

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

FIGURE 8.1

• Four-Part Indirect Pattern for Bad News

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

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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.