



Getting the Tone Right in Email Messages

The Scenario

Andie and Blake work for Top Supplies, a printer supply company. Andie and Blake have been with the company for the same number of years and are in similar positions as customer account managers. Recently, their supervisor reassigned several of Blake's accounts to Andie, including Blake's favorite account, Tiger LLC. Blake is upset about this change but is responsible for helping Andie with the transition.

Passive-Aggressive Email Tone

In the email below, Blake's tone is negative. By sending this email after Andie has called Tiger LLC, Blake comes across as reveling in Andie's lack of experience with the account. Further, the first sentence ("I hope you checked...") assumes that Max made a mistake.

The email below uses a passive-aggressive tone:

- ⇒ **Avoids addressing hurt feelings:** Blake seems hurt; it's clear from the way Blake accuses Andie of contacting Max instead of Frankie. However, Blake doesn't address these feelings head-on, so Blake's hurt feelings come across in a passive aggressive manner.
- ⇒ **Uses unnecessary commentary:** The final line—"not that you would know this"—unnecessarily draws attention to Andie's newness to the situation.

There's a better way!

Instead of sending the passive aggressive email on the left, Blake should provide Andie with the necessary information about Tiger LLC, without letting Blake's hurt feelings get in the way of the company's success.

The email below uses an appropriate tone.

- ⇒ **Save challenging or lengthy conversations for in-person:** Blake asks for an in-person meeting, which is appropriate since Blake has a lot of information to share with Andie.
- ⇒ **Offer assistance:** Blake offers to help the transition go smoothly.
- ⇒ **Address hurt feelings in person:** Blake may say something in the meeting about the hurt feelings. For example, it would be okay to say, "I'll admit that I'm disappointed to be pulled off this account. Frankie and the folks at Tiger LLC are great to work with!"

Andie,

I hope you checked Tiger LLC's website before you called Max, because you needed to notice that Max is the IT Manager there. Usually, we call Frankie, the secretary, to refill their printer ink.

Not that you would know this.

Best,
Blake

Andie,

I'm writing to follow up on the transfer of Tiger LLC's account. Are you available to meet tomorrow between 9 AM-12 Noon? At that time, I will provide you with my folder for Tiger LLC, including notes about who I usually contact about printer ink refills.

Thanks, Andie, and please let me know if there's anything else I can do to make this transition go smoothly.

Best,
Blake