

Delivering Difficult News

1. Recognize your personal reaction to this news and possible anxiety about delivering it.

- ✓ Acknowledge that this is difficult news to deliver
- ✓ Express your regret in your message – demonstrate empathy

2. Describe the processes used to make the decision.

3. Be clear and straightforward.

- ✓ Do not hide, sugarcoat or downplay the message
- ✓ Do not make future promises that may not happen
- ✓ Do not overreact
- ✓ **DO** give specifics – time, process, outcome

4. Explain why the action is being taken and offer context.

- ✓ Describe how the action supports the University's mission

5. Explain how the decision is fair to as much of the organization as possible.

Fair process considers many viewpoints:

- ✓ Those employed and enrolled within affected departments/programs
- ✓ Other members of the University community
- ✓ The public – taxpayers, future students, the state of AZ

6. Describe the resources that are available to help people accept and adjust; give your personal pledge to support them through this difficult time.

7. Tell it again – in writing.

- ✓ Follow up every meeting in writing to ensure that people received your message

Delivering Difficult News (continued)

8. Outline your on-going communication plan so people will know what to expect and when.

- ✓ Face-to-face meetings: Consider "town hall" style meetings to help reinforce the need to continue moving forward
- ✓ Designated point of contact: Offer contact information (e-mail address; phone number, etc.) for one individual who will provide timely responses to questions and concerns.
- ✓ E-mail: Use to convey quick, simple updates; do not use it to deliver messages that can be perceived as ominous or threatening
- ✓ Memos: Keep the message clear and accurate through regular written communication

9. Communication is not all words – it is also expression, posture, tone, vocabulary and approach.

- ✓ How you appear as you deliver this difficult news will have everything to do with how people absorb, accept and adjust

10. Remember that every conversation you have about these changes is a demonstration of the University's values.

Post-News Delivery Possibilities

1. Shock/confusion/bargaining/anger/rage/depression
2. Inability to focus on next steps
3. Pointed questions about timelines, expectations
4. Lack of productivity, earlier than expected turnover
5. Increased illness, disability claims, leave requests
6. Lobbying to stop the process
7. Sabotage
8. Excitement and eagerness to move forward NOW

Portions adapted from *The Secret of Communicating Bad News to Employees*, Dennis R. Ackley, *Communicating World*, August 1992; *No News is Not Good News: Communicating with Your Employees in Tough Economic Times*, Catherine Biondi, SHRM White Paper, July 2002