

**“R u in the ofc?” Textspeak in Business Language** – by Kathi Guiney SPHR, GPHR, President **YES!** Your Human Resources Solution

The text message reads: “R u in the ofc?”

Without looking at the sender, some might think this message came from a teenager. What if this strange abbreviated language, or “textspeak,” actually came from a colleague? And what is he trying to say?

This one’s easy: “Are you in the office?” And at a savings of seven letters over proper English, there is a gamble the recipient will understand. But not everyone is fluent in textspeak, and not everyone wants to be. Many businesspeople would dismiss a textspeak message as unprofessional gibberish, leaving the sender waiting for a response. This language barrier has sparked a battle over textspeak’s place in the business world. Is textspeak lazy nonsense or the efficient language of the future? And how did textspeak such as OMW\*, AFAIK\*, or “R u there?” creep into our daily lexicon anyway?

It’s easy to blame textspeak on the Millennial Generation’s presence in the workforce. After all, textspeak is the language of the young, who invented it in a bubbling cauldron of technology. Millennials don’t read the newspaper or write pen-and-paper letters. They shun e-mail in favor of 140-character Twitter and text messages. They clashed with instructors over textspeak and emoticons in their school papers. And now they’re clashing with bosses over textspeak in the business setting. Like business language battles of yesteryear, textspeak may gain acceptance as its slang predecessors, pls, thx, re, and fax.

“The Millennials will take this battle,” says Jocelyn Schamber, owner of Fuzzy Red Pen Writing and Copyediting. “As Millennials are changing language, they are also changing the workplace to accommodate their way of communicating.” According to a recent Plantronics survey of business communication trends, business text messaging has risen 58 percent and instant messaging has risen 64 percent during the last five years. “No one questions textspeak between Millennials,” says Schamber. “The ‘right’ language is all about the audience, and this generation will be the driving force in the workplace before long.”

For now, all workers tempted to use textspeak should consider if they’re speaking the “right” language for their audience. Modern textspeak saves a few seconds for the writer, but the message can take twice as long for the reader to understand—if it’s understood at all. Plantronics’ survey found that 72 percent of respondents had to clarify an unintelligible e-mail with a phone call, and 42 percent had to clarify an instant message. Unclear messages are ineffective, and may be labeled “unprofessional” or “lazy”—judgments that typically extend to the message sender. Many professionals also see textspeak as juvenile, even annoying, and are less apt to take the sender seriously if messages are fraught with winky faces. Unless there is an established personal relationship with a colleague, it’s better to be clear when communicating. Professional credibility and reputation could depend on it.

At the end of the day, does textspeak belong in the business world? As long as Millennials comprise a minority of the labor force, professional situations demand communication everyone can understand

without a translator. But it won't be long before today's AFAIK becomes yesterday's FYI. As Millennials flood the workforce, they will likely force the English language to change before they "fix" their textspeak.

BTW: Employers who want to attract and retain these up-and-coming workers should consider seeking a LTR\* with textspeak.

***Thx 4 ur attn. R.\* K\****

\*OMW- on my way

\* AFAIK - as far as I know

\* LTR- long term relationship

\* R -regards

\* K- Kathi