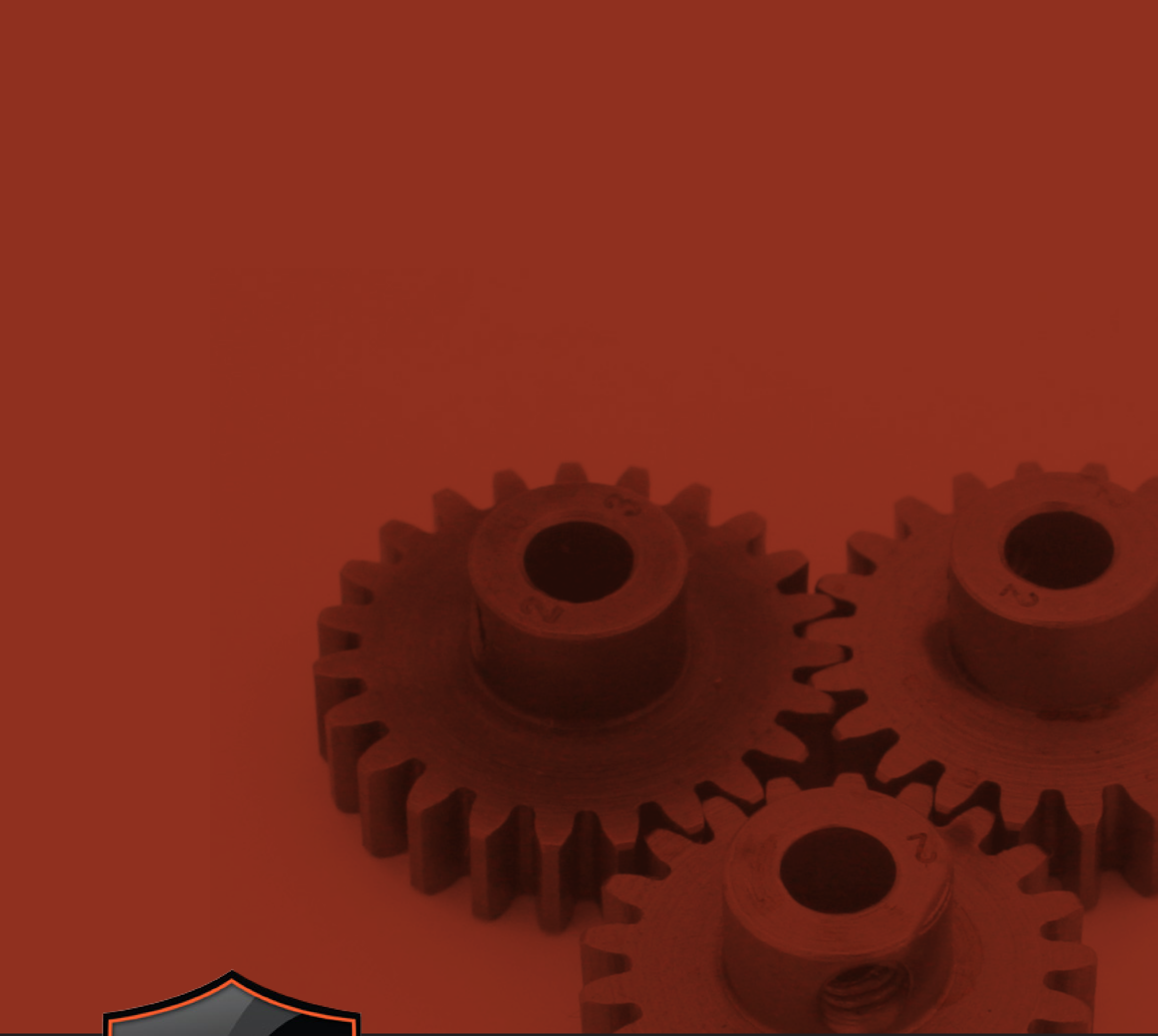

PETRA PROCESS

8 EMAIL BEST PRACTICES FOR ORGANIZATIONS

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LIFE LESSONS for BUSINESS OWNERS

Email is one of the primary tools for business communication today. Yet many organizations haven't taken the time to train their team members how to properly use email to reinforce a professional brand.

The following are eight email best practices to use as a basis for an organization's communication guidelines.

1. Require consistent email signatures. The signature at the bottom of an email is the modern-day business card. It should be consistent across the organization as its used as a branding tool for a company. It can even be used for promotional and marketing opportunities. Signatures should also be set up on any mobile phone or tablet used for email.

2. Start with the call-to-action. Place the call-to-action in the subject line and/or in the first sentence of the email if it requires a response. Emphasize it in underlined or bold text styles. For example, "John – Please let me know by the end of today if we have approval to make the changes listed below to your account." It's just as effective to put a message like "Response Required" in the subject line. In the current world of abundant information, it's easy to overlook a call-to-action at the end of an email.

3. Avoid 'Reply to All.' Only use "Reply to All" if everyone on the message truly needs to read the response. If a meeting organizer asks multiple recipients to submit their lunch orders, respond only to the sender. No one needs to know that Alex wants a "BLT on wheat" for lunch.

4. Avoid one-word emails. In most instances, sending one-word emails – like "Thanks!" – are not necessary. Consider if the value of that single word message is worth the extra email interruption for the recipient. This is especially true if the sender of the one-word email used 'Reply to All.' Now the single word message is an interruption for many people.

5. Mind grammar. Just because email is less formal than other forms of communication, it should still be professional and grammatically correct. Avoid slang, abbreviations and emoticons in written messages. Take the time to double-check your email as it's impossible to undo a message after it's sent. Always assume an email message will live forever on the Internet since most organizations archive all sent and received emails.

6. Only include one person in the "To:" field. For the majority of emails, the intended recipient in the "To:" field should only be one person. If there is more than one person in the "To:" field or several people in the "Cc:" field, be clear as to why they were included in the message. For example, "Dave – Here's the signed contract… Sue – I've copied you so you can activate the account." Never use the blind carbon copy "Bcc:" field. It may violate the privacy of other recipients of the message.

7. Use non-response as a response. When communicating with a large group that needs to provide feedback on a topic or conversation, consider setting the expectation that a "non-response" is a response. For example, "If I don't hear back from you by close of business Wednesday, I will proceed with contacting the client about a follow-up meeting." And unless everyone needs to see the response, consider encouraging everyone to only reply to the sender, instead of using 'Reply to All.'

8. Personalize the email. Depending on the culture of your organization, consider encouraging email senders to personalize the message to the sender. The heart of any business is personal relationships. When meeting with someone face-to-face it's not unusual to engage in "small talk" as a way to build connections. While it's not as easy with emails, it's still worth the effort to personalize the email if the organization values deep relationships. Consider starting all emails with a personal message or note instead of just jumping into business.

This article originally appeared in Texas CEO Magazine.

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