Improve Any Team’s Online Communication with These 3 Military Email Protocols

The BLUF protocol alone will get to the point immediately.

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For many business owners, great online communication is more critical than ever. From seasoned brick-and-mortar founders to starry-eyed startups, nearly every sector of business is facing demand to quickly pivot their product, messaging or both.

Moreover, an all-online team may become the new norm. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey recently told some of his employees that working from home will become permanent, according to a leaked email first reported by BuzzFeed News, and Google told employees last week to just stay home for the rest of the year. Online teamwork and agility are now an essential component of most organizations, and if you can write clearly with fewer words, your requests will slice through the clutter.

Enter *The Tongue and Quill*, the official communication manual of the United States Air Force that is available to download for free. From best practices for meetings to brand guidelines

for public speaking, this 370-page handbook is a treasure trove of protocols for anyone who wants to write and speak with brevity and clarity.

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As a writer and marketing strategist, I'm always looking for ways to capture attention in less time and land my point effectively, whether it be for myself or for my clients. So here are three protocols *The Tongue and Quill* recommends for online communication that can improve virtual messaging efforts within your organization.

1. Keep it brief and use the BLIND method

Nix the small talk. The BLIND approach to online communication delivers recommended actions, necessary context and a sense of urgency in a simple way.

- BL indicates the bottom line and prioritizes the most essential information first
- I stands for impact on the organization, providing context and urgency
- N recommends the next action step
- D outlines any other pertinent details

If you find yourself wanting a more systematized approach for daily updates within your organization, the BLIND approach gets the job done. This template, while originally recommended for email communication, can cross over nicely into other platforms.

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2. Go even shorter with the BLUF protocol

BLUF stands for “Bottom Line Up Front” and eschews any particular template or format, instead getting to the point as quickly as possible.

Because this information can come off cold, it helps to introduce the idea to your team and have them indicate BLUF at the top of their communication. An example within *The Tongue And Quill* shows the acronym BLUF appearing first in the body of an email, which gives readers context into the short and direct communication that follows.

It helps readers and listeners focus when you explain how subsequent information has been organized. This is the same reason numbers in headlines tend to get a better click through rate; a number frames how much information the reader can expect to navigate, which reduces mental friction. If you want more people to read your writing, set their expectations from the start.

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3. Present department opinions with the eSSS format

eSSS translates to Electronic Staff Summary Sheet and is used throughout both written and verbal Air Force communications. Sometimes the most pertinent points for you to communicate are status updates and opinions of other departments in a roundup format.

The Tongue And Quill recommends that you open your communication with a statement of purpose and any necessary background information. The Air Force even recommends these

subheadings be left-aligned and in all capital letters for formatting familiarity; the most frequent subheadings include “PURPOSE,” “BACKGROUND,” “VIEWS OF OTHERS” and “RECOMMENDATION.”

Seeing as many teams now have to work remotely, summary sheet communication can give your employees a running start. Online scheduling service Doodle studied 19 million meetings last year in its State of Meetings Report and found through interviews with 6,500 professionals that ineffective meetings cost U.S. businesses an estimated $399 billion in 2019.

More precise communication will help grow your business, so consider adopting one or more of the above formats, which have been honed over many years and taught to millions of service people. Over time, your team will discover that great online teamwork starts with clear communication and yields faster, better results.

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