Streamline email subject lines

How many times have you received an email message with the subject line "Hi" or "Question" or, even worse, no subject at all? Probably more times than you'd like.

Knowing the topic and what you'd need to do in response to each one before opening a single message would be great.

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Here's a technique, by Brett Kelly of The Cranking Widgets blog (**blog.crankingwidgets.com**), for labeling subject lines so the recipient knows instantly what the message entails:

Begin your subject line with one of these four keywords:

1. Question: to elicit a response from the reader

2. Response: to respond to questions or other inquiry messages

3. FYI: to inform; needs no response

4. Spam: jokes, pictures of your nephew's baseball game, etc.

This makes it easy for recipients to quickly scan an inbox and figure out what needs an action or response. *Example:* "Question: Material for January off-site meeting."

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Briefly describe the subject, without being too vague or too specific. *Example:* You have a question about which material to use for an upcoming off-site meeting. A too-vague subject line might be "Question: Material," while a too-specific line might read "Question: Should we give attendees the full report or only the executive briefing or something else?" Instead write "Question: Material for off-site." Save the specifics for the body of the message.

Never leave the subject blank. *Example:* Tom walks over and asks you to shoot over the expense report template. You open a new message, attach the template and send it to him. He knows what it is; he just asked you for it. But next month, when he can't locate your message or the attachment, guess who he'll come to ... again. On the flip side, writing "FYI: Expense report template" will allow him to use the Search tool to find the document again on his own.

Bottom line: A good subject line saves you and the recipient time!

Keep this technology time-savers manual by your desk for quick reference all day long! **59**