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*My boss was just replaced by someone new to the company and I need to give an update on my current projects. How can I get ready?*

– *Getting Debriefed*

**Judy:** You have a rare opportunity to set the stage for all future meetings, so open up some time to carefully prepare. First, write a “Five Point Agenda” for the items you will cover.

**1. INTRODUCTIONS:** Introduce yourself and ask your boss some questions; is she/he settled in? What was the culture like in their former organization, etc.?

**2. BIO:** Write one short paragraph on your background and skills and review at your meeting.

**3. COMPLETED PROJECTS:** Provide a few photos of recently completed projects and offer descriptions, including the names of your collaborative partners.

**4. CURRENT PROJECTS:** Prepare a chart that lists each of your current projects, along with columns for description, start date, due date, partners, progress updates and next steps. Hand a copy of the list to your boss and cover only those of critical importance, along with photos, materials, etc. Don’t overwhelm your boss with details—be brief.

**5. QUESTIONS:** Write a list of questions about the structure of future meetings. Discuss how often the two of you should meet; whether it be in person or sometimes on the phone or through email, etc.

Once you have established this Five Point Agenda format, you can continue to use it going forward, adjusting the content as needed. Your boss will always know what to expect from you—a manageable, well-organized meeting. The project chart you provide will be especially helpful since your boss is new to the company, and will aid during meetings with her/his manager. Now, how do you continue to build this new relationship?

In *The Wall Street Journal* article, “The Right and Wrong Ways to Manage Up” (April 2018), Sue Shellenbarger describes managing up as “building smooth, productive relationships with higher-ups.” To do this effectively, it is important to understand your boss’ communication and decision-making style. Since your boss is new, it will take some time and tactics to develop a working strategy. You may find Shellenbarger’s list of “Rules of Engagement With Your Boss” helpful: “Figure out and adapt to your bosses’ communication styles by watching them interact with others. Avoid escalating problems to the boss too quickly, before you’ve tried solving them yourself. When you bring the boss a problem, also bring at least one potential solution. Avoid overload by asking your boss for help prioritizing projects, rather than by saying no.”

Getting to know your boss well over time will generously enrich your collaboration. Some believe that their good work alone will tell the story, but developing a relationship where you practice careful listening and offer objective opinions will make a difference. Consider that leaders want to do just that—lead. If you welcome your boss’ suggestions, you are giving them the opportunity to do their job. You are also making their job easier, and what boss doesn’t want that?



*I’d like to be more strategic when I write emails. Any advice?*

– *Email Skills Needed*

**Judy:** Strategic email? Bravo to you in your quest to elevate email communication to a new level. Emails often are spun off with little thought given to the impression they will leave with the recipient. It is clear that most don’t take time to edit their prose before they click “send.” Misspellings and missing words are fired off into flooded inboxes, erasing the opportunity to demonstrate one’s respect for the reader. Instead, consider that every email you write is an opportunity to express your personality and professionalism and maybe even bring a smile to someone’s face.

Emails drop into our mailboxes at an incessant rate that invites speedy skimming of subject lines. If they don’t warrant an “open” click, emails quickly descend down and off the screen. Subject lines, therefore, are the single most important element in an email. Subject lines like “Round of Applause!” or “Your Thoughts Appreciated” are likely to arouse curiosity and invite immediate clicks.

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It also is effective to change the subject line if a back-and-forth exchange results in a shift from the original objective. For example, if all parties are in agreement to schedule a meeting and details are in place, the subject line might read: “Wednesday, July 11, 2 p.m. @ Spyhouse Coffee.” This sends a message of confirmation and clarifies specifics.

In the body of the email, think about the tone of voice you’d like to use. Using all caps leads people to believe you are shouting, but they can be effective if used sparingly to draw attention to an important point or to express enthusiasm. If you know the person well, you may want to lead in with a short, friendly note. Also consider a conversational approach without using corporate jargon, such as “I don’t have the bandwidth,” “I want to unpack a statement I made” and “I didn’t commit that to memory.” Early in my career, I was inspired by Brenda Ueland’s book, “If You Want To Write.” She encouraged composing as if you were writing to an 8 year old—which she, in fact, learned from Tolstoy. This is an easy way to keep your message simple and also is a reminder to cut corporate jargon. And if you need a question answered, italics or bold will ensure it stands out. The reader is more likely to fire off a quick response if the question is clearly emphasized.

When you’ve completed writing the email, read it at least a couple of times, preferably out loud. Edit as needed and then reread the entire

email. Depending on the level of importance or urgency for a response, you may want to determine the best time to send it. *The Wall Street Journal* ran an article in March 2018, “The Smartest Ways to Use Emails at Work” by Andrew Blackman. He wrote about a study of 16 billion emails that revealed “...people replied more quickly early in the week, and those replies were often longer. The same applied to time of day—between 8 a.m. and noon was best.” Therefore, in some cases, it may make sense to hold off sending a significant email on a Friday afternoon, and instead wait until Monday morning when it will be near the top of the stack.

All of the elements above—creative subject lines, conversational tone and careful editing—are a way to begin writing emails that will capture attention and elicit speedy responses. As you routinely send messages that demonstrate your respect for your colleagues’ time and opinions, your professionalism will be appreciated. As an unexpected gesture, an occasional handwritten note of thanks for their valuable insights will be one of the most strategic moves you can make.

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**JUDY BELL IS THE FOUNDER OF ENERGETIC RETAIL (ENERGETIC-RETAIL.COM) AND AUTHOR OF “SILENT SELLING.” SHE HELD AN INSPIRATIONAL ROLE FOR 22 YEARS AT TARGET CORP. AND NOW SHARES HER INSIGHTS ON NAVIGATING THE CREATIVE WORKPLACE WITH DESIGN:RETAIL IN THIS BI-ISSUE COLUMN. SEND YOUR QUESTIONS FOR “ASK JUDY” TO JESSIE.DOWD@EMERALDEXPO.COM.**

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