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Best Practices in Communicating Good and Bad News

How Critical Communications Can Build Trust

How we communicate, both when things are going well and through difficulty, is a critical part of the ongoing process of building trust. It's an art to master.

Every email, voicemail, text, face to face, and online meeting, works to either strengthen, or weaken, our "more-fragile-than-we-think" business relationships.

Best Practices - Good News

- 1. Tell them it's "Good News"** - Everyone loves a communication that begins with the words "Good News!" or a similar positive affirmation...whether it's verbal, in an email subject line, or in the first sentence of a hand-written note. We love people who create, locate, and are good at delivering good news to us. And we want to know its good news, up front, so we can relax and enjoy the message.
- 2. Use Email** -The advantage of using email to deliver good news, particularly in business, is that the details of our message are documented on both sides. Our audience can share our great news easily with other people who can read exactly what we wrote.
- 3. Consider the Downside** - No one wants to hear, "I have good news and bad news...". One is typically more significant than the other. If there's a downside related to our communication, we'll need to assess it from our customer's perspective. If the downside is insignificant when compared to the good news, then it's probably ok to communicate the good news and explain the "one small challenge" and how it is being addressed. If the downside is more significant than the upside, we probably aren't delivering good news!
- 4. Recognize Contribution** - We finish strong when we congratulate the recipient for something they genuinely contributed related to the good news outcome. If the recipient played no part in the outcome, don't pretend they did...just skip the recognition.
- 5. Briefly list the Next Steps** - We close by listing our "next steps", typically the action items to be addressed to bring the issue to resolution...hopefully without much effort on our

customer's part. Creating high value outcomes, and bringing them to "completion", wins trust.

6. Get a Second Opinion - Before hitting "SEND", someone should proof-read our communication and provide feedback. Eliminate typos, spelling errors, grammar mistakes, and eliminate all negative words. Our communication should be positioned to strengthen our client relationship and not do anything to put it in jeopardy.

Best Practices - Bad News

Most of the time, what we call "bad news" is really a challenge resulting from a change or an unfulfilled expectation. In business, the challenge typically has financial consequences. Of course, if trust has been breached in the process, money generally won't heal the relationship.

The goal is to protect "trust" at all cost.

1. Deeply understand the situation -Understanding the situation (the reasons, options, action plan, and next steps) and how it will likely affect the customer, before we communicate, is critical. Consult with others who are qualified to help us help our customer. If we're required to deliver unwanted news on the spot, show empathy and, if possible, buy time to research solutions or alternatives that may not be apparent in the moment, to help the customer.

Follow-through with what was promised.

2. Meet in person or by phone -Bad news should be communicated "face to face" or "by phone". Of course, we'll need to schedule in advance. Interrupting a client with an unexpected "bad news" phone call will cause a significant withdrawal of "trust" from our relationship. In fact, blindsiding someone with "bad news" can severely damage the relationship.

3. Don't call it "Bad News" -We thank our customer for the call and deliver the information with a short, understandable, explanation and advise that we have a solution (or are working on one). We never start with "I have bad news." This puts the recipient in "fight or flight" for no reason. Our opening is short (1 to 2 sentences) and should end on a positive note. We wait for our customer to respond. We listen. The goal is to move the conversation towards a collaborative action plan and next steps.

4. Be careful with apologies -What are we apologizing for? If we truly made a mistake or did something wrong, we apologize, receive the feedback, and move to solution mode. Over-apologizing costs trust and can communicate that we consider ourselves unable to help.

5. Use positive words -This is a best practice for any communication, good or bad. Replace negative words like "can't", "don't", won't, etc. with sentences that communicate what "is" possible.

6. No "Bad News" Fridays -Unless there is no option, we avoid ruining anyone's weekend for something that can be handled on Monday...or worse, that can't be handled until Monday!

7. Communicate as soon as possible -Nothing is worse than bad news that is received at

the last minute. The more advance notice, the more likely a collaborative solution will surface.

8. 20 seconds of courage -Author and motivational speaker, Darren Hardy, teaches that we only need to be brave for 20 seconds. Once we are in conversation, the anxiety that causes our procrastination and stress dissipates.

There is opportunity in every challenge. As author Napoleon Hill put it, "Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it seeds of an equal or greater benefit." We need to look for the opportunity for good and go after it.

VANTREO is here to help. If you'd like to know more about our leadership training and coaching systems, just **reply here** ^[1]. We look forward to the conversation.

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