CHECKLIST 8

Communicating Bad News

PURPOSE: *Deliver difficult news directly, humanely and in person, and follow through on what you promise afterward.*

News to deliver: *Layoff, reorg, cancellation, other*	**Audience:** *Individual or team*	**Date:** *MM/DD/YYYY*	**Setting:** *Private, in person*

WHEN TO USE

Use this for layoffs, reorganizations, project cancellations, or other difficult news. Affected individuals hear first, in private; the team hears as soon as possible after.

BEFORE COMMUNICATING

- ☐ Understand all facts completely
- ☐ Know what you can and cannot share
- ☐ Anticipate reactions and questions
- ☐ Prepare yourself emotionally
- ☐ Coordinate timing with others involved
- ☐ Have support resources ready if needed
- ☐ Clear your schedule for follow-up

DELIVERY APPROACH

- ☐ Deliver in person when possible (not email/text)
- ☐ Choose private setting for individual news
- ☐ Get to the point quickly (don’t bury the lead)
- ☐ Be direct and clear: no euphemisms
- ☐ Use simple language, not corporate-speak
- ☐ Show empathy and humanity
- ☐ Be authentic in your emotion
- ☐ Don’t rush: give them time to process

STRUCTURE

- ☐ State the news directly
- ☐ Explain the “why” as much as you can
- ☐ Acknowledge the impact
- ☐ Provide what information you can about next steps
- ☐ Be honest about what you don’t know
- ☐ Offer support where appropriate

- ☐ Allow space for questions and reactions

PLAN THE CONVERSATION

The news, stated directly	*One or two plain sentences*
The why (what I can share)	*Reasoning, within what you are allowed to say*
What I can say about next steps	*Dates, process, who they will hear from*
What I don't know yet	*Be honest about it*
Support available	*Resources, contacts, time*

WHAT TO SAY

> "I have difficult news to share…"
> "This is not a reflection of your work/value…"
> "I know this is hard to hear…"
> "Here's what I can tell you about next steps…"
> "Here's what support is available…"
> "I'm here to answer questions…"

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- ☐ "Everything happens for a reason"
- ☐ "This is actually a good thing"
- ☐ "At least…" (comparing their situation)
- ☐ "I know exactly how you feel"
- ☐ "You'll be fine" (dismissive)
- ☐ Jokes or attempts to lighten the mood

HANDLING REACTIONS

- ☐ Allow silence
- ☐ Accept anger without defensiveness
- ☐ Acknowledge sadness
- ☐ Don't try to "fix" their emotions
- ☐ Be present and listen
- ☐ Offer tissue, water, space as needed
- ☐ Give them time before expecting action

FOR TEAM ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ☐ Tell affected individuals first (in private)
- ☐ Announce to team as soon as possible after
- ☐ Be present for questions and reactions
- ☐ Don’t hide behind email for major news
- ☐ Create space for processing
- ☐ Follow up individually with everyone

AFTER

- ☐ Document the conversation if appropriate
- ☐ Provide promised resources
- ☐ Check in within 24–48 hours
- ☐ Be available for follow-up questions
- ☐ Take care of yourself too
- ☐ Follow through on all commitments

COMMITMENTS I MADE

Owner	Action item	Due date

> **Pro Tip:** How you deliver bad news defines your character as a leader. Be kind, be honest, be present. Your humanity matters most in these moments.