



When is Bad News Good?

With so much "bad news" in the world lately, it hardly seems like something you might welcome. Hurricanes and wars aside, in the world of organizations, bad news can be a gift. As Lee Lococca said, "We are continually faced by great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems."

Of course, if you as a leader foster an atmosphere where your staff avoids giving you bad news, you may miss all these "great opportunities."

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– Lee Lococca



you perform?" "What don't you like about our service?" or, "How well are we meeting your expectations?"

LOOK UNDER THE HOOD

Some bad news can come to you disguised as ordinary business statistics. Try looking under the hood and test your statistics or compare them in non-standard ways. Once, as a new leader in an organization I offered a prize for "The Best Bad News!"

QUALITY BAD NEWS CAN MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE

My favorite example of "Quality Bad News" is when I helped a telecomm company redesign their business processes. They were very focused on their customer care function and my job was to redesign the back-end financial operation. When I reported the bad news that their carrier charges weren't being reconciled to the actual time used by their customers, they didn't see it as significant. Their focus was on a new front-end system to support customer care. So I went back to them with an estimate of how much money they were losing – more than enough to pay for the new system. I found they suddenly had a new appreciation of my bad news.

ASK FOR IT

As you have probably already guessed, it often pays to *welcome* bad news instead of resisting it. And here's a thought, you may even want to ask for it! Try questions like "What worries you most about this function

WHEN DO YOU FIND BAD NEWS?

- When you attempt to measure the "immeasurable"
- When you ask for it...and mean it

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- When you reward people for finding it
- When you ask the right open-ended questions of your Clients or Customers

WHERE DO YOU FIND BAD NEWS?

- In the data you already have but may not be “mining” well
- In input from Staff who are in direct contact with Clients
- In Customer complaints – between the lines
- In feedback from colleagues you trust



“

It is nice to have someone to call when things are not going well that will help us find a way through it”.

- A state government project manager

”

- In the night when that nagging worry wakes you from a deep sleep
- Sometimes you find it in the news-paper...ouch!

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Stand in the discomfort, attempt to understand your own reactions
- Avoid defensiveness, never say “But...”
- Look for verification: Is it fact or perception? Both are valid and need to be recognized so you address the right area
- Determine priority, especially related to other work

WHAT ACTIONS CAN YOU TAKE?

- 1) Initiate a structured problem resolution
- 2) Form your *Resolution Team* from your best thinkers
- 3) Identify the stakeholders (internal and external), their stake and potential benefit for a resolution
- 4) Plan involvement of stakeholders, directly or indirectly
- 5) Research and clearly define the problem
- 6) Research and clearly define the preferred outcome
- 7) Analyze the gaps between these two
- 8) Design essential steps to close the gaps (your implementation plan)
- 9) Road test your work with stakeholders
- 10) Refine your plan, get needed authorizations and implement
- 11) Pause to gather lessons learned from the process
- 12) Reward BOTH your problem finders and problem solvers 🐺

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