

Delivering Bad News Messages

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The economic downturn has affected all businesses. Consequently, many of us are now in the position of delivering bad news messages. It is not easy, but the way that message is communicated is critical. It leaves a lasting impression of you and the company.

People who have been laid off, given reduced hours or had benefits slashed say they understand business decisions. What they expect from you, the bearer of the bad news is that you be empathetic, genuine and direct. Burying the news or sounding patronizing or rushed makes the situation a lot worse and affects relationships.

Consequently, experts advise managers or supervisors to prepare the message ahead of time and practice delivering it, whether it is in front of your bathroom mirror or to a trusted friend or colleague. By rehearsing, you can receive feedback on your facial reactions and your eyes. Are you looking down or directly at the person? If the recipient is to perceive you as sincere, you must look them in the eye. Are you fidgeting? As you hear your voice, does it sound sincere? Are you stammering?

Rehearsing also allows you to hear your own word choices and the clarity of your explanation. Avoid any euphemisms, platitudes and jargon. Make sure you share the thinking behind the business decision. Was the layoff company wide or only a particular division? People need to understand why it was them. Discuss any compensation benefits, job placement or counseling services that might be available, but do not offer unsolicited advice. Also, make sure you have paused at predictable points to invite the person to share his or her feelings and to say you care. This should be a two way conversation, not a monologue.

Although this isn't always possible, unpleasant news is best delivered in person and in private. Delivering bad news over phone to global team members doesn't allow you to see the other person's reactions or for them to see yours. At

all costs, avoid e-mail or voice mail. One of our clients reported checking messages late on a Sunday evening while in bed. The voice mail from his manager said there was a cutback and he had to be let him go. He was instructed to turn in his phone, laptop and employee identification card on Monday at the HR department on the 6th floor. You can imagine how devastated the person was and how well he was able to sleep that night.

Unpleasant news is too important to "wing it." Take time to deliver it in an honest, sensitive manner. Prepare ahead and put yourself in the other person's shoes. By delivering the message with tact and kindness, you maintain the relationship and leave a positive impression in the worst of times.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.