

TECHNIQUES FOR DELIVERING BAD NEWS

By Ann Butera CRP, President, The Whole Person Project, Inc.



I have never liked having to deliver bad news. In fact, I used to procrastinate, hoping that the situation would correct itself, so I would not have to deal with it. But this approach just delayed the inevitable.

The reality is that delivering bad news is part of life. And, it requires tact, diplomacy, and concern for the well-being of both you and the other person. The following techniques will help you incorporate these qualities into your conversation.

1. Pick a time and place when you can be free of distraction or interruption.
2. Get right to the point. Announce up front that you have some unpleasant, unfortunate, disappointing, or disturbing news. The right words? Simple: "I have some unpleasant news."
3. Use "softeners" to open. For example: "I'm sorry to have to tell you..." or "I'm afraid that..."
4. If the news is coming as a shock to the other person, be prepared for their emotional reaction. Let them vent, if they seem to need it. DO NOT try to get them to "calm down" or "be reasonable."
5. If you are concerned about their reacting with violence, make sure you have provided for your own safety and security. Either have a witness present, or alert security in advance.
6. If appropriate, once the shock has abated, offer the person resources they can pursue.
7. Forgive yourself for being the bearer of bad news. You are not causing their distress...the news is.

Let's face it -- while the task of delivering bad news will become easier with experience, it will never be easy. However, if you put these seven steps into practice, you will be able to focus attention on the facts, not personalities. I look forward to hearing your comments, results, and questions.



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