

Using qualified language in delivering against deadlines

In our previous article, we ended on the danger of overpromising in English (or any language!) - I am going to send the report tomorrow - which is unequivocal. If there are issues that might impact you meeting a deadline you might want to use more qualified language.

Key principles for your consideration:

1) What not to do! When stating what is possible but not certain it is vital not to appear vague, passive or dismissive. A good example of what not to say is highlighted below.

- **Example:** I might/could/may do it, it depends if I have the time time/energy/motivation!

2) Be positive but highlight variables/issues if needed...

- **Example:** I will aim to get this done by ... (the deadline). This should be fine as long as nothing changes with...
- **Example:** I am committed to getting this done, however I should highlight upfront the ...
- **Example:** We will do our very best to deliver this to time. I would like to be/I need to be transparent, we currently have an issue with ... which could impact...

This allows you state a clear intention but highlights that there are variables/issues that might impact the deadline.

3) Make sure you know what you are agreeing to.

Sense check the assumptions behind the work before agreeing to the deadline.

- **Example:** Could we talk through what is included in the scope of...?
- **Example:** Can I confirm what you need/want to be included/covered/encompassed in...?

4) Personal excuses: Treat personal issues carefully in relation to project delivery. This is something that is 'close to home' for us as one of our team members has recently had an incredible little baby.

We have had to manage expectations with some clients who have been in the habit of contacting us at weekends, however we also strongly believe that within the normal working week, we would never want this to be a 'hiding place' used in explaining slow delivery.

Avoiding the tendency to bring personal excuses into play is an important aspect of English working culture.

5) State two deadlines - a best case and back up scenario.

- **Example:** I will strive/aim/look to get this finalized/completed/delivered/reviewed by...However, at the latest you will receive this by...

6) Unnecessary apologies: Avoid the tendency to apologize/sound defensive where there is no need, instead professionally invite their empathy/understanding of the context.

- **Example:** As you know we are under significant pressure because of ... , given this I think it is realistic to send this by...

- **Example:** As you are probably aware, with the significant increase in ... I would suggest that we aim for...

7) Empower the deadline setter: When qualifying your commitment to a deadline it is important to give the person making the request a sense of ownership in any renegotiation of timelines. If I sent the project scope next Tuesday would this be acceptable for you?/Would this work for you?

8) A note of caution: The phrases above are useful where there is scope for 'kicking back' against a deadline and qualifying expectations. The extent to which you can do this might well depend on the seniority of the colleague in question, your working culture and to some extent - how well established you are in the company.
