

# 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.

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