

When Bad News Hits: 8 Ways To Lessen Your Employees' Panic

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Anyone who's ever gotten one of those email alerts for a "company-wide meeting today at 4 – mandatory" knows the feeling of dread in the pit of the stomach.

You know there's news, and it's probably bad news.

And you can tell from the scared-rabbit looks on your employees' faces that you're going to have to cope with the panicked fall-out.

Situations like this are inevitable. But we can go into them prepared by [adopting some strategies](#) to get our teams through the bad news.

Here are **8 ways to lessen the pain** (and the drama that often follows):

1) Let Them Complain – A Little

There's no use rehashing the bad news over and over if nothing can change it. The **only thing that can change is your team's outlook.**

Say the company announced a hiring freeze – and you know your staff already feels overworked. Their frustration levels are probably sky-high at this point, so allowing them to vocalize can at least ease some of the tension.

Listen to their concerns and **don't belittle them**.

Acknowledge that the news doesn't help, but remind them to take a realistic view of the situation: "We've been down this road, and we're making do with fewer people pretty well for now. But I get your frustration."

Just an **acknowledgment of their angst** can help defuse it.

2) Paint The Big Picture

Getting your team to honestly consider the impact the situation has on them can dispel concerns. It helps them **understand on a practical level what the news really means** for them and that it might not be as bad as they think.

As in the above example, get them to ask some questions:

- Are there ways we can help each other work better together?
- What's worked in the past when we had staffing shortages?
- What can we change or do now since we know we won't get more staff?

Offer ideas about how to turn the situation around, or at least minimize any damage.

3) Open Up

Tough times are worse [when information is scarce](#).

Tell everyone everything you can, within reason, that will affect them. A series of brief conversations can have **more impact than one long talk**.

They'll feel better knowing you're willing to be honest about the situation, which goes a long way to ease fears.

4) Get Their Take On Things

All employees want their opinions to be valued.

By asking "What's your feeling about this news?" or "Tell me what's bothering you most," team members **will feel you take their concerns seriously** and welcome their opinions.

If you can, pose this question to employees individually if you think the bad news affects them directly (for example, if a hiring freeze affects a promotion).

This will **spark dialogue about concerns that need to be hashed out**.

5) Refocus On Your Team's Main Goals

When stormy winds blow, purpose fuels grit.

Leadership coach [Joel Garfinkle recommends injecting optimism into your team's psyche](#) through some small but effective questions:

- **"What do we need to get done?"** This helps the team focus on a common vision. This question reveals areas where your employees lack confidence and problems that should be addressed. It also helps redefine their goals and encourages them to work around the bad news.

- **“What can I do better?”** In this case “I” means “you.” Take the step of asking your team if there’s anything YOU can do to make the situation better. Even if no one comes up with anything, it reinforces the idea that you’re in the same boat with them. And [employees notice that](#).

6) Reinforce Your Appreciation

It’s easy to say “thanks,” but **getting specific reinforces** to employees that you truly appreciate their efforts day to day.

Point out things they’ve done that you’re thankful for, even basic stuff like regularly meeting deadlines. Yes, you know it’s their job, but their commitment to it earns some credit, especially if they’ve been steady during not-so-good circumstances.

7) Turn To Your Optimists For Help

It’s easy to focus on critics and complainers and forget about those who are small points of light in bad news situations.

They’re the ones **who are the most easy-going, upbeat and engaged**. Enlist their support to keep morale up and work running smoothly following bad news. A positive outlook is catching, after all. So in the same vein ...

8) Deal With The Naysayers In Private

Bad news affects your entire team, but that doesn’t mean employees all respond in the same way. **Resist the urge to correct the whole team** when only a few take a negative attitude.

For those employees who can’t seem to drop those attitudes, take them aside and tell them that while you understand the situation isn’t good, it’s still up to them to do their jobs well and remain dedicated.

You **don’t want their cynicism to infect** the rest of the team.