

## **Video Transcript**

### **Sharing Negative Information without Being Negative by Bovee and Thill Business Communication Videos**

[Music] Sharing negative information without being negative.

Sharing unwelcome information is an unpleasant fact of life for all business professionals. No one likes to receive bad news and no healthy person likes to give it. These messages can take a toll on everyone involved, however, it is possible to minimize the emotional impact these messages have because you can take steps to share negative information without being negative.

Learning how to craft these messages with sensitivity and honesty will make the task easier for you as a writer and the experience less traumatic for the recipients of your messages. By negative message, we mean any message that contains unwelcome information for the sender, the receiver, or both. This can include such things as rejecting a job applicant, announcing negative business results, or apologizing for a mistake. Depending on this situation you can have as many as five goals when communicating negative information.

1. To convey the bad news
2. To gain acceptance of the bad news
3. To preserve as much of your audience's goodwill as possible
4. To maintain or repair your reputation or your organization's reputation
5. To reduce or eliminate the need for future correspondence on the matter as appropriate

This is a lot to accomplish in one message so careful planning and execution are particularly critical with negative messages.

Thoughtful planning makes the tasks easier for you as a writer and helps your intended reader process the message.

- Make sure you have a clear purpose that is sensitive to your audience's situation.
- Identify the information your audience needs to process the news. It's not uncommon for recipients of bad news to have questions or concerns so try to address those in your original message.
- Choose your medium and channel carefully. Delivering bad news in person can be uncomfortable but is often the most sensitive way to communicate with employees and colleagues.

- When you're ready to organize your message the most important decision is whether to take the direct or the indirect approach.

Bad news messages can be organized in two basic ways.

With the direct approach, you open with the bad news then offer reasons to explain it, provide any additional information that will help the audience react to and process the news, then close on a respectful note. The direct approach is usually preferred when the news is fairly routine or unemotional or when a situation is dire and you need to get the audience's attention immediately.

With the indirect approach you open with a neutral statement known as a buffer and lay out the reasons behind the bad news before presenting the news itself. The purpose of the buffer is to establish common ground with the reader or listener and prepare for laying out the reasons. The buffer should not be used to delay or obscure the bad news but rather to help you manage its emotional impact. By laying out the reasons before sharing the negative news you lead the audience toward the realization that bad news is coming which can help minimize the sting and help the recipient grasp the reasoning before getting hit with the emotional impact of the news itself. The indirect approach is usually preferred when the news is controversial, shocking or emotionally intense for the recipient.

After you've chosen your approach it's time to compose the message. Pay careful attention to word choices and overall writing style in order to create a tone that is respectful and honest without being insensitive or blunt.

Here's the opening of a message that a manager might send to a recently hired employee who submitted an unsolicited proposal that was well-intentioned but not very well thought out. This first draft uses the direct approach but it is blunt, to the point of being rude. By taking such a negative and disrespectful approach the manager is likely to create significant resentment on the employee's part and miss a great opportunity to help the new employee understand more about the company, and its operations. In just two brief paragraphs the writer manages to insult the employee several times, dismiss the initiative the employee took in drafting the proposal and end on a snarky note that only rubs salt in the wound. The employee surely had high hopes when he or she submitted the proposal, no doubt thinking it would be a good way to show a new boss both initiative and business sense. Getting such an insulting response could damage this new relationship permanently and destroy any motivation the employee had to help the company improve its operations. The employee put time and energy into this proposal and is emotionally invested in the manager's response so the indirect approach is a better choice.

Here's a revised version of the opening paragraphs. The first paragraph uses a buffer to establish common ground and show the employee the respect he or she deserves for showing initiative and caring about the company's financial health. The manager follows the buffer by laying out the reasons why it is valuable to use this outside advertising agency. Doing so prepares the employee for the negative response that will come. In addition to being structured more effectively this version of the message is much more respectful which helps nurture an important working relationship. By reading the reasons for the rejection before getting the rejection itself the employee has the opportunity to process the reasons while in a less emotional state of mind. Sharing negative news is unavoidable in business but with a thoughtful and sensitive approach to communication you can avoid being negative. Doing so protects important relationships and makes an unwelcome chore easier for you too.