Chapter 7

Delivering Bad News Messages
Indirect Outline for Bad-News Messages

**OPENING:**
Begins with neutral idea that leads to refusal or bad news

**BODY:**
1. Presents facts, analysis, and reasons for refusal or bad news
2. States bad news using positive tone and de-emphasis techniques
3. Includes counterproposal or "silver lining" idea

**CLOSING:**
Closes with ideas that shift focus away from refusal or bad news and indicates continuing relationship with receiver.
Your Turn

• What is the best outcome the sender can anticipate after sharing bad news?

• What is the worst outcome that can result?
Using the Inductive Approach to Build Goodwill

- Reasons are easier to understand if given before bad news
- Reasons might be ignored when bad news is given first
- Disappointment in bad news might interfere with ability to understand reasons
Types of Bad-News Messages

- Refusal of request or favor
- Denial of claim
- Denial of credit
- Message of constructive criticism
Your Turn

What other types of “bad news” situations will you likely encounter in your career?
Channel Choice for Bad News: Showing Tact

- **Personal delivery**
  - Says message is important, shows empathy for recipient, and is rich in nonverbal cues and feedback.

- **Electronic messages**
  - Tend to be more honest and accurate and can cause less discomfort for sender and receiver.
Your Turn

Why is using Donald Trump’s phrase “You’re fired!” not the best idea in actual work situations?

1. Because no one is ever really fired in the real world
2. Because people are only “laid-off”
3. Because using tact when delivering bad news helps maintain future relationships
4. Because “real” people would never emulate Donald Trump
Advantages of Inductive Outline

• Identifies the **subject** of the letter without first turning off the reader

• Presents the reasons **before** the refusal, increasing understanding and acceptance

• Avoids a negative reaction because the refusal does not come as a **shock**

• Closes on a neutral or **pleasant** note
Exceptions to Inductive Approach for Bad News

- Message is second refusal to repeated request
- Insignificant matter is involved
- Request is ridiculous, unethical, or illegal
- Writer wants to “shake” receiver
- Relationship is so close that human relations can be taken for granted
- Sender wants to demonstrate authority
Developing the Opening

• Begin with a **buffer** to cushion the bad news
• Avoid empty acknowledgments of the **obvious**
• Avoid **revealing** the bad news too early
• Avoid building **false hopes** by starting positively
Effective Openings for Bad-News Message

Compliment

Point of agreement

Good news

Resale

A review

Gratitude
I am pleased and honored to have been asked to serve as treasurer of the United Way campaign for the coming year.

Regrettably, I will not be able to accept your invitation to serve as treasurer of the United Way campaign in the coming years.

All of us who feel proud of our community agree that the United Way adds significant value to the lives of thousands of citizens. It has given shelter, health care, money, and hope to many with critical needs.
Guidelines for Composing Reasons

- Provide a smooth transition from opening paragraph
- Include concise discussion that is logical to reader
- Show reader benefits and consideration
- Avoid using company policy as reason
Wording the Bad-News Statement

- Position bad news strategically
- Use passive voice, general terms, and abstract nouns
- Use positive language to accentuate anything good
- Imply refusal, but only if the receiver can still understand the message
Examples of De-Emphasis Techniques

Imly bad news if possible. Use subjunctive mood

**Example:** Had you selected a variable rate, you could have taken advantage of the recent drop in interest rates.

Use positive language that accents the good

**Example:** NOT: We cannot ship your order until . . . .

**INSTEAD:** Your order will be shipped when . . . .

Offer counterproposal that shows writer wants to help

**Example:** Although our current personnel shortage prevents us . . . ., we can (alternative).
Examples of De-Emphasis Techniques (cont.)

Use stylistic techniques:
Complex sentence—bad news in the dependent clause
General terms and abstract nouns
Passive voice

Example:  NOT: You failed to verify the payroll figures.

INSTEAD: The payroll figures must be verified. (passive)

Please verify the payroll figures.
(Focuses on the solution rather than the problem)
Offering a Counterproposal or “Silver Lining”

**Counterproposal**
- States what you can do or offer (tangible or intangible)

**Silver lining**
- Provides a thought that turns the discussion back in a positive direction
What counterproposal could you offer in a “No, thank you” letter to a job applicant?

1. We will keep your application in our files for future positions

2. Thank you for your interest. We will contact you in the future.

3. Although we have already filled the director position, we would like to offer you our assistant director position.
Under no circumstances can we grant the request you have made.

Legal requirements prevent us from disclosing the information you have requested.

Unfortunately, we are not able to release the requested information due to privacy laws that prohibit disclosure.
Techniques for Closing Positively

• De-emphasize the negative

• Unify the message

• Include a positive, forward-looking idea
  – Reference pleasant idea from discussion
  – Use resale or sales promotion
  – Express willingness to help in another way
To Close Positively, Avoid . . .

- **Returning** to the bad news
- **Trite** statements that seem shallow or superficial
- Statements that could **undermine** the refusal or promote future **controversy**
Closing Positively: What Would You Do

For the supervisor:

Example:  Q: Can you stay late tonight to finish up this project?
A: No, I’ve got other obligations after work tonight. How can I offer the most help before the end of the day?

For the spouse/significant other:

Example:  A: Honey, I’ve got a tee time at 4 Sunday afternoon. Is it all right if I skip Billy’s soccer game that day?
A: Actually, no. He is expecting you and so am I. Why don’t you move your tee time to 1 that afternoon?
Closing Positively: What Not to Do

Trite statements that may seem shallow

Example: Thank you for your interest. When we can be of further help, please do not hesitate to write or call.

Statements that encourage further controversy

Example: We trust this explanation is satisfactory. We hope you will understand our position.

Statements that undermine the validity of the refusal

Example: If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to let us know.
Refusal of Employee Request: What Does Not Work

Subject: No Employee Video/Computer Lounge

How can you even consider asking for our company to fund a video game/computer lounge for employees?! Our employees are here to work, not to play.

Allowing our employees time with video games and unmonitored computer use goes against every management principle I’ve ever learned. Employees should conduct their personal computer business on personal time and use their spare time at home to play video or computer games. An office is for work, not play. Besides, the cost of installing a separate area for these video breaks would be exorbitant. Our vice president would never agree to spend money on this right now.

I will try to convince management to allow a fifteen-minute time frame every day for personal Internet use within certain parameters, but you should not get your hopes up.

• Reveals refusal in subject line
• States refusal before explanation
• Uses negative language and condescending tone without giving complete explanation for refusal
• Offers possible alternative, but reluctant tone seems insincere
Providing our employees the best working environment possible is a high priority here at ICUP Enterprises. Because we want you to work at the highest level possible, your suggestion to create an employee video game/computer lounge has been carefully considered. Taking a break from work to conduct personal Internet business or play a short game of Solitaire or Minesweeper can be a good way to keep the mind fresh and provide a short distraction from difficult projects.

Creating space dedicated to employee video games and computer breaks would be a complex and expensive project, because of a lack of available space and funding for additional electronic equipment. To provide equal access to all employees, we would need at least 20 new computers with desk space for each. The cost for this would start at $20,000, without considering finding space for the lounge.
Josie, in response to your idea, I have submitted a request to management that we consider adding an “e-break” to our company Internet policy that will allow employees to use the traditional 15-minute coffee break time to conduct personal business on their computers or play short games like Solitaire or Minesweeper. The article you sent me last month provided some good research to support this idea. Let’s see how this goes, and we will revisit the employee video game/computer lounge idea in the future.
“The customer is always right”: Responding when the customer is obviously wrong

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Accentuate the positive aspects of the situation</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>De-emphasize the bad news to promote a continuing relationship</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Emphasize sales promotion when appropriate</td>
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Denying a Claim: What Doesn’t Work

Your message questioning your statement has been received. I am sorry but we cannot adjust your account as you requested. Clearly, the statement is correct.

Each of the order forms you have completed states that returns are subject to a 15 percent restocking charge. Surely you saw this information printed in **bold** print on the order forms, and our telephone operators also explain our return policy thoroughly when customers place orders. I am sure you can appreciate the cost and effort we incur to restock merchandise after the winter ski season is over.

Thank you for doing business with us. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to call or message us.

- Begins with obvious idea
- Includes unnecessary apology for justified decision and provides refusal before reasons
- Uses patronizing tone that may offend
- Presents explanation that focuses on writer and is too brief to be understood
- Uses clichés that may undermine the decision and may lead to unnecessary correspondence
Restocking of Returned Merchandise

The HighFly skis you stocked this past season are skillfully crafted and made from the most innovative materials available. Maintaining a wide selection of quality skiing products is an excellent strategy for developing customer loyalty and maximizing your sales.

Our refund policies allow you to keep a fully stocked inventory at the lowest possible cost. You receive full refunds for merchandise returned within 10 days of receipt. For unsold merchandise returned after the primary selling season, a modest 15 percent restocking fee is charged to cover our costs of holding this merchandise until next season. The enclosed check for $2,069.76 covers merchandise you returned at the end of February.

While relaxing from another great skiing season, take a look at our new HighFly skis and other items available in the enclosed catalog for the 2012 season. You can save 10 percent by ordering premium ski products before May 10.

Bus 28, Fall 2012, David Sherwood
Delivering Constructive Criticism

- Gives the communicator a feeling of having exercised **responsibility**
- Allows management to learn of **changes** that need to be made
- Allows staff to modify techniques and become more **successful**
- Helps staff perform better in the **future**
Dear Preston:

Mallory Welch, a junior accountant in your firm, has been working with us on-site for about three weeks, and her conduct is deplorable. Her demeanor is absolutely unprofessional; her “no-problem” attitude has generated so much friction that a valued employee refuses to work in the same room with her.

Although extensive knowledge of auditing is important, Welch’s personal shortcomings far outweigh her technical expertise. I seriously hope Welch is able to take steps to correct the situation.

Sincerely,

Janette Nowicki
Dear Preston:

Mallory Welch, a junior accountant in your firm, has been working with us on-site for about three weeks. She is a very proficient auditor and did an excellent job of straightening out a technical tangle in our electronic accounting system last week.

Her demeanor, while friendly and open, has caused some of our employees to complain that she does not take her work seriously. She jokes with other members of the audit team, which disrupts the attention of our employees. Two or three of our managers also commented on Mallory’s dress—more appropriate for a round of tennis than a business office.

Mallory is obviously quite good at her job; I know from conversations with her that she is sincere and has sound judgment. Please convey my concerns to Mallory confidentially so that the rest of her time in our office will go more smoothly for her and for us.

• Written with positive intent to help
• Includes specific, verifiable facts
• Acknowledges both good and bad points; conveys fair-mindedness
• Ends with pleasant note that seeks to add credibility to preceding negatives
When should you communicate negative organizational news to employees?

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<td>1.</td>
<td>As soon as you know about it, even if the information is confidential.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>As soon as your supervisor gives you the “O.K.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>At the last possible second, to avoid anyone complaining at work.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Never, they will hear it on the 10 o’clock news</td>
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Sharing Negative Organizational News

- Convey the bad news as soon as possible
- Give a complete, rational explanation
- Show empathy and respond to feelings
- Follow up
COMPANY WILL RELOCATE MARCH 5

Effective March 5, 2011, we will relocate our plant facility to Franklin, Tennessee. Approved by the Board of Directors at its last meeting, this relocation will enable the company to reduce its operating expenses by 15 percent.

All employees wishing to relocate should notify their supervisors by the end of next week. We appreciate your support in this move.

- Reveals bad news in subject line
- Begins bluntly with bad news
- Explains company benefits but nothing to help employees understand
- Is clear on the next step but shows no empathy
- Ends with insincere cliché
- Sends highly sensitive information via email
### Negative Organizational News: Why It Works

#### Proposed Plan for Increased Manufacturing Capacity

Our company has thrived by taking advantage of international business opportunities. Outsourcing our service call center to India 10 years ago helped to control our operating costs through a period of significant growth.

The dynamics of the economy in India have changed, and we can now justify relocating our call center within the United States. We believe that having all of our support personnel, from accounting to sales to engineering, under one roof will provide us the flexibility to meet the business challenges of the next decade. Our present facility in New York City is not capable of achieving this objective.

High property taxes and transportation cost increases each year are additional reasons to consider alternative sites. Likewise, attracting new talent into this high-cost metro area has become more difficult each year. In fact, both of our newly hired unit supervisors are commuting over one hour to obtain affordable housing.

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- Uses subject line to introduce topic but does not reveal bad news
- Uses buffer to introduce familiar topic and lead to reasons
- Provides rational explanation, including benefits for company and employees

*Continued*
While relocating could provide a long-term economic benefit to the company, moving out of New York City could enhance the quality of life for us all. In a suburban city, we could enjoy day-to-day living in a relaxed, small-town environment with all the benefits of a large city only a short drive away. These factors have convinced us that moving the manufacturing facility to Franklin, Tennessee, a thriving suburb located approximately 18 miles south of Nashville, would benefit the company and employees.

Your supervisor will explain the logistics of the relocation at your unit’s next meeting. In the meantime, visit the Franklin link on the company intranet to read more about what Tennessee can offer us and our families. Check back often for updates on the FAQ page designed to respond to your concerns as they arise. Now let us all work together for a smooth transition to Franklin.

• Presents bad news while reminding of receiver benefits
• Shows empathy by assuring jobs not in jeopardy
• Follows up assuring continued exchange of timely information
• Ends with positive appeal for unity
• Prepare a statement to a group of employees AFTER a series of layoffs have taken place
Homework Email

- Write an email to an employee who was laid off due to economic conditions but is distraught.
- Email: bus28ElCamino@gmail.com
- DUE: By the start of the next scheduled session