

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

- Describe the strategies and goals of business communicators in delivering bad news, including knowing when to use the direct and indirect patterns.
- Explain the writing process and how to avoid legal problems related to bad-news messages.
- Discuss and illustrate techniques for delivering bad news sensitively.
- Outline a plan for refusing direct requests and claims.
- Describe techniques for delivering bad news to customers.
- Describe techniques for announcing bad news within organizations.



Primary and Secondary Goals in Communicating Bad News

As a business communicator working with bad news, you will have many goals, the most important of which are these:

Primary Goals

- Make the receiver understand the bad news
- Help the receiver accept the bad news
- Maintain a positive image of you and your organization

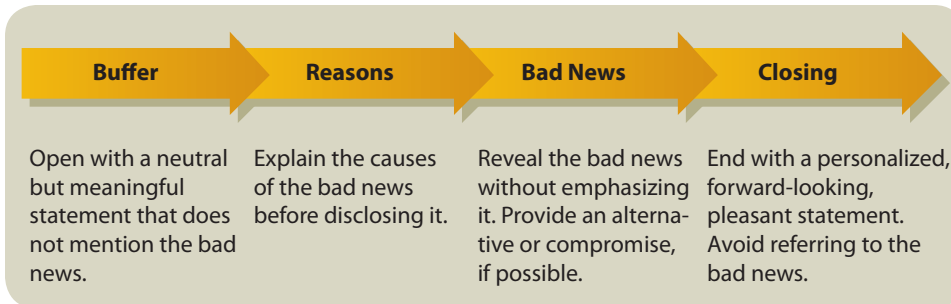
Secondary Goals

- Reduce bad feelings
- Convey fairness
- Eliminate future correspondence
- Avoid creating legal liability or responsibility for you or your organization

Using the Indirect Pattern to Prepare the Reader

The indirect pattern softens the impact of bad news by giving reasons and explanations first.

FIGURE 7.1 Four-Part Indirect Pattern for Bad News



- **Buffer.** Introduce the message with a neutral statement that makes the reader continue reading.
- **Reasons.** Explain why the bad news was necessary and that the matter was taken seriously.
- **Bad news.** Provide a clear but understated announcement of the bad news that might include an alternative or a compromise.
- **Closing.** End with a warm, forward-looking statement that might mention good wishes, gifts, or sales promotion.

When to Use the Direct Pattern

Many bad-news letters are best organized indirectly, beginning with a buffer and reasons. The direct pattern, with the bad news first, may be more effective, though, in situations such as the following:

- **When the receiver may overlook the bad news.** Rate increases, changes in service, new policy requirements—these critical messages may require directness to ensure attention.
- **When organization policy suggests directness.** Some companies expect all internal messages and announcements—even bad news—to be straightforward and presented without frills.
- **When the receiver prefers directness.** Busy managers may prefer directness. If you know that the reader prefers that the facts be presented straightaway, use the direct pattern.
- **When firmness is necessary.** Messages that must demonstrate determination and strength should not use delaying techniques. For example, the last in a series of collection letters that seek payment of overdue accounts may require a direct opener.
- **When the bad news is not damaging.** If the bad news is insignificant (such as a small increase in cost) and doesn't personally affect the receiver, then the direct strategy certainly makes sense.

The direct pattern is appropriate when the receiver might overlook the bad news, when directness is preferred, when firmness is necessary, and when the bad news is not damaging.

Avoiding Three Causes of Legal Problems

Before we examine the components of a bad-news message, we must look more closely at how you can avoid exposing yourself and your employer to legal liability in writing negative messages. Although we can't always anticipate the consequences of our words, we should be alert to three causes of legal difficulties: (a) abusive language, (b) careless language, and (c) the "good-guy syndrome."

a)

Abusive language becomes legally actionable when it is false, harmful to the person's good name, and "published."

b)

Careless language includes statements that could be damaging or misinterpreted.

c)

Avoid statements that make you feel good but may be misleading or inaccurate.

Techniques for Delivering Bad News Sensitively

The four components of the indirect pattern, shown in Figure 7.2, include buffer, reasons, bad news, and closing.

FIGURE 7.2 Ideas for Delivering Bad News Sensitively



Buffering the Opening

A buffer is a device to reduce shock or pain. To buffer the pain of bad news, begin with a neutral but meaningful statement that makes the reader continue reading. The buffer should be relevant and concise and provide a natural transition to the explanation that follows. The individual situation, of course, will help determine what you should put in the buffer. Here are some possibilities for opening bad-news messages.

Best News. Start with the part of the message that represents the best news. For example, a message to workers announced new health plan rules limiting prescriptions to a 34-day supply and increasing co-payments. With home delivery, however, employees could save up to \$24 on each prescription. To emphasize the good news, you might write, *You can now achieve significant savings and avoid trips to the drugstore by having your prescription drugs delivered to your home.*⁴

Compliment. Praise the receiver's accomplishments, organization, or efforts, but do so with honesty and sincerity. For instance, in a letter declining an invitation to speak, you could write, *The Thaliens have my sincere admiration for their fundraising projects on behalf of hungry children. I am honored that you asked me to speak Friday, November 5.*

Appreciation. Convey thanks to the reader for doing business, for sending something, for conveying confidence in your organization, for expressing feelings, or simply for providing feedback. Suppose you had to draft a letter that refuses employment. You could say, *I appreciated learning about the hospitality management program at Cornell and about your qualifications in our interview last Friday.* Avoid thanking the reader, however, for something you are about to refuse.

Agreement. Make a relevant statement with which both reader and receiver can agree. A letter that rejects a loan application might read, *We both realize how much the export business has been affected by the relative weakness of the dollar in the past two years.*

To reduce negative feelings, use a buffer opening for sensitive bad-news messages.

Openers can buffer the bad news with compliments, appreciation, agreement, relevant facts, and understanding.

Apologizing

Here are some tips on how to apologize effectively in business messages:

- **Apologize to customers if you or your company erred.** Apologies cost nothing, and they go a long way in soothing hard feelings. Use good judgment, of course. Don't admit blame if it might prompt a lawsuit.
- **Apologize sincerely.** People dislike apologies that sound hollow (*We regret that you were inconvenienced* or *We regret that you are disturbed*). Focusing on your regret does not convey sincerity. Explaining what you will do to prevent recurrence of the problem projects sincerity in an apology.
- **Accept responsibility.** One CEO was criticized for the following weak apology: "I want our customers to know how much I personally regret any difficulties you may experience as a result of the unauthorized intrusion into our computer systems." Experts faulted this apology because it did not acknowledge responsibility.⁷

Consider these poor and improved apologies:

Poor apology: We regret that you are unhappy with the price of ice cream purchased at one of our scoop shops.

Improved apology: We are genuinely sorry that you were disappointed in the price of ice cream recently purchased at one of our scoop shops. Your opinion is important to us, and we appreciate your giving us the opportunity to look into the problem you describe.

Poor apology: We apologize if anyone was affected.

Improved apology: I apologize for the frustration our delay caused you. As soon as I received your message, I began looking into the cause of the delay and realized that our delivery tracking system must be improved.

Poor apology: We are sorry that mistakes were made in filling your order.

Improved apology: You are right to be concerned. We sincerely apologize for the mistakes we made in filling your order. To prevent recurrence of this problem, we are . . .

Conveying Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and enter into the feelings of another

Here are other examples of ways to express empathy in written messages:

- In writing to an unhappy customer: *We did not intentionally delay the shipment, and we sincerely regret the disappointment and frustration you must have suffered.*
- In laying off employees: *It is with great regret that we must take this step. Rest assured that I will be more than happy to write letters of recommendation for anyone who asks.*
- In responding to a complaint: *I am deeply saddened that our service failure disrupted your sale, and we will do everything in our power to . . .*
- In showing genuine feelings: *You have every right to be disappointed. I am truly sorry that . . .*

Presenting the Reasons

The most important part of a bad-news letter is the section that explains why a negative decision is necessary. Without sound reasons for denying a request or refusing a claim, a letter will fail, no matter how cleverly it is organized or written.

Explaining Clearly. If the reasons are not confidential and if they will not create legal liability, you can be specific:

Citing Reader or Other Benefits if Plausible. Readers are more open to bad news if in some way, even indirectly, it may help them .

Explaining Company Policy. Readers resent blanket policy statements prohibiting something: *Company policy prevents us from making cash refunds* or *Contract bids may be accepted from local companies only* or *Company policy requires us to promote from within*. Instead of hiding behind company policy, gently explain why the policy makes sense: *We prefer to promote from within because it rewards the loyalty of our employees. In addition, we have found that people familiar with our organization make the quickest contribution to our team effort.* By offering explanations, you demonstrate that you care about readers and are treating them as important individuals.

An apology is an admission of blameworthiness and regret for an undesirable event.

Bad-news messages should explain reasons before stating the negative news.

Readers accept bad news more readily if they see that someone benefits.

Choosing Positive Words.

Stay away from such words as *cannot, claim, denied, error, failure, fault, impossible, mistaken, misunderstand, never, regret, rejected, unable, unwilling, unfortunately, and violate.*

Showing That the Matter Was Treated Seriously and Fairly.

In canceling funding for a program, board members provided this explanation: *As you know, the publication of Urban Artist was funded by a renewable annual grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Recent cutbacks in federally sponsored city arts programs have left us with few funds. Because our grant has been discontinued, we have no alternative but to cease publication of Urban Artist. You have my assurance that the board has searched long and hard for some other viable funding, but every avenue of recourse has been closed before us. Accordingly, June's issue will be our last.*

Cushioning the Bad News

Although you can't prevent the disappointment that bad news brings, you can reduce the pain somewhat by breaking the news sensitively. Be especially considerate when the reader will suffer personally from the bad news. A number of thoughtful techniques can cushion the blow.

Positioning the Bad News Strategically.

Using the Passive Voice.

Accentuating the Positive.

We will no longer allow credit card purchases, try a more positive appeal: *We are now selling gasoline at discount cash prices.*

Implying the Refusal. It is sometimes possible to avoid a direct statement of refusal. Often, your reasons and explanations leave no doubt that a request has been denied. Explicit refusals may be unnecessary and at times cruel. In this refusal to contribute to a charity, for example, the writer never actually says *no*: *Because we will soon be moving into new offices in Glendale, all our funds are earmarked for relocation costs. We hope that next year we will be able to support your worthwhile charity.* The danger of an implied refusal, of course, is that it is so subtle that the reader misses it. Be certain that you make the bad news clear, thus preventing the need for further correspondence.

Suggesting a Compromise or an Alternative.

Closing Pleasantly

Forward Look. Anticipate future relations or business. A letter that refuses a contract proposal might read: *Thanks for your bid. We look forward to working with your talented staff when future projects demand your special expertise.*

Alternative Follow-Up. If an alternative exists, end your letter with follow-through advice. For example, in a letter rejecting a customer's demand for replacement of landscaping plants, you might say: *I will be happy to give you a free inspection and consultation. Please call 746-8112 to arrange a date for my visit.*

Good Wishes.

Freebies. When customers complain—primarily about food products or small consumer items—companies often send coupons, samples, or gifts to restore confidence and to promote future business. In response to a customer's complaint about a frozen dinner, you could write: *Your loyalty and your concern about our frozen entrees are genuinely appreciated. Because we want you to continue enjoying our healthful and convenient dinners, we are enclosing a coupon that you can take to your local market to select your next Green Valley entree.*

Resale or Sales Promotion. When the bad news is not devastating or personal, references to resale information or promotion may be appropriate: *The computer workstations you ordered are unusually popular because of their stain-, heat-, and scratch-resistant finishes. To help you locate hard-to-find accessories for these workstations, we invite you to visit our Web site where our online catalog provides a huge selection of surge suppressors, multiple outlet strips, security devices, and PC tool kits.*

Refusing Direct Requests and Claims

Saying No to Requests From Outsiders. Requests for contributions to charity are common. Many big and small companies receive requests for contributions of money, time, equipment, and support. Although the causes may be worthy, resources are usually limited. In a letter from Huron Architectural Services, shown in Figure 7.3, the company must refuse a request for a donation to a charity. Following the indirect strategy, the letter begins with a buffer acknowledging the request. It also praises the good works of the charity and uses those words as a transition to the second paragraph. In the second paragraph the writer explains why the company cannot donate. Notice that the writer reveals the refusal without actually stating it (*Because of sales declines and organizational downsizing, we are forced to take a much harder look at funding requests that we receive this year*). This gentle refusal makes it unnecessary to be more blunt in stating the denial.

FIGURE 7.3 Refusing Donation Request

 **Huron Architectural Services**
500 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611
866-340-2200
www.huronarchitectural.com

May 18, 200x

Ms. Shelby Villanova
Executive Director
Outreach Children's Charity
650 North LaSalle, Suite 340
Chicago, IL 60610

Dear Ms. Villanova:

We appreciate your letter describing the care and support the Outreach Children's Charity gives to disadvantaged, physically challenged, sick, and needy children around the world. Your organization is to be commended for its significant achievements and outstanding projects such as the Sunshine Coach program, which provides passenger vans to worthy children's organizations around the globe.

Supporting the good work and worthwhile projects of your organization and others, although unrelated to our business, is a luxury we have enjoyed in past years. Because of sales declines and organizational downsizing, we are forced to take a much harder look at funding requests that we receive this year. We feel that we must focus our charitable contributions on areas that relate directly to our business.

We are hopeful that the worst days are behind us and that we will be able to renew our support for good work and worthwhile projects like yours next year.

Sincerely,

Matthew M. Rutherford
Vice President

Opens with praise and compliments

Doesn't say yes or no

Transitions with repetition of key ideas (good work and worthwhile projects)

Explains sales decline and cutback in gifts, thus revealing refusal without actually saying it

Closes graciously with forward look

Internal request refusals focus on explanations and praise, maintaining a positive tone, and offering alternatives.

Refusing Internal Requests. Just as managers must refuse requests from outsiders, they must also occasionally refuse requests from employees. In Figure 7.4 you see the first draft and revision of a message responding to a request from a key specialist, Zachary Stapleton. He wants permission to attend a conference. However, he can't attend the conference because the timing is bad; he must be present at budget planning meetings scheduled for the same two weeks. Normally, this matter would be discussed in person. But Zach has been traveling among branch offices, and he hasn't been in the office recently.

FIGURE 7.4 Refusing an Internal Request

Before

DATE: June 22, 200x
TO: Zachary Stapleton
 Chief Information Officer
FROM: Victoria M. Blaylock
 VP, Management Information Systems
SUBJECT: Request

This is to let you know that attending that conference in October, Zach, is out of the question. Perhaps you didn't remember that budget-planning meetings are scheduled for that month.

We really need your expertise to help keep the updating of our telecommunications network on schedule. Without you, the entire system—which is shaky at best—might fall apart. I'm really sorry to have to refuse your request to attend the conference. I know this is small thanks for the fine work you have done for us. Please accept our humble apologies.

In the spring I'm sure your work schedule will be lighter, and we can release you to attend a conference at that time.

Announces the bad news too quickly and painfully

Gives reasons, but includes a potentially dangerous statement about the "shaky" system

Makes a promise that may be difficult to keep

After

MAGELLAN ENTERPRISES

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 22, 200x
TO: Zachary Stapleton
 Chief Information Officer
FROM: Victoria M. Blaylock VMB
 VP, Management Information System
SUBJECT: Your Request to Attend October Conference

Buffer: Includes sincere praise — The entire Management Council and I are pleased with the exceptional leadership you have provided in setting up video transmission to our regional offices. Because of your genuine professional commitment, Zach, I can understand your desire to attend the conference of the Telecommunication Specialists of America from October 23-27 in Phoenix.

Reason: Tells why refusal is necessary — The last two weeks in October have been set aside for budget planning. As you and I know, we have only scratched the surface of our teleconferencing projects for the next five years. Because you are the specialist and we rely heavily on your expertise, we need you here for these planning sessions.

Bad news: Implies refusal — If you are able to attend a similar conference in the spring and if our workloads permit, we will try to send you then. You are our most valuable team member, Zach, and we are grateful for the quality leadership you provide to the entire Information Systems team.

Buffer: Includes sincere praise

Reason: Tells why refusal is necessary

Bad news: Implies refusal

Closing: Contains realistic alternative

Delivering Bad News to Customers

Damage Control: Dealing With Disappointed Customers

Whenever possible, these problems should be dealt with immediately and personally. Many business professionals strive to control the damage and resolve such problems in the following manner:¹⁰

- Call the individual involved.
- Describe the problem and apologize.

- Explain why the problem occurred, what you are doing to resolve it, and how you will prevent it from happening again.
- Follow up with a letter that documents the phone call and promotes goodwill.

FIGURE 7.5 Bad-News Follow-Up Message

PARAGON CONSULTING ASSOCIATES

4350 Camelback Blvd.
Scottsdale, AZ 85255
Voice: (480) 259-0971
Web: www.paragonassociates.com

May 7, 200x

Mr. Eric Nasserizad
Director, Administrative Operations
Alliance Resources International
538 Maricopa Plaza, Suite 1210
Phoenix, AZ 85008

Dear Mr. Nasserizad:

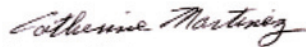
You have every right to expect complete confidentiality in your transactions with an independent consultant. As I explained in yesterday's telephone call, I am very distressed that you were called by a salesperson from Payroll Services, Inc. This should not have happened, and I apologize to you again for inadvertently mentioning your company's name in a conversation with a potential vendor, Payroll Services, Inc.

All clients of Paragon Consulting are assured that their dealings with our firm are held in the strictest confidence. Because your company's payroll needs are so individual and because you have so many contract workers, I was forced to explain how your employees differed from those of other companies. Revealing your company name was my error, and I take full responsibility for the lapse. I can assure you that it will not happen again. I have informed Payroll Services that it had no authorization to call you directly and its actions have forced me to reconsider using its services for my future clients.

A number of other payroll services offer outstanding programs. I'm sure we can find the perfect partner to enable you to outsource your payroll responsibilities, thus allowing your company to focus its financial and human resources on its core business. I look forward to our next appointment when you may choose from a number of excellent payroll outsourcing firms.

Sincerely,

PARAGON CONSULTING ASSOCIATES



Catherine Martinez
Partner

Opens with agreement and apology

Explains what caused the problem and how it was resolved

Takes responsibility and promises to prevent recurrence

Closes with forward look

Tips for Resolving Problems and Following Up

- Whenever possible, call or see the individual involved.
- Describe the problem and apologize.
- Explain why the problem occurred.
- Take responsibility, if appropriate.
- Explain what you are doing to resolve the problem.
- Explain how it will not happen again.
- Follow up with a letter that documents the personal contact.
- Look forward to positive future relations.

Denying Claims

In Figure 7.6 the writer denies a customer's claim for the difference between the price the customer paid for speakers and the price he saw advertised locally (which would have resulted in a cash refund of \$200). Although the catalog service does match any advertised lower price, the price-matching policy applies only to *identical* models. This claim must be rejected because the advertisement the customer submitted showed a different,

In denying claims, writers use the reasons-before-refusal pattern to set an empathic tone and buffer the bad news.

FIGURE 7.6 Denying a Claim

CAICAP.WEEBLY.COM

 **Digital Resources**
4350 Dodge Street, Omaha, NE 68183 402-445-2300 www.digitalresources.com

September 24, 200x

Mr. Cedrick Mandela
430 Erie Avenue
Lansing, MI 48895

Dear Mr. Mandela:

You are right, Mr. Mandela. We do take pride in selling the finest products at rock-bottom prices. The Nautilus 800 speakers you purchased last month are premier concert hall speakers. They are the only ones we feature in our catalog because they are the best.

We have such confidence in our products and prices that we offer the price-matching policy you mention in your letter of September 15. That policy guarantees a refund of the price difference if you see one of your purchases offered at a lower price for 30 days after your purchase. To qualify for that refund, customers are asked to send us an advertisement or verifiable proof of the product price and model. As our catalog states, this price-matching policy applies only to exact models with USA warranties.

Our Nautilus 800 speakers sell for \$1,299. You sent us a local advertisement showing a price of \$999 for Nautilus speakers. This advertisement, however, describes an earlier version, the Nautilus 600 series. The Nautilus 800 speakers you received have a wider dynamic range and smoother frequency response than the 600 model. Naturally, the improved model you purchased costs a little more than the older 600 model that the local advertisement describes. Your speakers have a new three-chamber bass module that virtually eliminates harmonic distortion. Finally, your speakers are 20 percent more compact than the 600 series.

You bought the finest compact speakers on the market, Mr. Mandela. If you haven't installed them yet, you may be interested in ceiling mounts, shown in the enclosed catalog on page 32. For the most up-to-date prices and product information, please see our online catalog at our prize-winning Web site: www.digitalresources.com. We value your business and invite your continued comparison shopping.

Cordially,

Christine C. Guzik
Manager, Customer Service

Enclosure

Refusing Credit

If you must deny credit to prospective customers, you have four goals in conveying the refusal:

Goals when refusing credit include maintaining customer goodwill and avoiding actionable language.

- Avoid language that causes hard feelings.
- Retain customers on a cash basis.
- Prepare for possible future credit without raising false expectations.
- Avoid disclosures that could cause a lawsuit.

After we received a report of your current credit record from Experian, it is apparent that credit cannot be extended at this time. To learn more about your record, you may call an Experian credit counselor at (212) 356-0922.

A cordial closing looks forward to the possibility of a future reapplication:

Thanks, Ms. Love, for the confidence you have shown in Mod Style. We invite you to continue shopping at our stores, and we look forward to your reapplication in the future.

Some businesses do provide reasons explaining credit denials (*Credit cannot be granted because your firm's current and long-term credit obligations are nearly twice as great as your firm's total assets*). They may also provide alternatives, such as deferred billing or cash discounts. When the letter denies a credit application that accompanies an order, the message may contain resale information. The writer tries to convert the order from credit to cash. For example, if a big order cannot be filled on a credit basis, perhaps part of the order could be filled on a cash basis. Whatever form the bad-news letter takes, it is a good idea to have the message reviewed by legal counsel because of the litigation land mines awaiting unwary communicators in this area.

Delivering Bad News Within Organizations

Giving Bad News Personally

- **Gather all the information.** Cool down and have all the facts before marching in on the boss or confronting someone. Remember that every story has two sides.
- **Prepare and rehearse.** Outline what you plan to say so that you are confident, coherent, and dispassionate.
- **Explain: past, present, future.** If you are telling the boss about a problem such as the computer crash, explain what caused the crash, the current situation, and how and when you plan to fix it.
- **Consider taking a partner.** If you fear a “shoot the messenger” reaction, especially from your boss, bring a colleague with you. Each person should have a consistent and credible part in the presentation. If possible, take advantage of your organization's internal resources. To lend credibility to your view, call on auditors, inspectors, or human resources experts.
- **Think about timing.** Don't deliver bad news when someone is already stressed or grumpy. Experts also advise against giving bad news on Friday afternoon when people have the weekend to dwell on it.
- **Be patient with the reaction.** Give the receiver time to vent, think, recover, and act wisely.

Bad news, whether delivered in person or in writing, is usually better received when reasons are given first.

When you must deliver bad news in person, be sure to gather all the information, prepare, and rehearse.

Delivering Workplace Bad News

Organizations can sustain employee morale by communicating bad news openly and honestly.

Many of the same techniques used to deliver bad news personally are useful when organizations face a crisis or must deliver bad news in the workplace. Smart organizations involved in a crisis prefer to communicate the news openly to employees, customers, and stockholders. A crisis might involve serious performance problems, a major relocation, massive layoffs, a management shake-up, or public controversy. Instead of letting rumors distort the truth, they explain the organization's side of the story honestly and early. Morale can be destroyed when employees learn of major events affecting their jobs through the grapevine or from news accounts—rather than from management.

Writing Plan for Announcing Bad News to Employees

- **Buffer:** Open with a neutral or positive statement that transitions to the reasons for the bad news. Consider mentioning the best news, a compliment, appreciation, agreement, or solid facts. Show understanding.
- **Reasons:** Explain the logic behind the bad news. Provide a rational explanation using positive words and displaying empathy. If possible, mention reader benefits.
- **Bad News:** Position the bad news so that it does not stand out. Be positive but don't sugarcoat the bad news. Use objective language.
- **Closing:** Provide information about an alternative, if one exists. If appropriate, describe what will happen next. Look forward positively.

The draft of the memo shown in Figure 7.7 announces a substantial increase in the cost of employee health care benefits. However, the memo suffers from many problems. It announces jolting news bluntly in the first sentence. Worse, it offers little or no explanation for the steep increase in costs. It also sounds insincere (*We did everything possible . . .*) and arbitrary. In a final miscue, the writer fails to give credit to the company for absorbing previous health cost increases.

FIGURE 7.7 Announcing Bad News to Employees

Before

Beginning January 1 your monthly payment for health care benefits will be increased to \$119 (up from \$52 last year).

Hits readers with bad news without any preparation

Every year health care costs go up. Although we considered dropping other benefits, Midland decided that the best plan was to keep the present comprehensive package. Unfortunately, we can't do that unless we pass along some of the extra cost to you. Last year the company was forced to absorb the total increase in health care premiums. However, such a plan this year is inadvisable.

Offers no explanation

We did everything possible to avoid the sharp increase in costs to you this year. A rate schedule describing the increases in payments for your family and dependents is enclosed.

Fails to take credit for absorbing previous increases

After

Northern, Inc.

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 2, 200x
TO: Fellow Employees
FROM: Lawrence R. Romero, President *LRR*
SUBJECT: Maintaining Quality Health Care

Begins with positive buffer

Health care programs have always been an important part of our commitment to employees at Northern, Inc. We are proud that our total benefits package continues to rank among the best in the country.

Offers reasons costs are rising

Such a comprehensive package does not come cheaply. In the last decade health care costs alone have risen over 300 percent. We are told that several factors fuel the cost spiral: inflation, technology improvements, increased cost of outpatient services, and "defensive" medicine practiced by doctors to prevent lawsuits.

Reveals bad news clearly but embeds it in paragraph

Just two years ago our monthly health care cost for each employee was \$515. It rose to \$569 last year. We were able to absorb that jump without increasing your contribution. But this year's hike to \$639 forces us to ask you to share the increase. To maintain your current health care benefits, you will be paying \$119 a month. The enclosed rate schedule describes the costs for families and dependents.

Ends positively by stressing the company's major share of the costs

Northern continues to pay the major portion of your health care program (\$520 each month). We think it's a wise investment.

Enclosure

The indirect strategy is unethical only if the writer intends to deceive the reader.