

## Guidelines for Delivering Bad News

There is no easy way to deliver bad news; whether it is downsizing, poor performance review, personal loss, or inability to provide a service to a customer. Recognizing this, every manager needs to know how to effectively deliver bad news, and they need to know how to do it in a way that is respectful of the individual as well as meets the needs of the organization. The following are guidelines that can make a difference to the person receiving the bad news, as well as to the one delivering it. There are two parts: A. Preparation and B. Delivery.

**A. Preparation.** You wouldn't make a speech without preparation or plan a vacation without a plan. This is particularly important in delivering bad news. The following eight guidelines will help you *plan* the delivery in a way that shows that you *and* your organization are caring and considerate.

- 1. Type of bad news?** What is the bad news that you will be delivering? Why do you have to deliver it? If it has to do with downsizing, a performance review, or salary freeze, what documentation do you have that will help support the action you are taking?
- 2. Individual or group?** Who will be receiving the bad news? How well do you know them? What reactions can you anticipate based on prior interactions?
- 3. Co-workers?** Is this news something that needs to be shared with others in the organization? If so, when will you do it? How will you do it?
- 4. Timeframe?** When do you have to deliver the bad news? Obviously it depends upon the type of bad news. If it has to do with personal loss, it has to be done as soon as possible; if it's people who are being downsized it's often best to do it as soon as possible – if you are prepared to do it.
- 5. Location?** Where are you going to deliver the bad news? It should be as private as possible and in an environment where the employee(s) receiving the news is comfortable. Another consideration: is there a telephone available for the person receiving the bad news to make calls?
- 6. Resources?** What resources can you provide the employee(s) that will help that person handle the bad news? If the job loss is a result of being downsized, can you provide resume services, counseling and insurance information that will be helpful?
- 7. Safety?** It's important that when delivering bad news that it is done in a safe environment. Consider the following: Inform your boss of the meeting, location, and timeframe. Know your exit out of the meeting area if a problem should arise. Ensure you can easily contact someone if an emergency should take place. Look over the meeting environment to remove any object that could be used as a weapon.
- 8. Schedule the meeting.** Once prepared, we suggest scheduling the meeting as soon as possible. It could cause resentment from the employee(s) concerned because they may feel that you did this on purpose to “get as much work out of them as possible.”

**B. Delivery.** After you have prepared what you are going to say, when you are going to do it and where, you need to consider the “How.” We recommend the following six steps be considered in delivering bad news face-to-face:

- 1. Start on time.** Don't tell the individual(s) to meet you and then show up late. That is not only rude, but it also will create hostility and make it difficult to have a compassionate and objective meeting.
- 2. Be empathic, but to the point.** Briefly express your regret for having to relay the news, and then give the bad news. Don't beat around the bush.
- 3. Be factual.** Provide the reasons why the action is taking place.
- 4. Prepare for anger and remain empathic.** The employee's initial reaction may be one of disbelief, crying or outright anger. Listen, make no judgments, and express understanding.
- 5. Provide support.** It's important that the person feels that you understand what he/she is going through and that you and the organization will be as supportive as possible. For example, if employees are losing their jobs because of downsizing, assist them in writing a resume; help them deal with their medical insurance, show them how to file for unemployment. Employees must be made to feel that they are being respected, valued and that they have alternatives they can pursue.
- 6. Inform co-workers.** If the bad news has to do with downsizing or reorganization, then we advise discussing this with employees as soon as possible after you have delivered the news to the employees leaving. Be prepared with facts and be honest and understanding. Remember, everyone will be wondering if they will be next.

Times are difficult, but even in the best of times we can be faced with the need to deliver bad news. How we take the time to prepare and deliver bad news always makes a difference to those receiving the news; to coworkers and eventually to the bottom-line of the organization.

For more on how SMLR, Inc. can help your management team deliver bad news in an understanding and compassionate manner call us at (631) 757-5716, or go to our website: [www.SMLR.net](http://www.SMLR.net) and click on the **Support tab** and review the courses and coaching we provide:

- Delivering Bad News
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