Delivering Bad-News Messages

*Business Communication, 15e*
Lehman and DuFrene
Indirect Outline Used in Bad-News Messages

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

**Body:**
1. Present 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 idea that shifts focus away from refusal or bad news and indicates continuing relationship with receiver
Channel Choice for Bad News: How to Show Tact

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

Electronic messages are more honest and accurate and cause less discomfort for sender and sometimes receiver.
Using the Inductive Approach to Build Goodwill

- Reasons easier to understand if given before bad news
- Reasons might be ignored if bad news given first
- Disappointment in bad news might interfere with ability to understand reasons
Advantages of the Deductive Outline

- Identifies the __________ of the letter without first turning off the reader
- Presents the reasons __________ the refusal, increasing understanding and acceptance
- Avoids a negative reaction because the refusal does not come as a __________
- Closes on a neutral or __________ note
Exceptions to Using the Inductive Approach for Bad News

- Message is a second refusal to a repeated request
- An insignificant matter is involved
- The request is ridiculous, unethical, or illegal
- The writer wants to “shake” the receiver
- The relationship is so close that human relations can be taken for granted
- The sender wants to demonstrate authority
Developing the First Paragraph

- Begin with a ______ to cushion the bad news
- Avoid empty acknowledgments of the ____________
- Avoid ______________ the bad news too early
- Avoid building ______________ by starting positively
Effective Openings for Bad-News Message

- Gratitude
- Compliment
- Point of agreement
- A review
- Good news
- Resale
Guidelines for Writing the Reasons Section

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

- Position the bad news strategically
- Use passive voice, general terms, and abstract nouns
- Use positive language to accentuate anything good
- Imply the refusal, but only if the receiver can still understand the message
Offering a Counterproposal or “Silver Lining”

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

**OR**

“Silver lining”
Provides a thought that turns the discussion back into a positive direction
Techniques for Closing Positively

- De-emphasize the negative
- Unify the message
- Include positive, forward-looking idea
  - Reference pleasant idea from discussion
  - Use resale or sales promotion
  - Express willingness to help in another way
Closing Positively: What NOT To Do!

• Avoid __________ to the bad news
• Avoid ____ statements that seem shallow or superficial
• Avoid statements that could __________ from the refusal or promote future

______________
Types of Bad-News Messages

- Refusal of a request or favor
- Denial of a claim
- Denial of credit
- Message of constructive criticism
You are to be commended for your commitment to restore Naperville’s historical downtown shopping district. In this age of megamalls and Internet shopping, the culture of a traditional main street lined with home-owned and operated shops needs to be preserved.

The success of this project depends on a good project director. The organizational, leadership, and public relations activities you described demand an individual with upper-level managerial experience. During the last year, Hilstrom has decentralized its organization, reducing the number of upper-level managers to the minimal level needed. Although our current personnel shortage prevents us from lending you an executive, we do want to support your worthy project.

Kevin Denny in our senior executive corps has a keen interest in historical preservation, having served on the board of a similar organization while living in Vermont. If you can benefit from his services, call him at 555-8700, extension 142.
Refusal of Employee Request: What Does Not Work

Subject: CD Players Out of the Question

We cannot afford to install CD players in our current fleet of trucks.

I would really like to enable you to play your music so your trips would be less boring.

Unfortunately, the cost of installing a CD player in our current trucks is exorbitant—over $500 per truck. Management would never agree to spend that much money at this time.

I will do what I can to convince management to include a CD player in the specifications of new trucks.

Analysis

Reveals refusal in subject line

States refusal before explanation

Uses negative language and condescending tone without providing a complete explanation for refusal

Offers possible alternative, but reluctant tone does not seem sincere
Because providing our drivers a pleasant and productive work environment is a priority, your suggestion to install CD players in our current fleet of trucks has been carefully considered. Listening to your favorite music while trucking down the highway is a sure way to shorten a long haul.

Installing a quality sound system in any vehicle can be a surprisingly complex and expensive task. The estimated cost for installing a CD player in one of our current trucks is $500. In contrast, installing a CD player as original equipment adds only $75 to the truck’s cost, a much more realistic expenditure for the company.

Carie, in response to your feedback, I have submitted a proposal seeking approval for a change in the specifications for new trucks to include a CD player. With the normal frequency that trucks are rotated within the fleet, you should be trucking down the highway soon with your favorite CD playing in the background.

Analysis

Cushions bad news with a sincere compliment for suggestion

Transitions to reasons and provides complete explanation for refusal

Restates reason for saying “No” to de-emphasize refusal
“The customer is always right.” How do you handle a situation where the customer is obviously wrong?

1. Accentuate the positive aspects of the situation

2. De-emphasize the bad news to promote a continuing relationship

3. Emphasize sales promotion when appropriate
Denying a Claim: What Does Not 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.

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**Analysis**

Begins with an obvious idea
Includes an unnecessary apology for justified decision and provides refusal before reasons
Uses a patronizing tone that may offend receiver
Presents an 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 provide you the opportunity 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 2007 season. You can save 10 percent by ordering premium ski products before May 10.

Analysis
Uses subject line that provides info without revealing bad news
Uses resale to cushion bad news
Presents clear explanation behind restocking policy with emphasis on reader benefits
Implies refusal by stating the amount of enclosed check
Shifts emphasis by presenting a silver-lining sales promotion
Delivering Constructive Criticism

• Give the communicator a feeling of having exercised _______________
• Allow management to learn of ___________ that need to be made
• Allow staff to modify techniques and become more ____________
• Help staff perform better in the ____
COMPANY WILL RELOCATE MARCH 5

Effective March 5, 2008, we will relocate our plant facility to Mason, Ohio. 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.

Analysis

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
Subject: Proposed plan for increased manufacturing capacity

Growth presents its challenges. As projected, increased demand for our product will soon exceed the capabilities of present production facilities as you know from information included on the company intranet. For some time, we have been studying whether to expand our current manufacturing facility or relocate to another site.

High property taxes and transportation cost increases each year are compelling 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 just to obtain affordable housing.

Analysis

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
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 Mason, Ohio, a thriving suburb located approximately 10 miles north of Cincinnati, would benefit the company and our employees.

You may resume your duties at the same structure should you choose to relocate. Your supervisor will explain the logistics of the relocation at your unit’s next meeting. In the meantime, visit the Mason link on the company intranet to read preliminary information about the move and more about what Ohio can offer us and our families. You’ll also want to visit this link periodically for relocation updates and to check the FAQ page we’re compiling daily to respond to your concerns as they arise. Now let us all work together for a smooth transition to many challenging opportunities awaiting us in Mason.

**Analysis**

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