

5 Business Communication Etiquette Pet Peeves

A few years ago, my colleague wrote a [pithy blog on etiquette](#). In it, she provided tips for how lawyers can brush up on their table manners to ensure they do not embarrass themselves in business settings.



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Like our table manners, our communication etiquette sometimes needs attention, too. After all, good relationships begin with good communication. As a communications professional, here are my five biggest communication pet peeves:

1. **Email signatures:** It is a best practice to include your telephone number in your email signature, even on the reply. (Read some great advice from Fast Company, [here](#)). In this day and age, a majority of our business is conducted without ever hearing someone's voice. Sometimes, though, actual talking is the best way to communicate, and it is terribly frustrating to have to go digging through old emails, files and even paper notebooks to find a phone number. If your law firm doesn't already have a standard email signature protocol, now is the time to institute it. Use it as a way to market your law firm, being mindful not to overwhelm readers with too many ways to reach you. If you are including a graphic, make sure recipients can view it on a mobile device, and that it does not make an email too large to open. Your clients will thank you!
2. **Grammar:** They're/their, who's/whose, you're/your, it's/its. Learn it, live it, love it. Sure, we all can make mistakes when using our smartphones and blame them on autocorrect, but there are some basic grammar rules that we as legal marketers should know. (*PR Daily* put together a great list of some cringe-worthy mistakes to avoid, [here](#).) In addition, also try to tighten up your sentences. For example, "I thought I would connect with Jane to discuss," can be rewritten as "I am going to call Jane to discuss," or "Jane and I are going to discuss." To put it concisely, be direct.
3. **Limit the word "just":** In the spirit of being direct, I want to share my dislike of the word "just." Improper use of the word often [weakens](#) what you are communicating and implies an unspoken apology. I am certainly guilty of using it, but am consciously trying to eliminate it from my vocabulary. For example, "I am just following up" suggests that I am sorry to bother you, but have something that I think is important to say. "I just have to say" implies that what you have to say is somehow a side note. Try eliminating the word "just" when you are asking someone to do something for you as well. "Can you justâ" minimizes a person's contributions. Try to see how many times you use the word "just" in a day, and see if eliminating it helps you become a stronger communicator.
4. **At your earliest convenience:** Be careful with this term because, when used the wrong

way, it makes you seem lazy and unengaged. It is perfectly fine to ask someone to respond at *their* earliest convenience, but how do you feel when I tell you that I will call you back at *my* earliest convenience? Probably like I will get to you after I drink my coffee and check social media. For most law firm marketers, your "clients" are the attorneys in your firm. They are your most important asset. Make them feel that way, and avoid telling them that you will do something when it is convenient for you. Try "as soon as possible" instead. It feels much better!

5. **Emphasize sparingly:** When I receive an email that is filled with bold, underlined and all-caps words, I FEEL LIKE I AM BEING YELLED AT, and that **whatever isn't emphasized probably isn't important!** Think about what you are emphasizing. Is it really crucial? As a general rule of thumb, focus on headers and deadlines to make sure that all of the content of your email is properly read and understood. Then think about using the signature at the bottom of the email to give the person a way to call to confirm.

Have your own law firm communication pet peeves? Leave a comment below.