



5 STRATEGIES FOR DELIVERING BAD NEWS

AN EXECUTIVE SPEAKING COACH EXPLAINS HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF A DIFFICULT SITUATION.

BY ANETT GRANT

In the business world you are constantly faced with the prospect of having to deliver bad news.

While these situations are difficult, there are steps you can take to ensure that you instill a sense of confidence in your organization. Even if your day-to-day isn't directly affected by Wall Street, by keeping in mind these five strategies you can navigate the bear markets that arise in your life.

1. BE REAL

Under pressure, many people have the impulse to try to spin bad news into a positive. I disagree with this tactic. Instead to maintain your credibility it is important to be straightforward, direct, and authentic. If you're not, your audience is going to see right through you. You need to give them some sort of hope for the future, but you must navigate the road between being a huckster and being completely downtrodden. Being direct isn't going to take away the sting of the bad news, but it will help you maintain your credibility and give your audience a reason to trust you in the long-run.

2. GET TO THE POINT

Burying bad news under a mountain of PowerPoint slides will only generate confusion and a likelihood of aggressive questioning. If you are below plan, for example, just say so right away—then give the explanation of how or why the numbers reflect that reality. Not only will your audience be able to digest the information more effectively, but by being direct you also show strength and confidence.

The key here is to be concise. Your audience is smart. If they think you are being anything but straightforward, your credibility will take a hit. No grandiose preambles, no rambling on, and no going off on tangents that may or may not be relevant. Just get to the point.

3. BE CLEAR

Being clear is absolutely essential when you have to deliver bad news that involves complexity. When talking financials, don't drown your audience in a sea of endless numbers and data points. You need to present your news in terms of critical takeaways, not data dumps. Here are some questions to ask yourself before you begin.

- Who is your audience?
- What do you want to say?
- What are they expecting to hear?
- And most importantly: What message do you want your audience to walk away with?

Going through these questions beforehand will help ensure that you are being as clear as possible, giving your audience confidence in your leadership ability.

4. GIVE YOUR AUDIENCE FORWARD-LOOKING ASSURANCES

When delivering bad news, you may need to explain some factors that went into the outcome. However, you don't need to spend too much time dwelling on past minutiae. Instead, make an effort to translate what this news means for the future. Don't sugar-coat it; assure your audience that you have a plan. They need to know that you are committed and caring, not brutal and cold. Additionally, you need to consider the personal reactions when the news is especially distressing. If you are facing downsizing, for instance, you have to give a vision for the future that reassures those who will remain with the company.

5. STAY CALM

While this one is a bit of a no brainer, it is often easier said than done (especially if the news is unexpected). Speak with a steady pace and make eye contact every five seconds or so. Don't rapidly scan your audience or avoid eye contact completely—this will make your audience uneasy. Also, be conscious of how your voice sounds at the ends of sentences. If your voice rises, it makes you sound unsure of yourself. Overall, the idea is to make the best of a bad situation and keep a cool head under pressure. Stay strong for your audience and give them confidence to keep persisting.

When you have to deliver bad numbers or bad news, remember this: It's not about you. You might be uncomfortable. You might not want to do it. But what matters is that you provide your audience with insight and understanding and a sense that you are in control and caring.

No matter your audience, you need to communicate that despite what the current situation is, you will be able to navigate forward and overcome whatever current obstacles you are facing. In business and in life, inevitably, you will have setbacks. But by keeping these strategies in mind, you can make the most of these unfortunate situations.

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