

The best way to deliver bad news to employees?

Science says take this approach

It's every leader's or manager's least favorite task: delivering bad news. Maybe your company is closing a facility. Or letting people go. Or there's an employee who won't get that coveted promotion, or has been denied an overseas posting, or can't take an expensive training course.

THE PROBLEM

We try to soften the blow



The impulse is to make a difficult situation easier. Leaders and managers often employ sophisticated techniques to sugarcoat bad news:

The sandwich strategy

Good news

Bad news

Good news

The bury-it approach

Small talk, small talk, small talk!

Bad news

The don't-worry technique

It's not so bad.

Bad news

Don't worry.

I'll take care of you.

The pretend-it's-not happening plan

Bad news

Sorry, have to run to another meeting. Good luck.

THE SOLUTION

Rip off the BAND-AID®



Recipients of bad news prefer clarity and directness.

According to researchers at Brigham Young University and the University of South Alabama.

Here's how employees express their preference for clarity and directness:

"Treat me like an adult."



"Tell me the straight story; don't spin it."

"Answer my questions."



"Get to the point."

How to improve communication about bad news

Brainstorm questions. Put yourself in employees' shoes and develop a list of tough questions. Developing thoughtful answers will help you work through issues and make decisions.

Avoid corporate speak. Complicated words or phrases make employees feel as if you're hiding something. Keep it simple and straightforward.

Provide context, but start with *what* and follow with *why*. In other words, state what's going on, then move to how the decision was made.

Show you care. Empathy goes a long way in helping employees feel respected. Acknowledge the emotion of the situation.

Listen. It's not easy, but allow space for venting. It's not a problem to solve, just a space to create.

You can't change the bad news, but you can deliver it in the best way possible.

