

~~Don't be the bad guy~~

Deliver the bad news personally

If you're like most managers, you probably hate being the bearer of bad tidings.

We all want people to like us, and we aren't very likeable when we're telling folks things they don't want to hear, such as:

- You don't get a merit raise this year.
- Your project didn't get funded.
- You're going to have to increase productivity by 15 percent—with no increase in budget or personnel, and, that all-time favorite,
- Your services won't be needed after June 30th (or any other variation on "You're fired!").

Bad news is inevitable. You could dodge the responsibility of delivering it yourself, but if you do, you'll probably make matters worse, and you'll earn

a reputation for being evasive and even cowardly as a manager.

Rather than ducking this hard duty, you need to develop strategies for handling it effectively.

Come directly to the point. A little small talk may help relax both of you, but the longer you delay, the more tension you create. Your employee knows you didn't call him in to talk about the weather.

Select an appropriate time and place. The setting may be as important as the message. Make sure you have privacy and you won't be interrupted.

Don't invite your employee to sit, and then remain standing (elevating yourself while diminishing him). Don't sit on a "throne" (a better, higher, bigger chair). And don't retreat behind your desk or any other barrier.

Above all, minimize the confrontational aspect of the conversation by following these three guidelines:

Offer reasons: It isn't so just because you say it's so. You need to explain why you've reached the conclusion that an employee's performance is subpar or that their behavior is inappropriate. Explain the "why" as you deliver the "what."

Speak to actions, not motives: You're a coach, not a therapist. You're coaching performance, not personality. Limit your message to what they do, not who they are or why they do it.

Offer options: If the news is anything short of termination, tell the employee what they can do to improve the situation. Don't end the session until you both are clear on what the employee should do next.

“How will your comments help them do their jobs better? How will that improved performance help them grow and advance?”