TALKSMITHS

ONE-PAGE CHEAT SHEET

The Softening Audit

Eight small words that discount your point before anyone hears it, what each one signals, and a five-minute check to run before you press send.

The eight softeners

WHAT YOU MEAN IS NOT WHAT ARRIVES

THE WORD	WHAT THE ROOM HEARS	SAY INSTEAD
"Sorry" (to open)	I'm intruding	Start with the point, thank them at the end
"Just"	Don't take this seriously	Delete it. Nothing is lost
"Quick" / "quickly"	This is minor	Name the time: "Two minutes on the budget."
"I think maybe"	I'm not sure	"I recommend..." / "My view is..."
"I'm not an expert, but"	Discount what follows	Give the basis: "From the Q3 numbers..."
"Kind of" / "sort of"	Vaguely	Give the figure or the range
"Does that make sense?"	I doubt I explained it	"What would you change?"
"Would it be possible to..."	Permission to have a view	"Can we..." / "I'd like to..."

The five-minute check

BEFORE YOU PRESS SEND

1. ☐ **Search and delete.**
   Find *sorry*, *just*, *quick*, *maybe* and *I think*. Delete every one and reread. Put back only the ones you genuinely miss. It is usually none.
2. ☐ **Move the ask to line one.**
   If the reader stopped after the first sentence, would they know what you need? If not, the request is in the wrong place.
3. ☐ **Replace hedges with sources.**
   "I think the cost is around 40k" becomes "Procurement's quote is €38,500." Confidence comes from the basis, not the tone.
4. ☐ **Keep one warm sentence, at the edge.**
   Open or close with it. Never put it between the reader and the request.
5. ☐ **End with a question that expects a yes.**
   "Does Thursday work?" moves things. "Let me know if that might be possible" waits.

SOFTEN HERE

Bad news · comments on someone else's work · the opening and the close · a first contact

NEVER SOFTEN

Your recommendation · your numbers · your request · your disagreement · your own results

Politeness is how you treat the other person. Seniority is how you treat your own point.