

# How to Deliver Bad News

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Everyone hates to be the bearer of bad tidings, but is there a right way to do it? What's the best way to deliver bad news?

## Performance Review

When you're the boss and the employee hasn't been doing the job, you first have to think about why. Was this just a bad year with bad goals or bad stuff at home? or is this an employee who's probably on the way out? You'll be more sympathetic with the first, tougher with the second.

In any annual review, you get the employee to talk first: What did you do well? What didn't you get done? Hear the explanation for the less-than-stellar performance. Then you, the boss, talk. Praise the good and be specific with the bad. Use the rest of the session to come up with an improvement plan. Express your confidence in the employee's ability to improve and your desire to help, but make sure your expectation for improvement is clear. And your belief in him/her.

## Downsizing

What if you, the boss, have to say, "We're downsizing and your position has been eliminated"?

I hate the current blitzkrieg fashion of the boss saying, "Hi, we no longer need your services. Here's a cardboard box and the security guard. 'Bye!'" It's a terrible shock to the employee and doesn't honor the hard work and contributions. At the same time, I also understand the need for speed. Angry employees can damage equipment and systems.

If you have to deliver the bad news, do it quickly; don't make people spend months guessing. But in the actual session itself, do it toward the end of the day and spend the necessary time with the employee to talk, be sympathetic, talk about the good the employee did and the support the company will offer. Even if the employee is only getting the barest of severance packages, your expression of sympathy and help will go a long way toward preserving that person's self-esteem. Until you've experienced it, you have NO idea how being let go can shatter someone's confidence and sense of worth. Let your kindness show.

## Bad News to the Board Room

And what if you have to take the disastrous sales figures into the board meeting?

When you're inexperienced, this kind of job doesn't bother you. You think you'll go in, explain the facts and how to make it all better. Then when you've been bloodied a couple of times, you realize that heads can roll and yours could be one of them. You change your approach. You learn never to bring surprises in, especially if it's bad news. You tell the key figures BEFORE the meeting. You may get more information. They get time to prepare their defense. This won't make you the most popular person at the meeting, but you might keep your head.