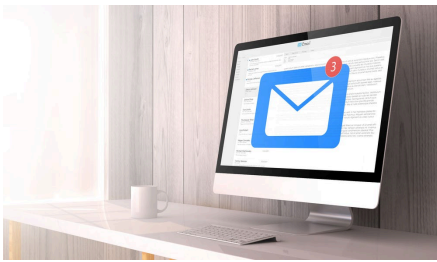


Leadership Barometer 168 The 30 Second Email Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD



Can you read that email in 30 seconds or less?

You know how it feels. You are grazing your bloated inbox, and you see the name, Sam Jones. You cringe. Having waded through his prior tomes, you know the routine.

Opening this e-mail will tie you up for at least 15 minutes trying to get the message. Sam writes really l-o-n-g notes and rarely uses paragraph breaks. He does not capitalize the start of sentences, so his writing is hard to decode. You pause and pass the note because there is just not enough time to deal with the hassle.

Don't be a Sam Jones! Follow these seven simple rules, and people will appreciate your e-mail communications.

- 1. Make it easy on the reader.** Have a well-formatted and short note that deals with a single topic in a compressed format. Don't ramble!
- 2. Don't go "over the horizon."** Try to have the majority of your notes fit into the first window of a note. The reader can see the start of your signature block at the bottom of the opening window. He knows that is all there is to the note. That is a psychological lift that puts the reader in a better frame of mind to absorb your meaning. When the text goes beyond the first page, the reader has no way to know the total length. This is a psychological burden that frustrates the reader subconsciously.
- 3. Aim for 15 to 30 seconds.** Try to have the email compressed enough that the recipients can read it in less than a half minute. They will remember it much more than one that takes 5 minutes to read.
- 4. Use bullet points.** Short, punchy bullets are easier to read than long complex sentences.
- 5. Highlight expected actions.** Delineate action items in a way that is not offensive. Do not use all caps. Sometimes bold text works, but I find it best to have a separate line like this:
Action: Please get me your draft report by Friday.

6. Be polite. Start with a friendly greeting and end with respect but not long or trite quotations.

7. Sometimes the Subject can be the whole note. In this case, use EOM (End Of Message) to designate there is no note to open at all. It looks like this:

Subject: The Binford celebration is Wednesday 3 pm. EOM

If you follow these simple seven rules, people will pay more attention to your emails. You will improve the hit rate of your communications. Not all notes can follow all of these rules but most can. Make sure the majority of your emails follow these rules.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations