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[How to have difficult workplace conversations that produce positive results](#)

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on February 16th, 2014 | [Comments\(2\)](#)

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Breaking bad news — especially when it affects peoples’ lives, careers or jobs — is never easy. And when these conversations are handled poorly, it can make matters even worse. But if you take advantage of these tips, your [communication efforts will be much more effective](#).

Many companies do poor job (or no job at all) [communicating negative information](#) to their employees. Here are some practical tips on how you can effectively deliver negative or difficult information:

- 1. Make the communication as direct and personal as possible.** Ideally, employees should be told bad news on a one-on-one, face-to-face basis. Obviously, this isn’t always possible. However, *always* deliver the initial information via a live human being, not by an e-mail, voice message or employee newsletter. Then, it’s OK to use other less personal communication channels for follow-up information and progress reports.
- 2. Start with “the big picture.”** Begin by putting your company’s situation in a more global context. Explain how market forces, changes in the economy, reduced customer demand, price-cutting by competitors, etc. are affecting your organization. In other words, tell employees *why* these actions are necessary.
- 3. Focus on the facts when sharing negative news.** Employees have an easier time embracing negative news when it is fact-based and emotion-free. Make sure your tone is neutral when delivering the news.
- 4. Show what you are doing to improve the situation.** Employees need to know what you are doing to make the situation better. They are probably already aware of all the negative issues and don’t want to be left with only the bad news. They need hope that the situation will improve and they need to see how you’re going to do it.
- 5. Be honest and transparent.** Employees know instinctively when management is trying to hide something, and that can affect trust between them and management. The more transparent management is in communicating the actual situation, the better the



long-term outcome. If you don't have an answer to a question, admit it. But promise to follow up as soon as the information becomes available. And keep your promise.

6. **Make sure management takes responsibility.** Don't shift the blame to others or get on the defensive when sharing the negative news with employees. Even if outside forces are in play, management needs to be accountable for what happened by taking responsibility when appropriate.

7. **Show that you care. Management needs to show empathy and understanding** to the challenges a situation brings to employees. Recognize that employees feel angry, frustrated and powerless. Management has an opportunity to show they care and are doing everything possible to make the situation better.

8. **Continue sharing information once the negative news has been released.** After announcing negative news, management needs to issue frequent updates as new information becomes available. Employees need to be informed so they don't feel surprised by additional negative news.

9. **Express your appreciation to employees.** After delivering negative news, it's important for management to continue to reinforce how much they appreciate each employee.

*Joel Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the U.S., having worked with many of the world's leading companies, including Oracle, Google, Amazon, Deloitte, The Ritz-Carlton, Gap and Starbucks. He has 17 years of first-hand experience working closely with thousands of executives, senior managers, directors and employees. He is the author of 300 articles on leadership and seven books, including "Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level." More than 10,000 people subscribe to his Fulfillment@Work newsletter. If you **sign up**, you'll receive the free e-book "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!" His website www.GarfinkleExecutiveCoaching.com has over 200 free articles on leadership, work issues and career advancement. Follow Garfinkle on **Twitter**, **Facebook**, **LinkedIn** and **Google+**.*