Delivering Bad News

Goals

- **Acceptance:** Reader understands and accepts bad news. Indirect pattern helps.
- **Positive Image:** Promote good image of yourself and company. Be ethical.
- **Message clarity:** Make message so clear that additional correspondence is not necessary.
- **Protection:** Avoid creating legal problems.

Avoid Legal Problems

- Defamation of character – don’t call people names in a “published” document
- Avoid statements that could be misinterpreted or potentially damaging.
- Avoid data that could be misused. Your words are assumed to represent the company

Four-Part Indirect Pattern for Bad News

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<td>Open with a neutral but meaningful statement that does not mention the bad news.</td>
<td>Explain the causes of the bad news before disclosing it.</td>
<td>Reveal the bad news without emphasizing it. Provide an alternative or compromise, if possible.</td>
<td>End with a personalized, forward-looking, pleasant statement. Avoid referring to the bad news.</td>
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Buffer

Best news, compliment, appreciation statement, relevant point you both agree on, objective facts, show understanding, carefully worded apology.

Compliment: *I admire .. organization… and am honored that you invited me to speak.*

Appreciation: *I appreciated learning about your organization…..; however,*

Agreement: *We both realize how much the economy has been effected by the ….*

Understanding: *We know that you expect superior service when .....*

Reasons

- Explain why a negative decision is necessary. Provide sound reasons.
- If possible, show how your decision benefits the receiver or others. Look for reader benefits. Show empathy and fairness.
- Avoid blaming the customer or hiding behind company policy.
- Explain what caused the decision necessitating the bad news.
- Use objective, nonjudgmental, and nondiscriminatory language.
- Show that the matter was treated seriously and fairly
Bad News

- Position the bad news strategically within the letter.
- Try not to let the bad news start or end the paragraph.
- Use a subordinate clause: although…. , because….  
  *Although another candidate was hired, we appreciate*…..  
- Use passive voice to depersonalize the statement  
  *Although … company… cannot lower the price on …., we are happy to …..*  
- Accent the positive: describe what you can do instead of what you can’t do.
- Suggest a compromise or alternative

Closing

- Pleasant statement that promotes good will
- We look forward to…….
- If alternative exists, end with follow through advice.
  *I will be happy to give you …….. Please call …. to arrange a …..*  
- Freebies – coupons, samples, gifts, etc.
- Reference to resale or promotions, if applicable
- Avoid endings that sound canned, insincere, inappropriate, or self-serving.
Closing continued

- Don’t invite further correspondence about the issue.
- Don’t repeat a reference to the bad news in the closing.