

How to easily deliver bad news and still look good

The day will come when you must deliver bad news. Sometimes you have to tell the bad news to your client, to fellow directors of a board that you are on, or maybe to your mentor. Whoever is on the receiving end of the message, the way you deliver the news can determine how you are treated and respected in the future.

An example of this is when Kris was working with a business owner who had to double his fees in order to stay in business. No one was happy about this, but Kris and Tom, the owner, knew it had to be done. They were developing a long-term plan, and the increase in fees was just a small part of the changes.



They called the fee increase a “restructuring of fees” and gave the entire upgrading process a name; they called it “Excel 2015.” Tom alerted his clients through the company mailings that he had many plans for “Excel 2015” and sent out quarterly updates to keep everyone informed.



Meanwhile, Tom was working with his contractors to make sure they would buy into his ideas of upgrading the company. He sent “update” notices to his board members, letting them know about progress and problems. He also sought out critics and spoke to them individually. He told his own staff that he would personally respond to the negative phone calls and emails, shielding them from irate clients.





To ensure that the news of doubling the fees would not hit so hard, Tom saw to it that his clients received more for their money.

The result? When “Excel 2015” was presented to the clients, the doubling of the fees was overshadowed by the benefits. Although certain clients had complaints about the dues, the clients did notice an improved image, better results, improved efficiencies and more benefits.



The lesson here is that when presenting bad news, always take a long-term approach. Trust that your decisions today will have impact for the long-term, even if those in power right now may not benefit from it. Every so often you may have to report bad news about something that already happened. The most important part of your approach is to show how you can avoid having the problem again.

If you approach the situation in an upfront manner, it will help. If you have to report to a superior, try telling them that you have a situation that is a problem, but you also have some possible solutions. If the person you are talking to understands that you are trying to solve the problem rather than being stuck in it, the meeting will go easier.

If you are successful, you will leave your meeting feeling revitalized because the problem is over and done with, and you have agreed on ways to avoid repeating it in the future.