

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

WORKSHOP GUIDE



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Informing employees that their work is not good enough, that they can't have the pay rise they asked for, or that they have been denied promotion are all situations that managers dread. Dealing with difficult conversations with rejected and dejected employees is a leadership skill, and one that can be learnt. This session will help delegates deal with giving bad news.

This guide is designed for a manager or a facilitator to deliver a short workshop featuring videos from the Video Arts Management Essentials Series. Each video comes with a series of activities around the following structure:

LOOK - watch the video and reflect on the content and message.

THINK - activities and questions linking the video to their own experience and workplace.

REMEMBER - a summary of the key learning points.

Each section relating to the video will last around 15 minutes.

ACTION PLAN - At the end of the series of videos and activities delegates should be encouraged to share the most important actions they will take and record actions on their Personal Action Plan sheet.

FEATURED VIDEOS

- Preparing to give bad news
- A bad news meeting, listening
- A bad news meeting, limit the damage

VIDEO 1 – PREPARING TO GIVE BAD NEWS

LOOK (play video, 3 minutes)

Most managers don't like to give employees bad news. So the natural tendency is to get it over quickly with the minimum of fuss. This inevitably means they fail to prepare as the preparation, in itself, causes pain. But that of course is the first mistake.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

A lot of managers rush through bad news meetings because they find the experience uncomfortable. The kindest way to break bad news is to give that news at the beginning of the meeting. It can help to draft the first paragraph of what you intend to say at the meeting. Perhaps even rehearse it. You'll feel much more confident if you know what you're going to say.

How did you prepare for your last bad news meeting?

Responses could include:

Be prepared

- Check ALL the facts about the decision; why alternative plans of action were rejected. Then anticipate questions and objections and think about your response to them.

Consider the logistics

- Where are you going to hold the meeting? How long you need and the least damaging time to break the news. Do you need to have anyone else present?

Stay in control of your emotions

- Remember, the more prepared you are, the better able you will be to remain neutral and in control of your emotions.

REMEMBER (2 minutes recap)

Prepare for bad news:

- Stick to the facts.
- Anticipate emotions.
- Write the first paragraph.

VIDEO 2 – A BAD NEWS MEETING, LISTENING

LOOK (play video, 3 minutes)

Every individual responds differently to bad news. It is vital at this stage to think on your feet, to be flexible in your behaviour.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Ask the group if they have ever given bad news to someone who then clammed up or became aggressive or upset? What's the best way to deal with emotional employees?

Try to emphasise the following points at the end of the discussion;

When employees get emotional - it's best to let them work through their tears or anger:

- Listen and continually show you understand.
- Allow any abuse to wash over you.
- Start to ask open questions, once the storm has begun to recede.
- Don't interrupt or get emotional yourself.

When employees clam up - start thinking about how you can probe for information:

- Ask open ended questions.
- Give them time to respond and don't hurry them.
- Don't interrupt or put words in their mouth.
- Encourage them to talk.
- Show you have time to listen and want to understand.

When employees get aggressive and argue the decision - think how you can stand your ground:

- Re-state the decision.
- Don't come up with other reasons on the spur of the moment.
- Respond to anger with calm gestures.
- Stay cool, neutral and dispassionate.

REMEMBER (2 minutes recap)

Listen to the responses:

- Emotional? Ride the storm.
- Clam up? Probe.
- Argue? Stand your ground.

VIDEO 3 – A BAD NEWS MEETING, LIMIT THE DAMAGE

LOOK (play video, 3 minutes)

There comes a point when you think all the emotions have come out and you've begun to hear it all a second time. That's when you need to start steering people away from their present emotions towards the future and limit the damage.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Ask the group to discuss how they can you limit the damage from a bad news meeting?

Responses could include;

Perspective

- Put the decision into perspective. Reassure the person that this decision doesn't make them a failure. Self-esteem can shrink - often out of all proportion to what's happened - so remind them of their strengths.
- Also consider what constructive advice you could offer for the future.

Letting other people know

- Think about how you let other people know the news. Ask them how the news should be broken and where, when and to whom. Respect their views. This should be done quickly, as they will worry whether or not colleagues know the news, and they will not be able to return to any sense of normality.

Future opportunities

- What future opportunities can you talk about? Help them work out the reasons they were unsuccessful if it was a promotion or interview situation.
- If there is no real compensation to offer, don't make it up.

REMEMBER (2 minutes recap)

Limit the damage:

- Put it in perspective.
- Discuss announcement.
- Talk about the future.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS – ACTION PLAN

Divide the group into pairs or threes.

- Ask them to spend 10 minutes sharing the most important action they will take to improve their approach to giving bad news.
- Make sure that each individual has identified at least one specific action to take as a result of the programme.
- Ask for and answer any final questions.
- Bring the session to an end.