



Announcing a difficult decision

The challenge

Informing people of a decision that is most likely to be badly received is likely to make you uncomfortable. Many managers believe that if they clearly explain their motivation, people will understand and accept the decision. However, this is mostly illusory, as bad news naturally generates reactions: fear, anger, misunderstanding, etc. A much better option is to be prepared and take this phenomenon into account in the approach used to inform people of the decision.

Four key steps

Faced with bad news, people react through a process of "mourning". Your speech and attitude should be adjusted to fit this process.

1

ANNOUNCEMENT

Announce your decision without appeal

When you announce a difficult decision, leave no room for debate. Otherwise, reactions may arise even before your message has been clearly transmitted.

- As the situation may require some courage, taking the time to **prepare yourself** will help you feel more at ease to dare express yourself openly. E.g.: Put your argument in writing; test it with a trusted colleague.
- Announce your decision **firmly**, leaving no room for debate or questions. You first need to clearly state the situation.
- Communicate a **simple** message to avoid any ambiguity or misunderstanding. E.g.: Avoid evasive language; do not use excessively technical terms which may obscure what you have to say; be brief.
- Present your decision as **legitimate**, and not as bad news for which you have to apologize. E.g.: Adopt an affirmative attitude, control your voice.

2

REJECTION

Listen to reactions... silently

After the announcement, allow fear, anger, etc. to be expressed. At this stage, there is no point in arguing: people will only be ready to listen to you when they feel that you have heard them.

- Try to take a **step back**. These reactions are normal; don't take it personally: becoming defensive will only make things worse.
- Beware of appearing **indifferent**. Sometimes, to restore calm, you may be tempted to play down the situation, and therefore exacerbate people's reactions by giving the impression you are ignoring their difficulties. E.g.: Look at your interlocutors; encourage them to express themselves by saying "yes", "I understand", etc.
- Allow yourself time to **listen**. E.g.: Reformulate what they say to clarify and show you are listening; avoid taking back the lead of the conversation to reply to their complaints.

3

NEGOTIATION

Leave the door open for discussion

It is normal that people will try to wrestle back control of the situation. Do not flee these discussions; they may help the other party to better understand the decision or even to accept it.

- **Identify in advance** what is negotiable; this will facilitate discussion. Do the same for what you believe is non-negotiable: you will minimize the risk of letting yourself be taken off guard during exchanges.
- Explain the **value of any concessions** you may be willing to make. Not everyone will necessarily be aware of it.
- Make sure you **close discussions** by reminding people that you are aware of the fact that it is a difficult decision, but that it remains nevertheless essential.

4

SUPPORT

Support efforts over time

Implementing the decision often gives rise to frustrations. Support is then essential to back up the action.

- Facilitate the move to action by dealing with the **details of implementation**. E.g.: Reflect on what might make the task easier – temporary additional resources, one-to-one coaching, etc.
- Demonstrate that you are **taking into account people's feelings and opinions**. E.g.: Accept to extend a deadline.
- **Resist the temptation to return to the previous situation** – especially if the implementation does not have immediate results. E.g.: Multiply opportunities to re-communicate the reasons behind the decision made.
- **Recognize the efforts made** – even if the desired results are not immediately visible.