



Enterprising Rural Families™

This newsletter is an instrument of the *Enterprising Rural Families: Making It Work* program of University of Wyoming Extension. For further information concerning the Enterprising Rural Families program or on-line course contact information@eRuralFamilies.org or go to <http://eRuralFamilies.org/>.

TIP OF THE MONTH:

RE-ENERGIZING YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

1. **Celebrate accomplishments and express gratitude.** Create rituals and opportunities to thank members and reward their commitment.
2. **Encourage board members to tell each other what motivates them to serve.** Let them tell their story.
3. **Revisit your mission; audit and evaluate purpose and calling.** Tuning up or re-writing your mission periodically helps keep everyone heading the same direction.
4. **Educate, educate, educate.** Create the atmosphere that everyone is so important they must keep learning.
5. **Create meaningful meetings.** Focus on strategic goals and issues—stay above the mundane.
6. **Conduct a candid board assessment.** Measure performance and gauge efficiency, focusing on results and quality.
7. **Develop the Board-CEO partnership.** Trust, candor, respect, honesty.
8. **Add new board members and graduate some “old.”** Bring in new creativity, ideas, energy.
9. **Discuss and promote transparency and integrity.** Hidden agendas generate mistrust.

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Difficult Conversations – Sharing Bad Information

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In the role of a manager we are often the bearer of bad news—telling people what they do not want to hear. Add upon the role of manager the role of parent, spouse or sibling; conversations around bad news can be extremely difficult in a family enterprise. There are techniques which can be employed to assist you in delivering the bad news, which comes out of the science of non-verbal communication.

The major objective is to deliver this message and to preserve a positive working/relating relationship with the individuals who are about to receive the message.

Before going into the conversation, ask yourself some questions:

1. What is your purpose for having the conversation? What do you hope to accomplish? What will be the ideal outcome?
2. What assumptions are you making about the person(s) intentions? Even though you may be feeling terrible, disrespected, betrayed, ignored, or marginalized—don’t assume that how you are feeling is what was intended. Impact does not necessarily equal intent.
3. Honestly look at your attitude about having to have this conversation. Is your attitude influencing your perception?
4. Compile the facts. Prepare a visual with the factual information. If this conversation is taking place with a single person, the information may be presented on a piece of paper. If the receiver of the bad news is a larger group, use a larger visual, such as a flip chart.

Go visual. Our tendency is to want to tell what we know. If you tell the other person the bad news, it is obviously coming from you, which results in the bad news becoming associated with you. This puts you into a position that you want to avoid--being the bad news. Get the bad news into a visual format: a chart, a report, or a comparative list. Your plan is to separate the written bad news physically from yourself. That sounds difficult, but really is very easy to accomplish with a bit of planning in the delivery of your message.





Plan the Delivery. Make sure to set up the delivery of this message so that you are not holding the paper the message is on. Put the paper somewhere where you can point to it, and the two of you can look at it. If there's more than two of you, put the paper on an easel or post it on a wall off to your side, so you can point to it. If you cannot put it on a table, or off to the side on an easel or wall, hold the paper away from your body.

Our culture teaches us to look at people when we are addressing them, because we want them to hear the message we are communicating. In this situation, we want the bad news to be heard and understood, and we want the bad news to be separate from ourselves. In other words, if you are looking at the listener while pointing to the bad news, the listener will still be looking at you. When you're referring to the bad news visual, if you look at it, your listener will look at it too.

Choose a meeting place where you deliver the bad news somewhere different from where you have pleasant conversations. You will be generating memories where you give the "bad news". You don't want to contaminate future strategy meetings of your company or group or family gatherings.

Practice the Delivery. Now is the time to choose your words carefully. Refer to the paper, report or chart as the source of the information. Say, "the report says," or "this situation is summarized by this report as...". Avoid using "I" statements.

Language is a powerful tool. When preparing your delivery, be mindful about the tone of voice that you will use when delivering the bad news. Practice is important, shift the tone of your voice to a more flat, credible, perhaps slower voice when you look to the paper with the bad information. There are negative and positive phrases and words that will impact the conversation. Remember, "I think," or "my thoughts on this" are going to draw the listener back to you as the source of the bad news.

Stick to the facts, the very specific facts, and descriptions. Avoid making interpretations of the information on the paper. Interpretations are yours and bring the listener back to you as the source of the bad news.

The way I have described the physical setting for this meeting can best be summarized as ending up with a three-point scene. You are one point, the listener is the second point, and the bad news is the third point.

Position your body so that you are on the "same side" of the table or room as your listener. Do not sit "opposite" each other. This creates a "you" vs. "me" position. If you are delivering good news and want to be associated with being the bearer of good news, reverse most of these suggestions.

Difficult conversations bring opportunities for change and assessing one's situation. To continue to do the same things and expect different results, according to Einstein, is the definition of insanity .

Difficult conversations are the ones we most avoid. Unfortunately, these conversations only get more difficult as time passes. Usually getting these conversations out into the open is a relief for all parties and helps individuals, even entire organizations, get moving in the right direction.



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