Business Emails that Work

Two emails—and no more popcorn!

From: Becker, Bob [Carnival Cruise Lines]
Sent: Wednesday, February 18, 2004
Subject: No Popcorn

Attention all: I have nothing against Orville Redenbacher. The reason for no popcorn is that 60% of all fire alarms in office buildings are because some idiot let it burn in the microwave. Last night we had another incident........Based on our last 2 weeks, we have made anywhere from $[removed] to $[removed] bookings after 8 O’clock. Therefore this popcorn cost us between $[removed] and $[removed] that will not be recoverable. If you must have popcorn, buy it already made in a bag or a tin. If you have microwave popcorn at your desk you will be terminated............Period! Thank you.

Bob Becker
Vice President
Consumer Research
1-800-xxx-xxxx Ext xxxxx

From: Xxxx, Dave
Sent: Wednesday, January 24, 2007 2:59 PM
To: Kenan-Flagler Students; Kenan-Flagler Faculty and Staff
Subject: Fire Alarms

On January 16, we had another fire alarm due to microwave popcorn being burned. This is the second such occasion over the past year and has created disruption across the school that we feel is completely avoidable. We experienced interrupted classes, interviews with recruiters cut short, inconvenienced employees and students etc. We cannot afford to risk future disruption to the school’s operations from this issue. Therefore, we are instituting a policy prohibiting the use of microwave popcorn throughout the school. We will be removing microwave popcorn from all vending machines and Café McColl in support of this policy. We realize this may seem like an extreme reaction to some but we’ve tested this direction with several constituencies and the bottom line is that we’re doing all we can to minimize future disruptions to the core mission of the school. In addition, we continue to receive feedback that microwaves are frequently left unattended when in use. If you’re cooking anything in a microwave you should never leave it unattended. Thank you for your cooperation. Regards, Dave.

1 From internalmemos.com
How can I set an appropriate tone in business emails?
You can create a conversational tone in two main ways: using **pronouns** and **contractions**. Your goal: to transfer the tone of a face-to-face conversation to paper.

What pieces do I need in business emails?
You can employ the same skeleton for most business messages—just extend the length of the fifth section to accommodate the complexity of your message.

1. **Subject line**: in 5-6 words, summarize the main purpose of your message.
2. **Greeting**: Don’t forget to address your audience, just as you would in a letter. “Dear So-and-so,” “Hi John,” or “Good morning, Juanita” all work.
3. **Friendly opening**: optional. In 1-2 sentences, you can enhance a positive relationship with the audience or prepare your audience for bad news. If you choose to use a friendly opening, keep it related to the overall message topic.
4. **Bottom line**: the reason you’re writing this message—to explain, convey, recommend, or propose a new policy, a new product, or bad news. State it in one sentence, as clearly as possible. Make it easy to find at the beginning or end of a paragraph.
5. **Reasons/details**: a quick rationale for a new policy or procedure, or an explanation of the benefits of the change you’re announcing, along with the key steps the audience needs to follow. Focus on what your audience needs to know or do. Keep the paragraphs short and organized with strong topic sentences to make them easy to skim.
6. **Forward-looking closing**: end on a positive note related to the message.
7. **Name and signature**: tell readers who you are and how to get in touch with you.

How can I make my message look inviting?
Busy readers won’t want to read your message unless you make it look readable and manageable. Use short, no-indent paragraphs with a blank line between them. Other strategies:

- Prioritize the message information: keep the **most important pieces at the top**.
- Use a **sans serif font** for electronic messages. Keep the font size **10-point or above**.
- Consider **headings** to label your message’s parts and make information easy to find.
- Use **bold** for items you want to pop off the page, **italics** for items you want to pop out of the paragraph. Avoid **underlining** (except for hyperlinks) and NEVER USE ALL-CAPS!
- **Bulleted or numbered lists** can break up large blocks of text. Depending on email programs, they may not always transmit well to your audience, so use them sparingly.

Where can I find more information about writing business emails?