Goals in Communicating Bad News

- Make your decision clear
- Help your audience accept the message
- Maintain a goodwill relationship
- Prevent further unnecessary discussion
- Preserve the company’s image
- Protect the company against lawsuits

Examples | Planning | Replying | Announcing

Purposes

- Want audience to feel
  - They have been taken seriously
  - The decision is fair and reasonable
  - If they were in your situation, they would make the same decision

Planning a Bad-News Message

- Assess the Communication Context
- Analyze the Audience
- Choose the Medium
- Plan Components of the Message

- Organize the Message
- Explain the Decision
- Give the Bad News
- Close the Message

What Is the Best Medium for the Message?

- Canceling a contract with a long-time supplier
  - Email
  - Phone
  - Letter

- Firing a new employee who works across the country
  - Email
  - Phone Call
  - In-Person Visit
**What Is the Best Medium for the Message?**

- Email
- Phone Call
- Letter
- In-Person Visit
- Firing a new employee who works across the country

**Organizing Bad-News Messages**

Questions to consider when organizing your message:

- What is the content of your message?
- How important is the news?
- What are the reader’s expectations?
- What is your relationship with the reader?

**Tone in Negative Messages**

- Tone—implied attitude of the author toward the audience and subject
- Show you took request seriously
- Use positive emphasis and you-attitude
- Think about visual appearance
- Consider timing of message

**Prefer the direct plan when**

- Writing to superiors
- The bad news involves an insignificant matter
- The reader prefers directness
- The reader expects a “no” response
- The writer wants to emphasize the bad news

**Planning a Bad-News Message**

1. Assess the Communication Context
2. Analyze the Audience
3. Choose the Medium
4. Plan Components of the Message
5. Give the Bad News
6. Explain the Decision
7. Close the Message

**Presenting bad news directly**

- Present a brief rationale along with the bad news.
- Follow with needed explanation.
- End with a friendly, off-the-topic closing.
Prefer the indirect plan when:

- Writing to colleagues and subordinates
- Writing to someone outside the organization
- The reader prefers the indirect approach
- You don’t know the reader
- The reader expects a yes.

How to Use the Indirect Plan

What are the four elements of a bad-news message that uses the indirect plan?

- Bad news, apology, explanation, and close
- Buffer, apology, bad news, and explanation
- Buffer, explanation, bad news, and close
- Bad news, alternative, apology, and close

Parts of Negative Messages

- Subject lines
- Buffers
- Reasons
- Refusals
- Alternatives
- Endings

Parts: Subject Lines

- Include the topic, not the specific negative
- Use negative subject lines when the audience
  - May ignore message
  - Needs information to act
- Keep in mind not everyone reads all their messages
  - Be cautious of neutral subject lines

Opening Buffer Statements

What is the goal of a buffer statement in a bad-news message?

- To establish or strengthen the reader-writer relationship
- To apologize for the bad news
- To summarize the bad news
- To hint at the bad news
Opening Buffer Statements

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Parts: Reasons

- Major part of bad news message: REASONS.
- If possible, explain reader benefit, or other benefits that do not include you.
  - You do not want to sound selfish
- Not in your Company’s best interest:
  - Provide short explanation
  - Business, not personal
  - Don’t hide behind company policy, explain
- Present the strongest reason first.

Parts: Refusals

- As you have presented valid reasons:
  - Bad news should not come as a surprise
  - Decision is logical and reasonable.
- If possible, stress what you can do.
  - Avoid these terms: Cannot, are not able to, impossible, unfortunately, sorry, and must refuse.
  - Use impersonal language
- Resist the temptation to apologize for a reasonable business decision.

Apologies

- Don’t apologize
  - If correcting only small error
  - When not at fault
- Do apologize
  - Only once
  - Early in message with a reason
  - Briefly
  - Sincerely
  - Focus on how the situation is corrected

Giving the bad news

- To enable us to have the funds needed to finance our move into multimedia presentations, we’re delaying all other capital equipment purchases for six months. These presentations are projected directly from the computer itself, thereby avoiding the need to print color transparencies.
  - Subordinated
  - Positive
  - Impersonal

Types of Buffers

- Compliment
- Facts
- General principle
- Good news
- Understanding
Consider Compromise/Alternatives

- Offers way to get what audience wants
- Shows you care about audience’s needs
- Returns audience’s psychological freedom (freedom of choice)
- Allows you to end on positive note

Closing on a Pleasant Note

Approaches to Avoid

- Apologizing
- Anticipating Problems
- Inviting Needless Communication
- Repeating the Bad News
- Using a Cliché
- Revealing a Doubt
- Sounding Selfish

Techniques to Use

- Offering Best Wishes
- Suggesting a Counterproposal
- Directing to Other Sources
- Referring to Sales Promotions

Varieties: Rejections and Refusals

- Requests from external audience
- Indirect is almost always used.
  - Don’t wait
- Tone is crucial. Convey respect, sincerity, and courtesy.
- Use buffer of understanding.
- Impersonal language, and explain
- Is there room for compromise?

Varieties: Layoffs and Firings

- If company likely to fold, tell early
- Give honest reasons for firing
  - Unrelated face-saving reason may create legal liability
  - Avoid broadcasting reasons to avoid defamation lawsuit
- Deliver orally; backup in writing

Writing Complaint Letters and Negative Online Reviews

- Consider an indirect style
- Give specific evidence about what went wrong
- Maintain a calm, objective tone
- Close with a confident, respectful tone

Responding to Negative Online Feedback

- Thank the writer for the review—even negative comments give you the opportunity to respond and restore your company’s reputation.
- Many reviews will include some positive points; highlight those for other readers.
- Explain the situation and what you will do to correct the situation. Then, follow through to use negative feedback to improve operations or service.
- Invite the customer back
Rejecting an Idea

Think about a time when you presented an idea that was not accepted. How did the person respond? How did you feel?

Bad News about Normal Operations

Examples | Planning | Replying | Announcing
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