

Deliver Bad News with Compassion: A GUIDE

For professional leaders, these reminders can GUIDE you when preparing yourself to deliver bad news. These skills are crucial now more than ever, as financial and tech markets adjust to new realities.

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Gather yourself

G Collect your thoughts and clarify all next steps. Secure an uninterrupted space/conference room to hold difficult meetings. If meeting in person is not possible, organize a video call so that you can see each other. In some cases, you may have to deliver a mass layoff via email in advance, which makes it more challenging to be personable and show compassion. Don't forget that your words on paper, on screen, or delivered in person all carry the same weight, and thus necessitate equal care in crafting.

Unpack the news and communicate clearly

U It helps to Unpack the decision and prepare bullet points and a storyline so that your delivery is empathetic, clear, and consistent – especially when you must bring the same message to multiple employees. When you deliver the news, be direct and clear about the decision. Be mindful that, while company leadership made the decision to cut costs/jobs and not you personally, you must now own the tough decision; don't hide behind it.

Be intentional and straightforward

I Get to the point quickly. Practice and prepare for reactions and questions, as your preparation will help employees receive and digest the news. Your first priority is making clear at the start of the meeting what is actually happening. Intentional compassion looks like: eye contact with employees, preparing for tough questions, clearly defining next steps, recognizing emotions, and acknowledging the impact of these hard decisions on employees and their families.

Deliver with care and compassion

D Deliver the conversation with empathy and compassion. As a manager you are expected to communicate concise and clear information with care, without seeming harsh or casual. Clearly convey your information and answer questions honestly. Listen to the concerns from your heart and address the concerns with calm. Respond with empathy yet confirm the decision made, and clarify next steps. Be respectful and recognize their contributions. While you can't reverse the decision, you can help the person accept the reality and move forward.

Engage and follow up with your team

E Engage with your remaining team once the news has been delivered. Prepare a follow-up meeting and answer questions they may have. Think about how the decision to let go of one or more employees will have an impact on the team, business unit, and organization at large. How will tasks and responsibilities be disseminated across the team now? Will the layoff(s) have an impact on the structure of the organization? Most importantly, though – acknowledge the departure of much-respected colleagues and friends.