

The Unofficial

Workplace Translation Guide


An unscientific guide to what you send and what they hear

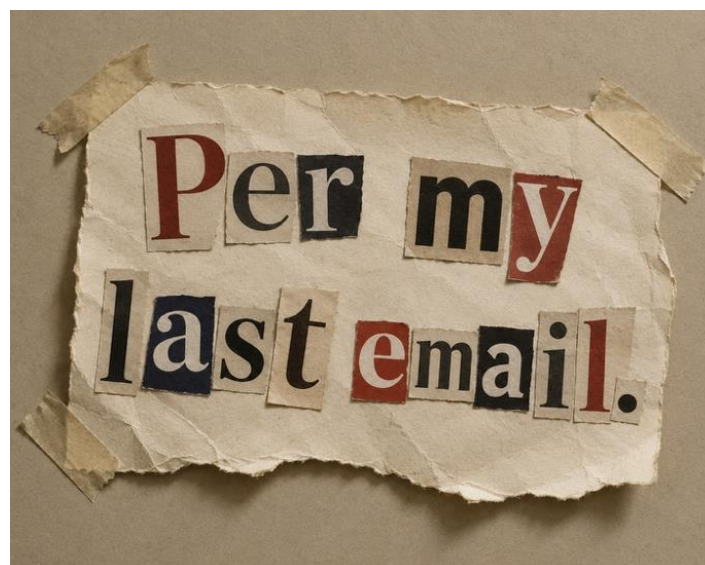
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Digital Communication

Where most workplace misunderstandings now begin.

Signal	Boomer	Gen X	Millennial	Gen Z
Thumbs Up	Agreement	Efficient acknowledgement	Slightly abrupt	Passive aggressive
Heart reaction 	Slightly unprofessional	Supportive but intense	Supportive	Completely normal
Full stop in chat "Ok."	Proper grammar	Normal punctuation	Slight tension	Emotional threat detected
Replying "K"	Short response	Probably driving	Annoyed	Relationship-ending behaviour
Using "... " at end of sentence	Continuing a thought	Normal typing habit	Slightly ominous	Emotional manipulation
Typing in full sentences in chat	Professional	Normal	Slightly formal	Are you upset with me?
Double spacing after a full stop	Correct grammar	Old habits die hard	Wait... people still do this?	Archaeological evidence
No greeting in email	Efficient	Fine	Slightly cold	Rude
"Please see attached"	Professional	Standard	Formal	Why are we talking like lawyers?
"Per my last email"	Clarification	Uh oh	Passive aggressive	Digital violence
"As discussed"	Helpful summary	Documentation	Oh no	You are building a case against me
"Please advise."	Professional	Abrupt	Slightly threatening	Why does this sound legally binding?
"Noted."	Understood	Fine	Cold	Emotional assassination
Reply All	Keeping everyone informed	Risky	Someone's about to embarrass themselves	Digital terrorism
"Just following up..."	Professional persistence	Fair enough	I forgot and now feel guilty	I'm being hunted
cc'ing someone's manager	Visibility	Escalation	Political move	Declare war properly next time



Meetings, Messages & Workplace Panic

The modern workplace runs primarily on calendar invites and low-grade anxiety.

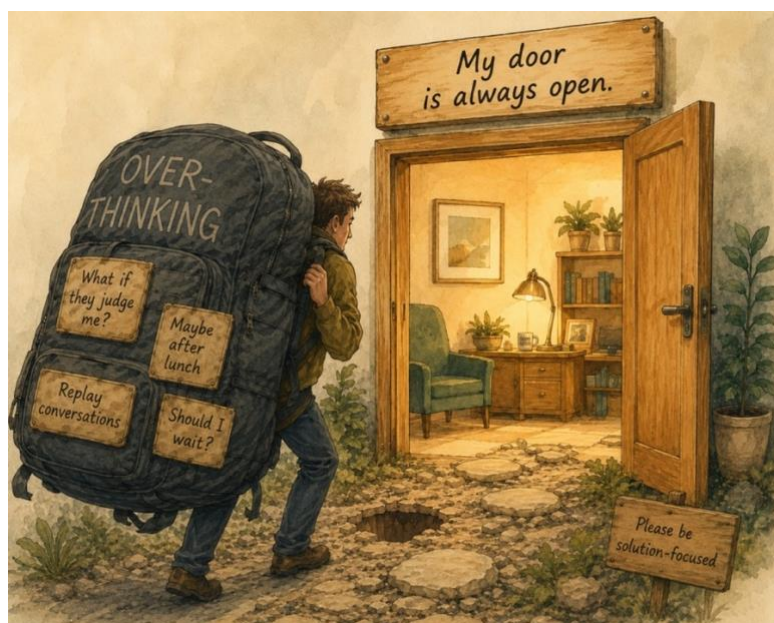
Signal	Boomer	Gen X	Millennial	Gen Z
"Can we chat?"	Normal conversation	Probably annoying	What did I do wrong?	Immediate nervous system activation
Sending "You free?"	Starting a conversation	Get to the point	What's wrong?	I've already panicked
Phone call without warning	Normal	Hope this is quick	Mildly alarming	Fight or flight response
"Let me just call them"	How problems get solved	Sensible	Oh... actually that's faster	Terrifying. Effective. Slightly aggressive.
Calendar invite without context	Efficient	Annoying	Anxiety-inducing	Absolutely unacceptable
"Can everyone turn cameras on?"	Engagement	Fine	Ugh	You are asking to enter my home
Camera off in Teams	Bandwidth issue	Lucky if I'm wearing pants	Probably overwhelmed	Socially acceptable
Turning camera on immediately	Professional courtesy	Fine if necessary	Depends how tired I look	Deeply personal request
"Thoughts?" after a presentation	Invitation for discussion	Please let this end	I should probably say something smart	Why has this been thrown to the group with no structure?
Silence after a question	Thinking time	Nobody wants extra work	Awkward	Hostile environment



Leadership & Psychological Safety

The same words can feel radically different depending on the culture around them.

Signal	Boomer	Gen X	Millennial	Gen Z
"My door is always open"	Leadership support	Come if it's important	What happened to the last person who walked through it?	I'll need evidence before attempting this
"Can I get clarity on what success looks like?"	Overthinking it	Smart question	Useful	Standard. Why isn't everyone doing this?
Declining a meeting: "I can't add value"	Bold	Efficient	I could never	Basic self-management
"Do you have capacity?"	Thoughtful leadership	Better than assigning it	Respectful	Basic human decency
Asking for feedback regularly	Keen	Self-aware	Growth mindset	Expected
"That felt dismissive"	Confrontational	Depends on the tone	Brave	Healthier than pretending it didn't happen
Sharing personal struggles at work	Inappropriate	It depends who's asking	Human	Healthy leadership
"We're a family here"	Loyalty	Red flag	Massive red flag	Immediate exit strategy
Message sent after hours	Dedicated	Clearing inbox	Boundary concern	Toxic work culture
Taking leave without checking email	Brave	Aspirational	Healthy	Obviously
Leaving exactly on time every day	Not very committed	Smart	Healthy boundaries	Correct behaviour
Being "busy"	Important	Permanent state of existence	Potential burnout	Not a personality trait



Technology, AI & Other Things Quietly Destroying Workplace Norms

Somewhere along the way, we all adapted to completely different versions of "normal."

Signal	Boomer	Gen X	Millennial	Gen Z
Using AI to draft something	Cutting corners	Depends what for	Smart leverage	Why would you not?
Using GIFs at work	Unprofessional	Occasionally funny	Team culture	Essential communication tool
Voice note	Personal touch	Why not just call?	Helpful context	Normal
Watching videos with subtitles	Can't hear properly	Distracting	Helpful	Mandatory
Watching content at 1.5x speed	Why rush it?	Depends how boring it is	Efficient	Still too slow
Reading receipts turned on	Transparency	Dangerous	Social pressure	Psychological warfare
Wearing headphones at work	Antisocial	Leave me alone	Focus mode	Default operating system
Phone ringtone on in public	Reachable	Risky	Embarrassing	Absolutely unhinged
Speakerphone in public	Normal conversation	Absolutely not	Slightly chaotic	Criminal behaviour
Leaving a voicemail	Professional	Necessary evil	Please just text me	Ancient ritual
Writing notes by hand	Normal	Helps me think	Romanticises productivity	It's kind of aesthetic
Showing up to a meeting early	Respectful	Safe buffer	Responsible	Aggressive overachievement
"Let's circle back"	Corporate language	Fine	Mildly annoying	Why are we talking like NPCs?
Aggressive alarm tone	It wakes you up	Horrific	Anxiety-inducing	Absolutely not — birdsong only
Eating lunch alone	A bit sad	Bliss	Recharge time	Self-care



None of these are universally true.

Shared with curiosity, never judgment.

(Except maybe speakerphone in public. We need to talk about that.)