”

I think this is a distasteful way of delivering feedback, and here’s why:

1. “But” is an eraser word. We all have been taught that anything that follows the word “but” negates everything said prior. The positive information gets discounted.

2. The message doesn’t sound sincere. Since too many of us are familiar with this technique, it screams technique, which lowers trust and believability.

3. It destroys the truth behind the positive messages. Most of us walk away from the “sandwiched” approach only hearing the critical feedback.

We focus on the meat and completely miss the positive messages. It’s better to save the bread for another time to reinforce someone’s talents.

What to do instead?

1. Share the specific event, behavior or performance that concerns you.

2. Explain how this creates a challenge.

3. Ask for the desired behavior change.

4. Be supportive and listen. In the above example, you would simply say, “Barb, the past three team meetings I’ve noticed you spoke the majority of the time and interrupted others. Others end up not contributing and we could be losing out on some great input. During our meeting later today, I’d like you to be more aware of your communication style and allow others the floor. I still want your input today. The team needs you and values your contribution. Can I support you in this in any way?”

You may think, “Hey, that was just an open-faced sandwich!” It was a sincere way to help Barb understand that she is valued. And the comment is also specific to the issue at hand.

Since too many of us are familiar with this technique, it screams technique, which lowers trust and believability.

Guest Speaker

Don’t offer employees that unsavory feedback ‘sandwich’

Colette Carlson

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Craft a great LinkedIn message

Just because you’re networking online doesn’t mean it’s OK to throw basic etiquette out the window.

Learn to write LinkedIn messages that people will want to read with these tips from Sara McCord, a columnist for The Daily Muse.

- **Get clear before you compose.** How do you know this person? How are you going to frame the context of your connection with her? What would you like to come out of this connection?
- **Be as specific as possible in the subject line.** For example, “Following up from yesterday’s conference,” or “Fellow consultant interested in new technology.” Use the subject line to establish a meaningful connection.
- **Make an introduction.** In the first paragraph of any message you send, make sure to provide a brief description of who you are and how you know the recipient.
- **Cut to the chase.** Use your second paragraph to get to the bare bones of why you want to be connected. **Think:** What is it about this person that makes you want to connect with her?

Reprimanding: Do it right

Sometimes, you’ve got to pull an employee aside and straighten him or her out. Here are four tips to do it right:

1. **Don’t smile.** Smiling indicates approval, and you are talking about performance that doesn’t win that approval.
2. **Don’t “pile on.”** That is, don’t save up all your complaints for one session. Reprimand as soon as possible for each problem, one at a time.
3. **Be specific.** Tell the employee what he did wrong—what you observed and how that differs from what you expect. Give him a chance to clarify, but don’t accept flimsy excuses.
4. **Put the reprimand in perspective.** You’re reprimanding the employee for a specific action in a specific situation, not for being a bad worker in general.

It’s because you value his work and talents that you’re investing the energy in trying to correct his performance.

Tips to spice up your writing

Business writing doesn’t necessarily mean boring. Before hitting “send” on your correspondence, review it and put some oomph in it. Use these editing tricks:

- **Search and destroy.** Replace lazy verbs, such as “have” and “get,” with stronger, punchier verbs. **Example:** Instead of “We have 20 new employees,” write “We welcomed 20 new employees this year.”

- **Go noun hunting.** Next, look for verbs that you’ve turned into nouns. **Examples:** Instead of “Develop a full understanding of . . . ,” write “Understand fully.” Instead of “Provide an explanation,” write “Explain.”

- **Wipe out “to be.”** Eliminate forms of “to be” that dilute your verbs. **Example:** Instead of “The team was debating the proposals,” write “The team debated proposals.”

- **Stay active.** Avoiding the passive voice also slices weak constructions from your sentences. Instead of “The agenda was approved by the board,” write “The board approved the agenda.”
Manage remote workers: 5 tips

Being part of a remote team can be difficult for even the most skilled administrators. Success in this role requires clear and effective communication, strong organizational skills and a culture of accountability.

We reached out to companies with remote staffs to get some of their best advice for assisting remote teams. Here’s what they had to say.

1. **Spend some time together.** The only way to really know your remote team is to spend some time with them, says Veselin Stoilov, owner and CEO of StivaSoft, a Web development company. Spending time with team members will help you better understand your co-workers’ idiosyncrasies.

2. **Be patient.** “You will often find that even with today’s technological tools, it will take you more time to explain something to your remote team than to the people who stand next to you,” Stoilov says. “Be prepared for that and give it enough time.”

3. **Create a virtual watercooler.** Develop a virtual working environment that mimics a traditional office and keeps everyone in touch with one another by setting up a virtual watercooler to serve as the team’s hub, suggests Carrie McKeegan, co-founder of Greenback Tax Services. Find tools to keep your team talking and give them a space to collaborate, share information and talk about best practices and how-to’s.

4. **Recognize work well done.** “Frequent recognition is critical,” McKeegan says. “Make time to recognize excellent work and to share testimonials and satisfactory feedback you receive from clients or customers with the team.”

5. **Use communication to build trust.** “Make an effort to constantly stay in touch and to create a level of trust based on expectations that you and your team feel accountable to,” says Craig Wolfe, president of toy company CelebriDucks. “Everyone must clearly understand what is expected of them. In the end, you have to treat your remote co-workers the same as any co-worker in your immediate vicinity. That means a high level of respect, understanding and clear communication.”

How do I stop an office pest?

_Q: “For three years, I have been stuck with an irritating co-worker who loves to aggravate me. Although I try to hold my tongue, I can’t seem to stop myself from responding to her personal digs. I’ve told her numerous times to leave me alone, but to no avail. “My boss says I’m too sensitive and that I should just ‘suck it up.’ I tried complaining to Human Resources, but they were no help. Quitting my job isn’t possible, so what can I do?” – Harassed_

_A: Actually, you seem to have answered your own question. You can’t quit, go to HR or seek help from your boss. You’ve already tried asking her to stop, and you certainly can’t change her annoying personality. The only remaining option seems to be learning to live with her.

The secret to tolerating pesky co-workers is emotional detachment. As long as you provide the reaction she is hoping for, this woman will continue to provoke you. But if you can convince yourself that her words have no importance, you will immediately take away her power.

Marie McIntyre, Ph.D., a nationally syndicated workplace columnist, writes the “Your Office Coach” blog at [www. CommunicationBriefings.com](http://www. CommunicationBriefings.com).