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HOW TO CONVEY BAD NEWS

By Tom Herndon

Life can be disappointing at times. Systems break down, mistakes are made, deadlines go unmet, and so on. It's not always easy to be the deliverer of 'bad news' to your colleagues, your customers, or to anyone else for that matter.

We recently ran across some useful tips from an article by Karen E. Klein in Business Week, entitled "The Importance of Being Up Front". In her article she mentions Stephanie Winston's "The Organized Executive." <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0446676969/earlytorise-20>

Ms. Winston's article outlines a set of simple communications that can help you responsibly prepare the person to whom you are about to deliver bad news.

We hope, of course, that you will not have to use this guideline all that often. But, just in case...

1. Prepare the recipient.

"I have some bad news, and it's going to be very disappointing to you."

2. Lay out what happened.

"We won't be able to deliver the equipment on time..."

3. Explain why it happened. Don't make excuses - simply show that you understand what caused the problem.

"Our computer failed, and several orders were dropped from the system."

4. Show that you understand the impact.

"I understand this is going to make things tough for your company."

5. Explain what you're doing to make sure it doesn't happen again.

"Our computer system is going to be revamped so we can't overlook orders in the future."

(continued)

6. Make amends. Provide the client with a token gesture or more.

"I'm so sorry that happened. To make sure you get what you need on time, we'd like to rent the equipment for you from another vendor until we can deliver your order."

7. Ask for their continued support going forward.

"You're very important to me personally and to our company. Can I count on you to stick with us during this difficult time?"

8. As you go forward with the customer, don't continually apologize - it only hurts your ability and your credibility.

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