Emotionally Intelligent Emailing

Email is one of the most common and frequent ways we communicate with workers, and its use continues to expand. For many workplaces, emailing is a necessary part of the job. Although emailing can be an easy and efficient way to deliver information to workers, there is the potential risk of messages becoming “lost in translation”, since there is no accompanying non-verbal communication to give clues about the meaning.

Here a few tips for emotionally intelligent emailing:

- **Avoid misinterpretations**: Be aware that emails can easily be misinterpreted due to the absence of non-verbal messaging cues (e.g., tone of voice, facial expression, body language). There are a great range of interpretations that we can read into an email (e.g., the underlying tone and nuance of the email message). When writing about sensitive topics, try to envision the perspective of the recipient, and imagine how they will perceive the message. If you’re unsure about possible misinterpretations of your message, ask someone for an additional perspective before sending the email.

- **Know the limits of written humour**: The recipient of an email can’t see your grin or hear your laugh when you mean something to be funny. To avoid misunderstanding in these cases, let the recipient know that you’re not serious by adding “grin”, “LOL” or a smiley face icon after the comment (if this is appropriate in your workplace).

- **Don’t overuse email – know when it’s better to talk in person**: Avoid using email for sensitive or complex topics. When an online exchange is becoming too emotional, too significant, or simply too difficult, it may be better to pick up the phone or talk in person.

- **Be careful with confidential content**: Always ask yourself whether the content may be too confidential to send by email, remembering that messages can get lost or be intercepted by hackers. Also keep in mind that a range of people (e.g., supervisor, co-workers, family members) might also have access to the intended recipient’s email.

- **Be aware of the “disinhibition effect”**: When communicating online, we tend to experience a disinhibition effect. Without having the other person there in person, we may not worry as much about their response. For this reason, it can be easier to offend someone online than in person. Before clicking “send”, always ask yourself if you would have the courage to say the same things face-to-face.

- **Never send an email in anger**: When we’re angry, we’re generally much less able to think clearly and act appropriately. It is a good idea, therefore, to calm yourself down before you send an email. You can save your email as a draft and read it again later. Once your emotions are settled, you’ll be in a much better state to evaluate your message and edit it if necessary.