

TLP Five-Minute Read Over Coffee – How to chase in a professional way

This article looks at how to remind others to do something in a clear and professional way. Whether you are a project manager reminding colleagues to deliver actions or chasing up an important document with a customer; the same skills are required. If you would like to get in contact please email me at toby@tlp.lu.

My working principles:

Tip 1: When chasing up by email, message or phone, consider carefully whether to emphasize the 'we'. The idea that you are all working for the same team can be helpful here. It can also dilute the impact of you seeming to be too pushy/demanding.

If you have a strong relationship, it might be more meaningful to use 'I'. 'We' might also create a different type of pressure – a sense of letting down the team. All of this depends on the quality of the relationships between the person/team chasing and the person being chased.

Two quite directive examples below:

Example: We need you to send the Q1 report by 5pm. I hope that is ok for you.

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Tip 2: To copy or not to copy. It can be very powerful and freeing to send a chasing email/difficult mail without copying other colleagues. The benefit to this is the person being chased does not feel a sort of **email group shaming!**

There might be times you need to protect yourself or add weight to the email by copying in a senior manager but in general I believe people over copy!

Tip 3: Avoid the terrible – can you send me the xxx ASAP. Even written out, 'as soon as possible' can come across as needlessly direct.

Tip 4: Equally don't be too vague unless you need to be super diplomatic or just want to send a gentle and relaxed reminder;

Example: Could you send me the report when you have a moment (*semi-formal*).

Example: Would you send me xxx at your earliest convenience (*formal*).

In both examples there is no guarantee when this will happen!

Tip 5: Simply give a deadline. A deadline can be perceived as aggressive, but if presented in a professional and polite manner, it can be a calm way to chase up an action. Consider the difference between ‘would you pay the second part of the invoice by 10 March 2023’ and ‘would you pay the second part of the invoice as soon as possible’.

Tip 6: The use of ‘**please**’. In general, ‘please’ is clearly a good word to use. However, when reminding someone to do something, please can actually have a more complicated impact. The ‘please’ can give a sense of urgency and pressure. This might or might not be helpful.

Example: Could you please send the report by 5.00 pm today.

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Tip 7: Explain the context. Sometimes giving the business context can make the request feel less like an order from one colleague to another. It can also be powerful to refer to the bigger picture.

Example: We need to get the first draft from you today, to make sure we have time to make any amendments before sending this to the client.

Example: We need to get this finalized today. Our credibility with this client on this project really depends on this. (Quite dramatic!)

Tip 8: Worse case scenarios using the conditionals

If the delay is really critical to the business, you might want to highlight the worst-case scenario.

Example: If we don’t get this finalized today, we will have to delay delivery to the client which will have a real impact on their day-to-day operations.

Tip 9: Don’t be falsely positive and just get to the point. We have an expression in English called ‘**sugar coating**’. Where you try and sweeten a challenging message. If you need someone to do something urgently don’t

dilute that message with expressions like 'I hope your week is going well'. However, the way you make the request still matters, be polite and professional.

Example:

Hi, Peter,

I am just emailing about the cost report for Q1. I really need to get this from you today. I hope this is ok. If you have any issues, please do give me a call.

Best regards

Toby

Tip 10: Offer to talk through anything face-to-face that might be blocking the other person completing on the action. This offer, in itself, can often encourage the other person to act!

Tip 11: If dealing with a customer, supplier, or senior manager always consider 'could' or 'would' when making a request.

Tip 12: 'I hope this ok for you'. In reflecting on how to chase up and remind people, I have found this expression really useful. It is designed to be empathetic in considering the impact on the other person. At the same, I still want the person to complete their action against my deadline (**I am not really opening up the action for negotiation**).

For more information about the work I do - please visit my [website](#).
