

Negative Messages



OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

7-1

Understand the goals of business communicators in conveying negative news.

7-2

Compare the strategies and ethics of the direct and indirect plans in communicating negative news.

7-3

Explain the components of effective negative messages, including opening with a buffer, apologizing, showing empathy, presenting the reasons, cushioning the bad news, and closing pleasantly.

7-4

Apply effective techniques in refusing typical requests or claims, as well as handling customer bad news in print and online.

7-5

Describe and apply effective techniques for delivering negative news within organizations.

7-1 Communicating Negative News Effectively

Bad things happen in all businesses. Goods are not delivered, products fail to perform as expected, service is poor, billing gets fouled up, and customers are misunderstood. You may have to write messages declining proposals, explaining service outages, describing data breaches, refusing requests for donations, turning down invitations, or responding to unhappy customers. You might have to apologize for mistakes in orders or pricing, the rudeness of employees, overlooked appointments, defective products, or jumbled instructions. As a company representative, you may have to respond to complaints posted for the world to see on Twitter, Facebook, or complaint websites.

The truth is that everyone occasionally must deliver negative news in business. Because bad news disappoints, irritates, and sometimes angers the receiver, such messages must be written carefully. The bad feelings associated with disappointing news can generally be reduced if the receiver (a) knows the reasons for the rejection, (b) feels that the news was revealed sensitively, and (c) believes that the matter was treated seriously and fairly.

In this chapter you will learn when to use the direct strategy and when to use the indirect strategy to deliver negative news. You will study the goals of business communicators in working with unfavorable news and learn techniques for achieving those goals.

"Delivering difficult messages is part of day-to-day life in all social groups, whether the organization is a family, a nation, or a business."

—John J. Engels, president of Leadership Coaching Inc. in Rochester, New York



7-1a How to Achieve Your Goals in Communicating Negative News

Delivering bad news is not the happiest communication task you may have, but it can be gratifying if you do it effectively. As a business communicator working with bad news, you will have many goals. Here's how to achieve them:

- **Explain clearly and completely.** Your goal is to make your readers understand and, in the best case, accept the bad news. Recipients should not have to call or write to clarify your message.
- **Project a professional image.** Even when irate customers sound threatening and overstate their claims, you should strive to stay calm, use polite language, and respond with clear explanations of why a negative message was necessary.
- **Convey empathy and sensitivity.** Try to use language that respects the receiver but also attempts to reduce bad feelings. When appropriate, accept blame and apologize; however, strive to do so without creating legal liability for your organization or yourself.
- **Be fair.** When you can show that the decision was fair, impartial, and rational, receivers are far more likely to accept the negative news.
- **Maintain friendly relations.** A final goal is to demonstrate your desire to continue pleasant relations and to regain the confidence of the reader.

These goals are ambitious, and, frankly, you may not be successful in achieving them all. However, many communicators have found the strategies and techniques you are about to learn helpful in conveying disappointing news sensitively and safely. With experience, you will be able to vary these strategies and adapt them to your organization's specific communication tasks.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1

Understand the goals of business communicators in conveying negative news.

INSTRUCTOR: See the **Instructor's Manual**, which is available at the **instructor's website**, for the **author's lecture notes and teaching suggestions.**

Workplace in Focus



John Walker/The Fresno/ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy

During a recent holiday season, hackers breached Target's computer system and stole the credit card data of an estimated 110 million customers—one of the largest cyber-security heists ever in retail. In a letter to customers, Target CEO Gregg Steinhafel opened with news of the event and got straight to the point: "I am writing to make you aware that your name, mailing address, phone number or e-mail address may have been taken during the intrusion." Steinhafel offered a sincere apology and gave important tips on how to protect against Internet and phone scams. Most important, the CEO offered customers one year of free credit monitoring and identity theft insurance. How would you rate Target's response to this event?¹

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2

Compare the strategies and ethics of the direct and indirect plans in communicating negative news.

7-2 Analyzing Negative News Strategies

Unfavorable news in business doesn't always fall into neat categories. To successfully convey bad news, writers must carefully consider the audience, purpose, and context. As a business writer in training, you have at your disposal two basic strategies for delivering negative news: direct and indirect, as compared in Figure 7.1.

Whether to use the direct or indirect strategy depends largely on the situation, the reaction you expect from the audience, and your goals. Which approach is best suited for your particular message? One of the first steps you will take before delivering negative news is analyzing how your receiver will react to this news. In earlier chapters we discussed applying the direct strategy to positive messages. In this chapter we expand on that advice and offer additional considerations to help you decide which strategy to use.

When to Use the Direct Strategy. The direct strategy saves time and is preferred by some who consider it to be more professional and even more ethical than the indirect strategy. The direct strategy may be more effective in situations such as the following:

- **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 makes sense.
- **When the receiver may overlook the bad news.** Changes in service, new policy requirements, legal announcements—these critical messages may require boldness to ensure attention.
- **When the organization or receiver prefers directness.** Some companies and individuals expect all internal messages and announcements—even bad news—to be straightforward and presented without frills.

Figure 7.1 Comparing the Direct and Indirect Strategies for Negative Messages

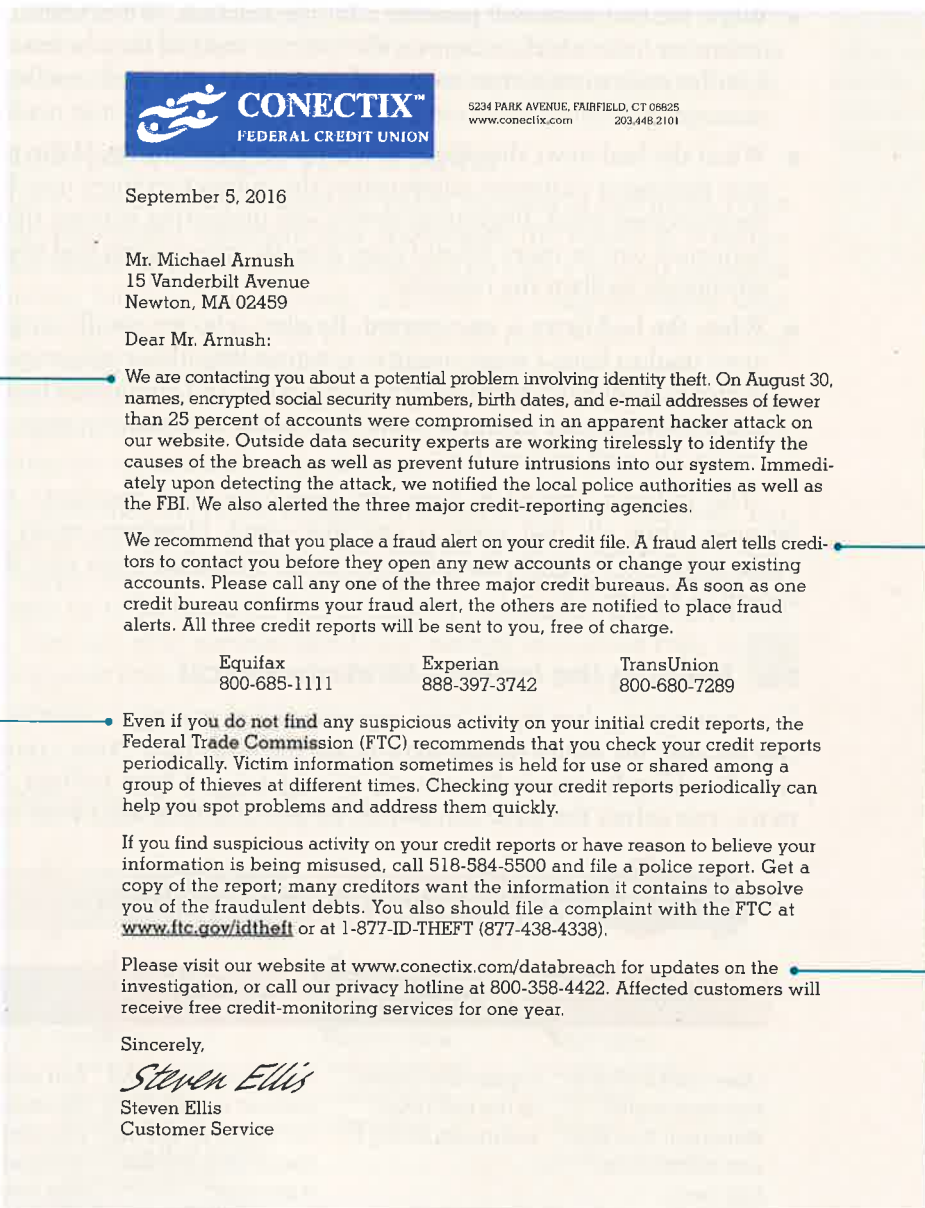


- **When firmness is necessary.** Messages that must demonstrate determination and strength should not use delaying techniques. For example, the last in a series of collection letters that seek payment on an overdue account may require a direct opener.

Security breach messages provide a good example of how to employ the direct strategy in delivering bad news. Notice in Figure 7.2 that the writer, Steven Ellis, is fairly direct in announcing that consumer identity information was lost at Conectix Federal Credit Union.

Although he does not blurt out “your information has been compromised,” the writer does announce a potential identity theft problem in the first sentence. He then explains that a hacker attack has compromised roughly a quarter of customer accounts. In the second paragraph he recommends that credit union customer Michael Arnush take specific corrective action to protect his identity and offers helpful contact information. The tone is respectful and serious. The credit union’s

Figure 7.2 Announcing Bad News Directly: Security Breach Letter



Uses modified direct strategy because urgent action is needed to prevent identity theft

Suggests recommended steps and provides helpful information about credit-reporting agencies

Gives reasons for the recommended action, provides contact information, and offers additional pointers

Ends by providing more helpful information, company phone number, and offer of one-year free credit monitoring

letter is modeled on an FTC template that was praised for achieving a balance between a direct and indirect opening.²

When to Use the Indirect Strategy. The indirect strategy does not reveal the bad news immediately. This strategy, at least theoretically, enables you to keep the reader's attention until you have been able to explain the reasons for the bad news. Some writing experts suggest that the indirect strategy "ill suits today's skeptical, impatient, even cynical audience."³ To be sure, in social media, bluntness seems to dominate public debate. Directness is equated with honesty; hedging, with deceit. Regardless, many communicators prefer to use the indirect strategy to soften negative news. Whereas good news can be revealed quickly, bad news may be easier to accept when broken gradually. Here are typical instances in which the indirect strategy works well:

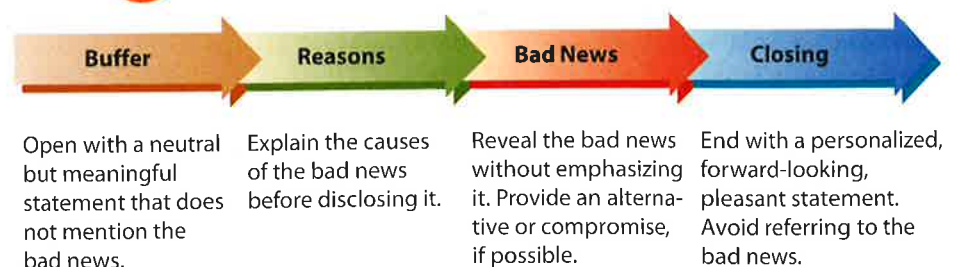
- **When the bad news is personally upsetting.** If the negative news involves the receiver personally, such as a layoff notice, the indirect strategy makes sense. Telling an employee that he or she no longer has a job is probably best done in person and by starting indirectly and giving reasons first. When a company has made a mistake that inconveniences or disadvantages a customer, the indirect strategy also makes sense.
- **When the bad news will provoke a hostile reaction.** When your message will irritate or infuriate the recipient, the indirect method may be best. It begins with a buffer and reasons, thus encouraging the reader to finish reading or hearing the message. A blunt announcement may make the receiver stop reading.
- **When the bad news threatens the customer relationship.** If the negative message may damage a customer relationship, the indirect strategy may help salvage the customer bond. Beginning slowly and presenting reasons that explain what happened can be more helpful than directly announcing bad news or failing to adequately explain the reasons.
- **When the bad news is unexpected.** Readers who are totally surprised by bad news tend to have a more negative reaction than those who expected it. If a company suddenly closes an office or a plant and employees had no inkling of the closure, that bad news would be better received if it were revealed cautiously with reasons first.

The indirect approach does not guarantee that recipients will be pleased, because, after all, bad news is just that—bad. However, many communicators prefer to use it. To apply the indirect strategy effectively, you may use four parts, as shown in Figure 7.3.

7-2a Keeping the Indirect Strategy Ethical

You may worry that the indirect organizational strategy is unethical or manipulative because the writer deliberately delays the main idea. Now, consider the alternative. Breaking bad news bluntly can cause pain and hard feelings. By delaying bad news, you soften the blow somewhat, as well as ensure that your reasoning will be

Figure 7.3 Four-Part Indirect Strategy for Bad News



read while the receiver is still receptive. One expert communicator recognized the significance of the indirect strategy when she said, "People must believe the reasons why before they will listen to the details of what and when."⁴ Your goal is to be a compassionate, yet effective communicator.

The key to ethical communication lies in the motives of the sender. Unethical communicators *intend to deceive*. Although the indirect strategy is a technique for announcing bad news, it should not be used to avoid or misrepresent the truth. For example, unscrupulous marketers advertise on trusted websites of national news organizations and falsely claim endorsements by Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Oz. Unsuspecting consumers end up paying hundreds of dollars, the Better Business Bureau reports.⁵ As you will see in Chapter 8, misleading, deceptive, and unethical claims are never acceptable. In fact, many are simply illegal.

7-3 Composing Effective Negative Messages

Although you can't expect to make the receiver happy when delivering negative news, you can reduce resentment by structuring your message sensitively. Most negative messages contain some or all of these parts: buffer, reasons, bad news, and closing. Figure 7.4 presents these four components of the indirect strategy in greater detail.

7-3a Opening Indirect Messages With a Buffer

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 encourages the reader to continue reading. The buffer should be relevant and concise and provide a natural transition to the explanation that follows. The situation, of course, will help determine what you should put in the buffer. This section provides some possibilities for opening bad-news messages. Avoid trite buffers such as *Thank you for your e-mail*.

Not all business communication authors agree that buffers actually increase the effectiveness of negative messages. However, many cultures appreciate softening bad news. Following are various buffer possibilities.

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.*

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 3

Explain the components of effective negative messages, including opening with a buffer, apologizing, showing empathy, presenting the reasons, cushioning the bad news, and closing pleasantly.

Figure 7.4 Delivering Bad News Sensitively



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“These days, apologizing is a leadership skill. We see our decision makers dodging and weaving instead of accepting responsibility, and that disappoints us. We don’t expect them to be perfect. Just willing to learn. In the long run apology leads to better outcomes and more durable relationships.”

—John Kador, blogger and author of *Effective Apology*



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, *HarvestPlenty has my sincere admiration for using crowd-sourcing technology to enable gardeners to donate their excess crops to local food pantries. I am honored that you asked me to speak Friday, November 6.*

Appreciation. Convey thanks for doing business, for sending something, for showing 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.*

Agreement. Make a relevant statement with which both you and the receiver can agree. A letter that rejects a loan application might read, *We both realize how much the slow economic recovery in the past five years has affected customers’ purchasing power.*

Facts. Provide objective information that introduces the bad news. For example, in a memo announcing cutbacks in the hours of the employee cafeteria, you might say, *During the past five years the number of employees eating breakfast in our cafeteria has dropped from 32 percent to 12 percent.*

Understanding. Show that you care about the reader. Notice how in this e-mail to customers announcing a product defect, the writer expresses concern: *We know that you expect superior performance from all the products you purchase from OfficeCity. That’s why we are writing personally about the Omega printer cartridges you recently ordered.*

7-3b Apologizing

Apologies to customers are important if you or your company erred. They cost nothing, and they go a long way in soothing hard feelings. You learned about making apologies in adjustment letters in Chapter 6. We expand that discussion here because apologies are often part of negative-news messages.

Why apologize? Because sincere apologies work. Peter Post, great-grandson of famed etiquette expert Emily Post and director of the Emily Post Institute, said that Americans love apologies. They will forgive almost anything if presented with a sincere apology.⁶ An *apology* is defined as an “admission of blameworthiness and regret for an undesirable event.”⁷ The following pointers can help you apologize effectively in business messages:

- **Apologize promptly and sincerely.** Credibility suffers when a public figure delays an apology and responds only after causing an outrage. Also, people dislike apologies that sound hollow (*We regret that you were inconvenienced* or *We are sorry that you are disturbed*). Focusing on your regret does not convey sincerity; explaining what you will do to prevent recurrence of the problem does.
- **Accept responsibility.** One CEO was criticized for the following weak apology after angrily and publicly firing an employee: “It was an emotional response at the start of a difficult discussion dealing with many people’s careers and livelihoods. . . . [I] apologized for the way the matter was handled at the meeting.” Communication experts faulted this apology because it did not acknowledge responsibility or show remorse.⁸
- **Use good judgment.** Before admitting blame, it might be wise to consult a superior or the company legal counsel to avoid litigation.

Consider these poor and improved apologies:

Poor apology: *We regret that you are unhappy with the price of frozen yogurt purchased at one of our self-serve scoop shops.*

Improved apology: *We are genuinely sorry that you were disappointed in the price of frozen yogurt recently purchased at one of our self-serve 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 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 changing our tracking. . . .*

7-3c Showing Empathy

One of the hardest things to do in apologies is to convey sympathy and empathy. As discussed in Chapter 2, *empathy* is the ability to understand and enter into the feelings of another. When ice storms trapped JetBlue Airways passengers on hot planes for hours, CEO Neeleman wrote a letter of apology that sounded as if it came from his heart. He said, “Dear JetBlue Customers: We are sorry and embarrassed. But most of all, we are deeply sorry.” Later in his letter he said, “Words cannot express how truly sorry we are for the anxiety, frustration, and inconvenience that you, your family, friends, and colleagues experienced.”⁹ Neeleman put himself into the shoes of his customers and tried to experience their pain.

You can express empathy in many ways, as illustrated in the following:

- 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 respond to any future outages promptly.*
- In showing genuine feelings: *You have every right to be disappointed. I am truly sorry that. . . .*

7-3d Presenting the Reasons

Providing an explanation reduces feelings of ill will and improves the chances that readers will accept the bad news. Without sound reasons for denying a request, refusing a claim, or revealing other bad news, a message will fail, no matter how cleverly it is organized or written. For example, if you must deny a customer’s request, you probably have good reasons. As part of your planning before writing, think through those reasons so that you can present them strategically in your message. In the indirect strategy, the reasons appear before the bad news. In the direct strategy, the reasons appear immediately after the bad news.

Explaining Clearly. If the reasons are not confidential and if they will not create legal liability, you can be specific: *Growers supplied us with a limited number of patio roses, and our demand this year was twice that of last year.* In responding to a billing error, explain what happened: *After you informed us of an error on your January bill, we realized the mistake was ours. Until our new automated system is fully online, we are still subject to human error. Rest assured that you will see a credit on your next bill.* In refusing a speaking engagement, tell why the date is impossible: *On January 15 we have a board of directors meeting that I must attend.* However, in an effort to be the “good guy,” don’t make dangerous or unrealistic promises: *Although we can’t contribute now, we expect increased revenues next year and promise a generous gift then.*

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“Business is all about building relationships and the best way to build relationships is to be kind and to show interest in and compassion for the people you work and interact with. Ultimately, that’s how you build trust, which is the single most important factor in business and in life.”

—Paul Spiegelman, co-founder and CEO of The Beryl Companies and author of *Why Is Everyone Smiling?*



Citing Reader or Other Benefits if Plausible. Readers are more open to bad news if in some way, even indirectly, it may help them. In refusing a customer's request for free hemming of skirts and slacks, Lands' End wrote: "We tested our ability to hem skirts a few months ago. This process proved to be very time-consuming. We have decided not to offer this service because the additional cost would have increased the selling price of our skirts substantially, and we did not want to impose that cost on all our customers."¹⁰ Readers also accept bad news more readily if they recognize that someone or something else benefits, such as other workers or the environment: *Although we would like to consider your application, we prefer to fill managerial positions from within.* Avoid trying to show reader benefits, though, if they appear insincere: *To improve our service to you, we are increasing our brokerage fees.*

Explaining Company Policy. Readers resent blanket policy statements prohibiting something: *Company policy prevents us from making cash refunds* 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.

Choosing Positive Words. Because the words you use can affect a reader's response, choose carefully. Remember that the objective of the indirect strategy is holding the reader's attention until you have had a chance to explain the reasons justifying the bad news. To keep the reader in a receptive mood, avoid expressions with punitive, demoralizing, or otherwise negative connotations. Stay away from such words as *cannot, claim, denied, error, failure, fault, impossible, mistaken, misunderstand, never, regret, rejected, unable, unwilling, unfortunately, and violate.*

Showing Fairness and Serious Intent. In explaining reasons, show the reader that you take the matter seriously, have investigated carefully, and are making an unbiased decision. Receivers are more accepting of disappointing news when they feel that their requests have been heard and that they have been treated 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. 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.*

7-3e **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. Instead of spotlighting it, sandwich the bad news between other sentences, perhaps among your reasons. Don't let the refusal begin or end a paragraph; the reader's eye will linger on these high-visibility spots. Another technique that reduces shock is putting a painful idea in a subordinate clause: *Although another candidate was hired, we appreciate your interest in our organization and wish you every success in your job search.* Subordinate clauses often begin with words such as *although, as, because, if, and since.*

Using the Passive Voice. Passive-voice verbs enable you to depersonalize an action. Whereas the active voice focuses attention on a person (*We don't give cash refunds*),

the passive voice highlights the action (*Cash refunds are not given because. . .*). Use the passive voice for the bad news. In some instances you can combine passive-voice verbs and a subordinate clause: *Although franchise scoop shop owners cannot be required to lower their frozen yogurt prices, we are happy to pass along your comments for their consideration.*

Highlighting the Positive. As you learned earlier, messages are far more effective when you describe what you can do instead of what you can't do. Rather than *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 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. A refusal is not so depressing—for the sender or the receiver—if a suitable compromise, substitute, or alternative is available. In denying permission to a group of students to visit a historical private residence, for instance, this writer softens the bad news by proposing an alternative: *Although private tours of the grounds are not given, we do open the house and its gardens for one charitable event in the fall.* You can further reduce the impact of the bad news by refusing to dwell on it. Present it briefly (or imply it), and move on to your closing.

7-3f Closing Pleasantly

After explaining the bad news sensitively, close the message with a pleasant statement that promotes goodwill. The closing should be personalized and may include an alternative follow-up, freebies, good wishes, a forward look, resale information, or a sales promotion. *Resale* refers to mentioning a product or service favorably to reinforce the customer's choice. For example, *you chose our best-selling model.*

Alternative Follow-Up. If an alternative exists, you might end your letter with follow-up 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 301-746-8112 to arrange a date for my visit.* In a message to a prospective home buyer: *Although the lot you saw last week is now sold, we do have two lots with excellent views that are available at a slightly higher price.* In reacting to an Internet misprint: *Please note that our website contained an unfortunate misprint offering \$850-per-night Bora Bora bungalows at \$85. Although we cannot honor that rate, we are offering a special half-price rate of \$425 to those who responded.*

Freebies. When customers complain—primarily about food products or small consumer items—companies often send coupons, samples, or gifts to restore confidence and 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 entrées are genuinely appreciated. Because we want you to continue enjoying our healthy and convenient dinners, we are enclosing a coupon that you can take to your local market to select your next Green Valley entrée.*

Good Wishes. A letter rejecting a job candidate might read: *We appreciate your interest in our company, and we extend to you our best wishes in your search to find the perfect match between your skills and job requirements.*

Forward Look. Anticipate future relations or business. A letter that refuses a contract proposal might read: *Thanks for your bid. We look forward to*

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“The most pressing need of angry customers is to be heard. Listen to them without interrupting. Then show you understand their situation by finding common points of frustration.”

—Jonathan Rick, director,
Levick Strategic
Communications



working with your talented staff when future projects demand your special expertise.

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 website where our online catalog provides a huge selection of surge suppressors, multiple outlet strips, security devices, and PC tool kits.*

Avoid endings that sound canned, insincere, inappropriate, or self-serving. Don't invite further correspondence (*If you have any questions, do not hesitate. . .*), and don't refer to the bad news. To review these suggestions for delivering bad news sensitively, take another look at Figure 7.4, Delivering Bad News Sensitively.

7-4 Refusing Typical Requests and Claims

When you must refuse typical requests, first think about how the receiver will react to your refusal and decide whether to use the direct or the indirect strategy. You may receive requests for favors or contributions. You may have to say no to customer claims or invitations to give presentations. You may also deal with disappointment and anger. If you have any doubt, use the indirect strategy and the following writing plan:

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 4

Apply effective techniques in refusing typical requests or claims, as well as handling customer bad news in print and online.

WRITING PLAN FOR REFUSING TYPICAL REQUESTS AND CLAIMS

- **Buffer:** Start with a neutral statement on which both reader and writer can agree, such as a compliment, appreciation, a quick review of the facts, or an apology. Try to include a key idea or word that acts as a transition to the reasons.
- **Reasons:** Present valid reasons for the refusal, avoiding words that create a negative tone.
- **Bad news:** De-emphasize the bad news, use the passive voice, accentuate the positive, or imply a refusal. Suggest a compromise, alternative, or substitute, if possible. The alternative may be part of the bad-news section or part of the closing.
- **Closing:** Renew good feelings with a positive statement. Avoid referring to the bad news. Include resale or sales promotion material, if appropriate. Look forward to continued business.

7-4a Rejecting Requests for Favors, Money, Information, and Action

Requests for favors, money, information, and action may come from charities, friends, or business partners. Many are from people representing worthy causes, and you may wish you could comply. However, resources are usually limited. In a letter from Heartland Management Associates, shown in Figure 7.5, 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 internal restructuring and the economic downturn, 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 blunter in stating the denial.

In some donation refusal letters, the reasons may not be fully explained: *Although we can't provide financial support at this time, we all unanimously agree*

Figure 7.5 Refusing Donation Request

Heartland
Management Associates

212 South Central Avenue
St. Louis, MO 631250
www.heartlandmanagement.com

February 12, 2016

Ms. Denise Moore
Guide Dog Center
2903 Market Street
St. Louis, MO 63103

Dear Ms. Moore:

Here at Heartland Management Associates, we are pleased that over the years we were able to partner with the Guide Dog Center and assist in its admirable program that provides guide and service dogs to blind or visually impaired individuals. We appreciate your recent letter describing the exceptionally worthwhile VetDogs program that offers trained animals to America's returning heroes in need of service dogs.

Supporting the good work and worthy projects of your organization and others, although unrelated to our business, is a luxury we have enjoyed in the past. Because of internal restructuring and the economic downturn, 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 more directly to our business.

We are hopeful that the worst of the economic slump is now behind us and that in the future we will be able to again partner with the Guide Dog Center to help defray the costs of breeding, training, and placing guide and service dogs. You provide an admirable service, and Heartland salutes you.

Cordially,

HEARTLAND MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES

Nelson M. Felton

Nelson M. Felton

Opens with praise and compliments

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

Closes graciously with praise and a forward look

Doesn't say yes or no

Explains cutback in gifts, thus revealing refusal without actually stating it

that the Make-A-Wish Foundation contributes a valuable service to sick children. The emphasis is on the foundation's good deeds rather than on an explanation for the refusal. Businesses that are required to write frequent refusals might prepare a form letter, changing a few variables as needed.

7-4b Dealing With Disappointed Customers in Print

Businesses must occasionally respond to disappointed customers. Whenever possible, these problems should be dealt with immediately and personally. Most business professionals strive to control the damage and resolve such problems in the following manner:¹¹

- Call or e-mail the individual immediately.
- Describe the problem and apologize.

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"As soon as you realize there is a problem, let your client know by phone or, if possible, in person. It's better to let them hear bad news from you than to discover it on their own because it establishes your candor."

—Kevin Kearns, VP of sales for Huthwaite, a sales force consulting company in Sterling, Virginia



- Explain why the problem occurred, what they are doing to resolve it, and how they will prevent it from happening again.
- Promote goodwill by following up with a print message that documents the phone call.

Written messages are important (a) to communicate when personal contact is impossible, (b) to establish a record of the incident, (c) to formally confirm follow-up procedures, and (d) to promote good relations.

A bad-news follow-up letter is shown in Figure 7.6. Consultant Manuela Lucas Santiago found herself in the embarrassing position of explaining why she had given out the name of her client to a salesperson. The client, Premier Resources International, had hired her firm, Azad Consulting Associates, to help find an appropriate service for outsourcing its payroll functions. Without realizing it, Manuela had mentioned to a potential vendor (QuickPay Services, Inc.) that her client was considering hiring an outside service to handle its payroll. An overeager salesperson from QuickPay Services immediately called on Premier, thus angering the client.

Manuela Lucas Santiago first called her client to explain and apologize. She was careful to control her voice and rate of speaking. She also followed up with the letter shown in Figure 7.6. The letter not only confirms the telephone conversation but also adds the right touch of formality. It sends the nonverbal message that the writer takes the matter seriously and that it is important enough to warrant a hard-copy letter.

Many consumer problems are handled with letters, either written by consumers as complaints or by companies in response. However, e-mail and social networks are also firmly established as channels for delivering complaints and negative messages.

7-4c Responding to Negative Posts and Reviews Online

Today's impatient, hyperconnected consumers eagerly embrace the idea of delivering their complaints to social networking sites rather than calling customer service departments. Why rely on word of mouth or send a letter to a company about poor

Workplace in Focus



What do underwear and hummus have in common? Nothing. But that didn't stop underwear giant Hanes Brands Inc. (HBI) from requesting that food-dip maker Hanes Hummus change its name, destroy its products, and withdraw its trademark application due to possible name infringement. In letters exchanged between the firms, the underwear maker claimed that Hanes Hummus is "essentially identical and confusingly similar" to its own trademark. In its reply, the mashed-chickpeas maker wrote, "No rational person familiar with Hanes Hummus could possibly allege any confusion between Hanes Hummus and HBI's mark or product." The writer added, cheekily, "I was not aware that HBI's t-shirts were edible, made with chickpeas, lemon or garlic." The name "Hanes" is the nickname of the hummus maker Yohannes Petros. What tips should businesses follow when refusing requests?¹²

Figure 7.6 Bad-News Follow-Up Message

AZAD CONSULTING ASSOCIATES

4380 Speedway Blvd.
Tucson, AZ 85712

Voice: (520) 259-0971
Web: www.azadassociates.com

May 7, 2016

Mr. Carl Bahadur
Director, Administrative Operations
Premier Resources International
538 North Pima Road, Suite 1210
Phoenix, AZ 85001

Dear Mr. Bahadur:

Opens with agreement and apology

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 QuickPay 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, QuickPay Services, Inc.

Takes responsibility and promises to prevent recurrence

All clients of Azad 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 QuickPay 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.

Explains what caused the problem and how it was resolved

Closes with forward look

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,

Manuela Lucas Santiago
Manuela Lucas Santiago
Partner

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 it.
- Explain what you are doing to prevent recurrence.
- Follow up with a message that documents the personal contact.
- Look forward to positive future relations.

service or a defective product when you can jump online and shout your grievance to the entire world? Today's consumers are quick to voice their displeasure with negative posts and reviews via Twitter, Facebook, Angie's List, Yelp, and other sites.

How can organizations respond to negative posts and reviews online? Experts suggest the following pointers:

- **Verify the situation.** Investigate to learn what happened. If the complaint is legitimate and your organization fouled up, it's best to fess up. Admit the problem and try to remedy it.
- **Respond quickly and constructively.** Offer to follow up offline; send your contact information. Be polite and helpful.
- **Consider freebies.** Suggest a refund or a discount on future services. Dissatisfied customers often write a second more positive review if they have received a refund.

OFFICE INSIDER

"Any declarative sentence starting with 'you' when talking to a customer is best avoided—it comes across as shaking your finger at the customer, and no one wants to feel like we're talking to our mother! Better choices are 'We can' or 'Let's do this together' or 'What I could suggest is.'"

—Kristin Robertson,
KR Consulting, Inc.



LEARNING OBJECTIVE 5

Describe and apply effective techniques for delivering negative news within organizations.

- **Learn how to improve.** Look upon online comments as opportunities for growth and improvement. See complaining customers as real-time focus groups that can provide valuable insights.
- **Accept the inevitable.** Recognize that nearly every business will experience some negativity, especially on today's readily accessible social media sites. Do what you can to respond constructively, and then move on.

For advice on answering online comments, see p. 167 in Chapter 6.

7-4d Denying Claims

Publisher Malcolm Forbes once observed, "To be agreeable while disagreeing—that's an art."¹³ Customers occasionally want something they are not entitled to or something you can't grant. Because these customers are often unhappy with a product or service, they are emotionally involved. Messages that say *no* to emotionally involved receivers will probably be your most challenging communication task.

Fortunately, the reasons-before-refusal plan helps you be empathic and artful in breaking bad news. Obviously, in denial messages you will need to adopt the proper tone. Don't blame customers, even if they are at fault. Avoid *you* statements that sound preachy (*You would have known that cash refunds are impossible if you had read your user agreement*). Use neutral, objective language to explain why the claim must be refused. Consider offering resale information to rebuild the customer's confidence in your products or organization.

In Figure 7.7 the writer denies the customer's request to be reimbursed 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 \$100). Although the catalog service does match any advertised lower price, the price-matching policy applies *only* to exact models. This claim must be rejected because the advertisement the customer submitted showed a different, older speaker model.

The e-mail to Stephen Dominique opens with a buffer that agrees with a statement in the customer's e-mail. It repeats the key idea of product confidence as a transition to the second paragraph. Next comes an explanation of the price-matching policy. The writer does not assume that the customer is trying to pull a fast one. Nor does he suggest that the customer is a dummy who didn't read the price-matching policy. The safest path is a neutral explanation of the policy along with precise distinctions between the customer's speakers and the older ones. The writer also gets a chance to resell the customer's speakers and demonstrate what a quality product they are. By the end of the third paragraph, it is evident to the reader that his claim is unjustified.

7-5 Managing Bad News Within Organizations

Generally, bad news is better received when reasons are given first. Whether you use a direct or an indirect strategy in delivering that news depends primarily on the anticipated reaction of the audience. A tactful tone and a reasons-first approach help preserve friendly relations with customers. These techniques are also useful when delivering bad news within organizations. Interpersonal bad news might involve telling the boss that something went wrong or confronting an employee about poor performance. Organizational bad news might involve declining profits, lost contracts, harmful lawsuits, public relations controversies, and policy changes. Within organizations, you may find yourself giving bad news in person or in writing.

Figure 7.7 E-Mail Denying a Claim

To: Stephen Dominique <sdominique@outlook.com>
From: Ross Gilbert <ross.gilbert@infinityhts.com>
Subject: Your Inquiry About CyberSeries II Speakers
Cc:
Bcc:

Dear Mr. Dominique:

You're absolutely right. We sell the finest surround sound speakers at rock-bottom prices. The CyberSeries II home theater speaker system that you purchased last month comes with premier concert hall speakers.

We have such confidence in our products and prices that we offer the price-matching policy you mention in your e-mail of March 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 website states, this price-matching policy applies only to exact models with USA warranties.

The CyberSeries II speaker set sells for \$999.95. You sent us a local advertisement showing a price of \$899.95 for CyberSeries speakers. This advertisement, however, describes an earlier version, the CyberSeries I. The set you received has a wider dynamic range and smoother frequency response than the CyberSeries I set. It is also 20 percent more compact than the CyberSeries I. Naturally, the advanced model you purchased costs a little more than the older Series I model.

You bought the finest compact speakers on the market, Mr. Dominique. If you haven't installed them yet, you may be interested in ceiling mounts and other accessories, shown on our website at <http://infinityhts.com/cyberseriesII> and available at competitive prices. We value your business and invite your continued comparison shopping.

Sincerely,
 Ross Gilbert, Senior Product Manager
 INFINITY HOME THEATER SYSTEMS
 245 Commonwealth Ave. | Boston, MA 02116 | phone 617.458-9023 | fax 617.458-3390 | www.infinityhts.com

Annotations:

- Combines agreement with resale
- Explains price-matching policy and how reader's purchase is different from lower-priced model
- Without actually saying *no*, shows why reader's claim cannot be honored
- Builds reader's confidence in wisdom of purchase
- Continues resale; looks forward to future business
- Buffer
- Reasons
- Implied refusal
- Positive closing

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7-5a Delivering Bad News in Person

When you have the unhappy responsibility of delivering bad news, decide whether the negative information is newsworthy. For example, trivial, noncriminal mistakes or one-time bad behaviors are best left alone. However, fraudulent travel claims, consistent hostile behavior, or failing projects must be reported.¹⁴ For example, you might have to tell the boss that the team's computer crashed and important files have not been backed up. As a team leader or supervisor, you might be required to confront an underperforming employee. If you know that the news will upset the receiver, the reasons-first strategy is most effective. When the bad news involves one person or a small group nearby, you should generally deliver that news in person. Here are pointers on how to do so tactfully, professionally, and safely:¹⁵

- **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

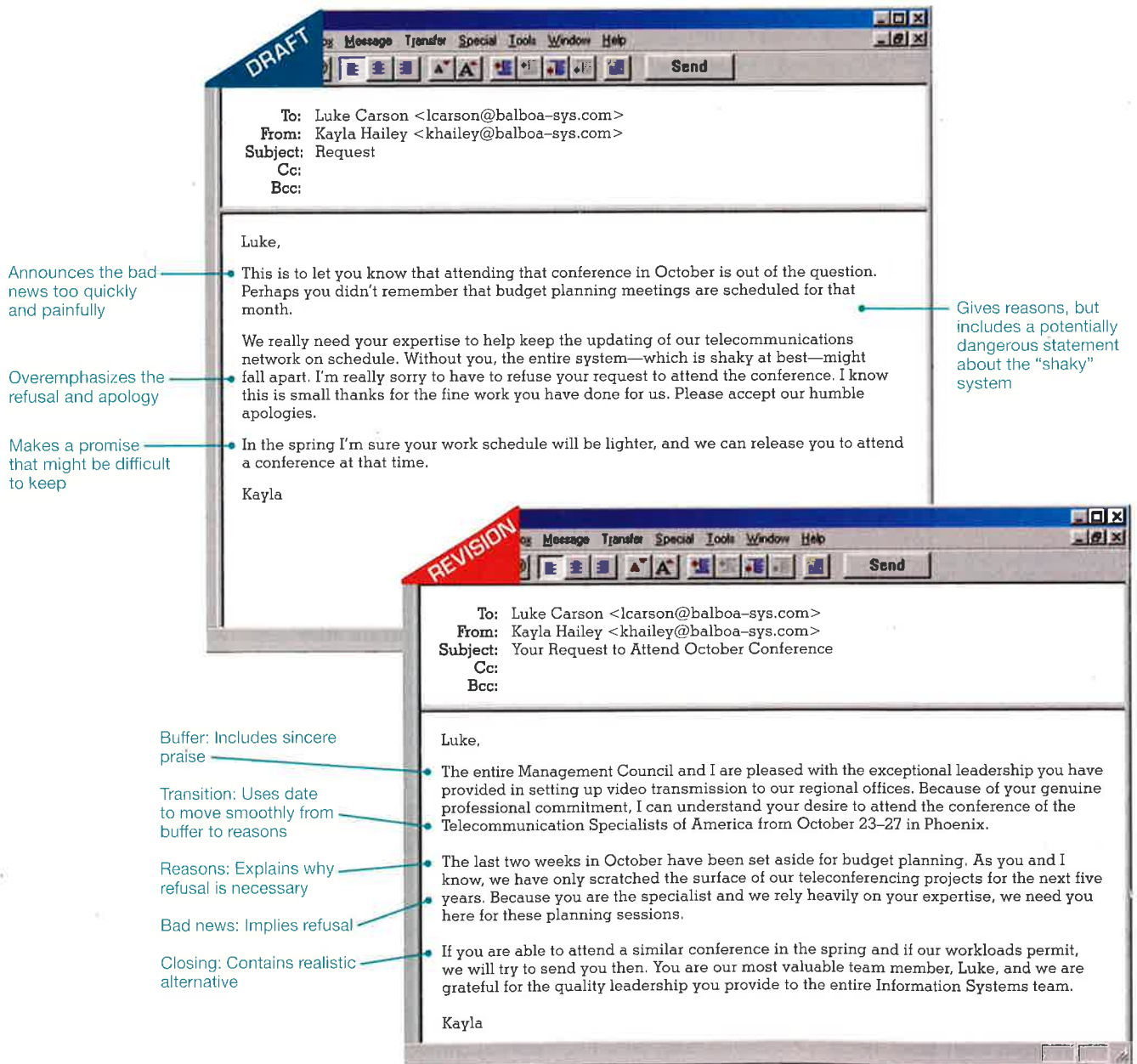
consistent and credible part in the presentation. If possible, take advantage of your organization's internal resources. To lend credibility to your view, call on auditors, inspectors, or human resources experts.

- **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.

7-5b Refusing Workplace Requests

Occasionally, managers must refuse requests from employees. In Figure 7.8 you see the first draft and revision of a message responding to a request from a key specialist, Luke Carson. He wants permission to attend a conference. However, his timing is

Figure 7.8 Refusing an Internal Request



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bad; he must be present at budget planning meetings scheduled for the same two weeks. Normally, this matter would be discussed in person. However, Luke has been traveling among branch offices, and he just hasn't been in the office recently.

The vice president's first inclination was to dash off a quick e-mail, as shown in the Figure 7.8 draft, and "tell it like it is." However, the vice president realized that her first draft was going to hurt and that it had possible danger areas. Moreover, the message missed a chance to give Luke positive feedback. Notice that the revision carefully employs a buffer, gives a rational explanation, and closes positively with an alternative and gratitude.

7-5c Announcing Bad News to Employees and the Public

In an age of social media, damaging information can rarely be contained for long. Executives can almost count on it to be leaked. Corporate officers who fail to communicate effectively and proactively may end up on the defensive and face an uphill battle trying to limit the damage. Many of the techniques used to communicate bad news in person are useful when organizations face a crisis or must deliver negative news to their workers and other groups.

Keeping Communication Open and Honest. Smart organizations in crisis prefer to communicate the news openly to employees and other stakeholders. A crisis might involve serious performance problems, a major relocation, massive layoffs, a management shakeup, or public controversy. Instead of letting rumors distort the truth, managers ought to explain the organization's side of the story honestly and promptly.

WRITING PLAN FOR ANNOUNCING NEGATIVE NEWS TO EMPLOYEES

- **Buffer:** Start with a neutral or positive statement that transitions to the reasons for the bad news. Consider opening with 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.

Choosing the Best Communication Channel. Morale can be destroyed when employees learn of major events affecting their jobs through the grapevine or from news accounts—rather than from management. When bad news must be delivered to individual employees, management may want to deliver the news personally. With large groups, however, this is generally impossible. Instead, organizations deliver bad news through multiple channels, ranging from hard-copy memos to digital media. Such electronic messages can take the form of intranet posts, e-mails, videos, webcasts, internal as well as external blogs, and voice mail.

Draft of Intranet Post. The draft of the intranet blog post shown in Figure 7.9 announces a substantial increase in the cost of employee health care benefits. However, the message 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.

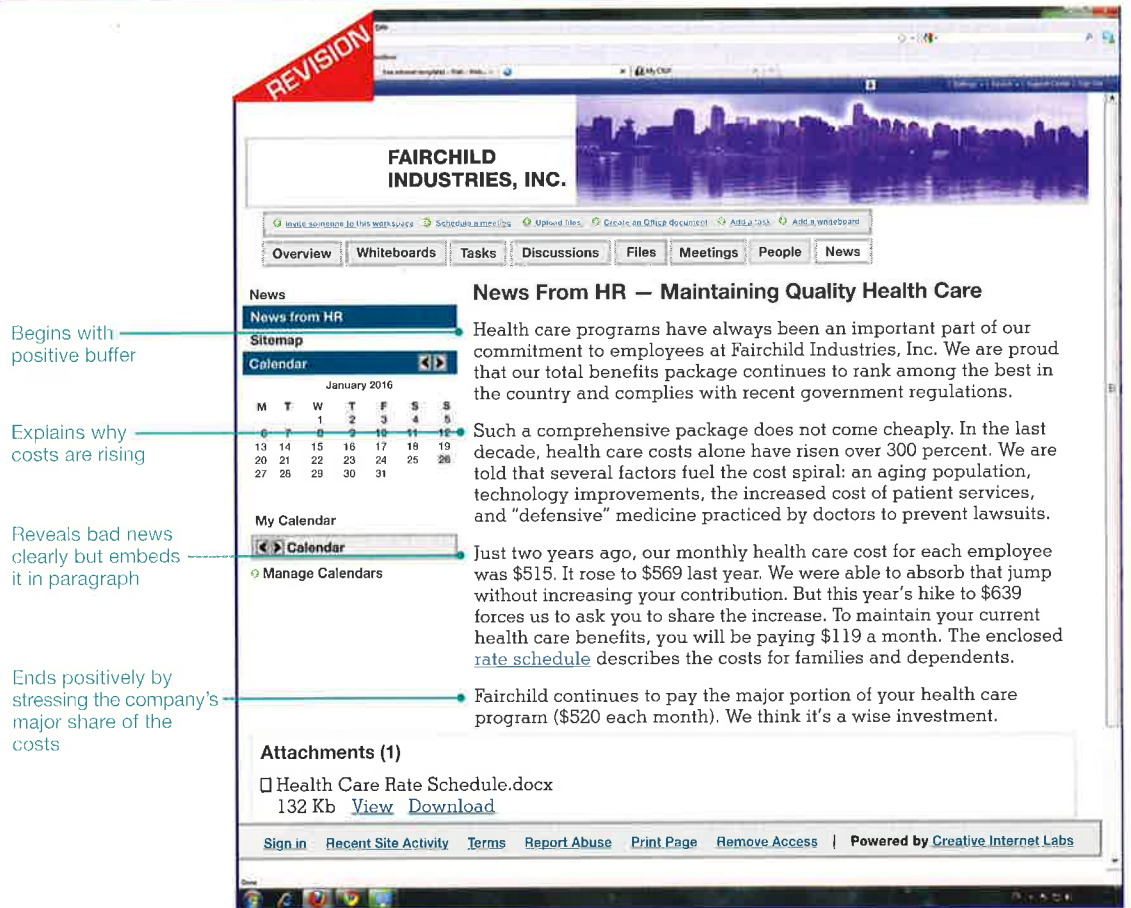
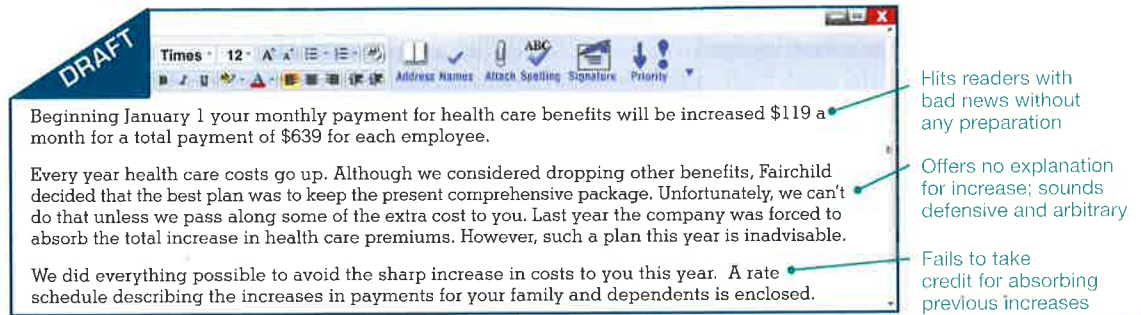
OFFICE INSIDER

"E-mail and blogging have become such a part of our DNA that people take for granted that it's an OK way to communicate. But actually it's depersonalizing. It chops us off from who we thought we were."

—Ruth Luban, employment counselor and author of *Are You a Corporate Refugee? A Survival Guide for Downsized, Disillusioned, and Displaced Workers.*



Figure 7.9 Announcing Bad News to Employees



Revision of Intranet Post. The revision of this bad-news message uses the indirect strategy and improves the tone considerably. Notice that it opens with a relevant, upbeat buffer regarding health care—but says nothing about increasing costs. For a smooth transition, the second paragraph begins with a key idea from the opening (*comprehensive package*). The reasons section discusses rising costs with explanations and figures. The bad news (*you will be paying \$119 a month*) is clearly presented but embedded within the paragraph. Throughout, the writer strives to show the fairness of the company’s position. The ending, which does not refer to the bad news, emphasizes how much the company is paying and what a wise investment it is.

The entire message demonstrates a kinder, gentler approach than that shown in the first draft. Of prime importance in breaking bad news to employees is providing clear, convincing reasons that explain the decision. Parallel to this internal blog post, the message was also sent by e-mail. In smaller companies in which some workers do not have company e-mail, a hard-copy memo would be posted prominently on bulletin boards and in the lunchroom.

SUMMARY OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES

7-1 Understand the goals of business communicators in conveying negative news.

- Explain clearly and completely while projecting a professional image.
- Convey empathy, sensitivity, and fairness.
- Maintain friendly relations, especially with customers.

7-2 Compare the strategies and ethics of the direct and indirect plans in communicating negative news.

- Use the direct strategy, with the bad news first, when the news is not damaging, when the receiver may overlook it, when the organization or receiver prefers directness, or when firmness is necessary.
- Use the indirect strategy, with a buffer and explanation preceding the bad news, when the bad news is personally upsetting, when it may provoke a hostile reaction, when it threatens the customer relationship, and when the news is unexpected.
- To avoid being unethical, never use the indirect method to deceive or manipulate the truth.

7-3 Explain the components of effective negative messages, including opening with a buffer, apologizing, showing empathy, presenting the reasons, cushioning the bad news, and closing pleasantly.

- To soften bad news, start with a buffer such as the best news, a compliment, appreciation, agreement, facts, understanding, or an apology.
- If you apologize, do it promptly and sincerely. Accept responsibility but don't admit blame without consulting a superior or company counsel. Strive to project empathy.
- In presenting the reasons for the bad news, explain clearly, cite reader or other benefits if plausible, explain company policy if necessary, choose positive words, and strive to show fairness and serious intent.
- In breaking the bad news, position it and word it strategically by (a) sandwiching it between other sentences, (b) presenting it in a subordinating clause, (c) using passive-voice verbs to depersonalize an action, (d) highlighting whatever is positive, (e) implying the refusal instead of stating it directly, and (f) suggesting a compromise or an alternative.
- To close pleasantly, you could (a) suggest a means of following through on an alternative, (b) offer freebies, (c) extend good wishes, (d) anticipate future business, or (e) offer resale information or a sales promotion.

7-4 Apply effective techniques in refusing typical requests or claims, as well as handling customer bad news in print and online.

- In rejecting requests for favors, money, information, and action, follow the bad-news strategy: (a) begin with a buffer, (b) present valid reasons, (c) explain the bad news and possibly an alternative, and (d) close with good feelings and a positive statement.
- To deal with disappointed customers in print, (a) call or e-mail the individual immediately; (b) describe the problem and apologize; (c) explain why the problem occurred, what you are doing to resolve it, and how you will prevent it from happening again; and (d) promote goodwill with a follow-up message.
- To handle negative posts and reviews online, (a) verify the situation, (b) respond quickly and constructively, (c) consider giving freebies such as refunds or discounts, (d) learn to improve by considering people who made negative comments as real-time focus groups, and (e) be prepared to accept the inevitable and move on.
- To deny claims, (a) use the reasons-before-refusal plan, (b) don't blame customers (even if they are at fault), (c) use neutral objective language to explain why the claim must be refused, and (d) consider offering resale information to rebuild the customer's confidence in your products or organization.

7-5 Describe and apply effective techniques for delivering negative news within organizations.

- To deliver workplace bad news in person, (a) gather all the information; (b) prepare and rehearse; (c) explain the past, present, and future; (d) consider taking a partner; (e) choose the best time to deliver the news; and (f) be patient with the reaction.
- In announcing bad news to employees and to the public, strive to keep the communication open and honest, choose the best communication channel, and consider applying the indirect strategy.
- Be positive, but don't sugarcoat the bad news; use objective language.

CHAPTER REVIEW

1. When denying a claim from an irate customer who is threatening and overstates the claim, how can you remain professional and fair? (Obj. 1)

You can remain professional by staying calm, using polite language, and responding with clear explanations of why the claim must be denied. You can be fair by showing that the decision was impartial and rational.

2. What is the primary difference between the direct and the indirect strategies? (Obj. 2)

The primary difference is where the bad news is placed. In the direct strategy, it comes first. In the indirect strategy, it comes after the buffer and reasons.

3. When would you be more inclined to use the direct strategy in delivering bad news? (Obj. 2)

The direct strategy is best (a) when the bad news is not damaging, (b) when it doesn't personally affect the receiver, (c) when the receiver may overlook the bad news, (d) when the organization or receiver prefers directness, or (e) when firmness is necessary.

4. What is a buffer? Name five or more techniques to buffer the opening of a bad-news message. (Obj. 3)

A buffer is a device to reduce shock or pain. In bad-news messages, a buffer may consist of the best news, a compliment, appreciation, agreement, facts, understanding, or an apology.

5. Why should you apologize to customers if you or your company erred? What is the best way to do it? (Obj. 3)

Apologies to customers go a long way in soothing hard feelings, and they cost nothing. To apologize effectively, do it promptly and sincerely. Strive to accept responsibility, but before admitting blame, consult a superior or the company legal counsel to avoid litigation.

6. In delivering bad news, name five techniques that can be used to cushion that news. (Obj. 3)

Bad news can be cushioned by (a) sandwiching it between other sentences, (b) avoiding high-visibility positions, (c) using the passive voice, (d) highlighting any positive news, (e) implying the refusal, and (f) suggesting a compromise or an alternative.

7. What is a process used by many business professionals in resolving problems with disappointed customers in print? (Obj. 4)

Many business professionals strive to control damage and resolve customer problems by (a) telephoning or e-mailing immediately; (b) describing the problem and apologizing; (c) explaining why the problem occurred, what they are doing to resolve it, and how they will prevent it from happening again; and (d) promoting goodwill with follow-up messages.

8. How can negative online comments be turned into positive growth for an organization? (Obj. 4)

Negative online messages can provide opportunities for learning and improvement. By analyzing complaints, organizations can recognize weaknesses and rectify problem areas. Some organizations consider customers who provide negative online comments as inexpensive real-time focus groups.

9. How can a subordinate tactfully, professionally, and safely deliver upsetting news personally to a superior? (Obj. 5)

To deliver upsetting news personally, (a) first gather all the information; (b) prepare and rehearse; (c) explain the past, present, and future of the situation; (d) consider taking a partner; (e) choose a good time to deliver the news; and (f) be patient with the reaction.

10. What are some channels that large organizations may use to deliver bad news to employees? (Obj. 5)

Large organizations may deliver bad news in the form of hard-copy memos, intranet posts, e-mails, videos, webcasts, voice mail, and internal as well as external blogs.

CRITICAL THINKING

INSTRUCTOR: See the Instructor's Manual for a guide to critical thinking.

11. Robert Bies, professor of management at Georgetown University, believes that an important ethical guideline in dealing with bad news is never to shock the recipient: "Bad news should never come as a surprise. Failure to warn senior leadership of impending bad news, such as poor sales or a loss of a major client, is a cardinal sin. So is failure to warn subordinates about mistakes in their performance and provide an opportunity for them to make corrections and improve."¹⁶ Discuss the motivation of people who keep quiet and struggle with dispensing bad news. (Objs. 1–3)
12. Suppose you made an honest mistake that could prove expensive for your employer or internship provider. Would you blurt out the bad news immediately or consider strategies to soften the blow somewhat? (Objs. 1–3)
13. Why is the passive voice acceptable, even desirable, in bad-news messages when it's considered poor, impersonal writing in most other situations? (Objs. 1–3)
14. Consider times when you have been aware that others were using the indirect strategy in writing or speaking to you. How did you react? (Obj. 2)
15. Living in Pittsburgh, Lauren Bossers worked virtually by e-mail and phone for a supply chain management software company in Dallas. She was laid off by phone, too. Bossers' manager had given her one day's notice; however, the news was still "shocking," and she responded with just *yes* or *no* to the HR officer who called: "I wasn't rude, but I didn't think it was my job to make them feel better," Bossers said. Software developer Jeff Langr was fired during a teleconference on Skype. What might be some advantages and disadvantages to receiving bad news remotely, if any? Why might it be a good idea to rein in one's frustration and anger? (Obj. 5)

WRITING IMPROVEMENT EXERCISES

INSTRUCTOR: See the Instructor's Manual for solutions plus Additional Writing Improvement Exercises.

Passive-Voice Verbs (Obj. 3)

Passive-voice verbs may be preferable in breaking bad news because they enable you to emphasize actions rather than personalities. Compare these two refusals:

Active voice: I cannot authorize you to take two weeks of vacation in August.

Passive voice: Two weeks of vacation in August cannot be authorized.

YOUR TASK. Revise the following sentences to present the bad news with passive-voice verbs.

16. We cannot offer free shipping for orders under \$100.

Free shipping is unavailable for orders under \$100. *OR:* Free shipping is available on all orders over \$100.

17. This hospital has a strict policy of not admitting patients until we have verified their insurance coverage.

Patients cannot be admitted until after their insurance coverage is verified. *OR:* Patients can be admitted after verification of their insurance coverage.

18. Because our liability insurance no longer covers visitors, we are postponing indefinitely requests for company tours.

Because visitors are no longer covered by our liability insurance coverage, company tours must be postponed indefinitely.

19. Your car rental insurance coverage does not cover large SUVs.

Large SUVs are not covered by your car rental insurance.

20. Company policy prevents us from offering health and dental benefits until employees have been on the job for 12 months.

Health and dental benefits are offered only after employees have been on the job for 12 months.

Subordinating Bad News (Obj. 3)

YOUR TASK. Revise the following sentences to position the bad news in a subordinate clause. (**Hint:** Consider beginning the clause with *Although*.) Use passive-voice verbs for the bad news.

21. A shipping strike makes it impossible for us to ship your complete order at this point in time. However, we are able to send two corner workstations now, and you should receive them within five days.

Although your complete order cannot be shipped at this time, two corner workstations should arrive within five days.

22. We were forced to stop taking orders for flowers the week before Mother's Day. To make up for this disappointment, we apologize and ask you to try again with free shipping for the next week.

Although flowers could not be shipped the week before Mother's Day, we apologize and invite you to try again with free shipping for the next week.

23. We now offer all of our catalog choices at our website, which is always current. We are sorry to report that we no longer mail print catalogs. Our sustainability goals made it impossible for us to continue doing that.

Although sustainability goals prevent us from mailing print catalogs, we now offer all of our catalog choices at our website, which is always current.

24. We appreciate your interest in our organization, but we are unable to extend an employment offer to you at this time.

Although an employment offer cannot be extended at this time, we appreciate your interest in our organization.

25. The shipment of your last order was late for a reason. We had some really large orders that had to be filled ahead of yours and tied up our facilities. After that tie-up, we realized we had to improve our shipping process. Your next order will arrive within a week. That's a promise.

Although your last order was delayed, we have improved our shipping process and we promise that your next order will arrive within a week.

Implying Bad News (Obj. 3)

YOUR TASK. Revise the following statements to *imply* the bad news. If possible, use passive-voice verbs and subordinate clauses to further de-emphasize the bad news.

Direct refusal: We cannot send you a price list, nor can we sell our lawn mowers directly to customers. We sell only through authorized dealers, and your dealer is HomeCo.

Implied refusal: Our lawn mowers are sold only through authorized dealers, and your dealer is HomeCo.

26. Unfortunately, we find it impossible to contribute to your excellent and worthwhile fund-raising campaign this year. At present all the funds of our organization are needed to lease equipment and offices for our new branch in Hartford. We hope to be able to support this commendable endeavor in the future.

All our present funds are needed to lease equipment and offices for our new branch in Hartford. However, we hope to be able to support this commendable endeavor in the future.

27. We cannot ship our fresh fruit baskets c.o.d. Your order was not accompanied by payment, so we are not shipping it. We have it ready, though, and will rush it to its destination as soon as you call us with your credit card number.

We have your fresh fruit basket ready and will ship it as soon as you call us with your credit card number.

28. Because of the holiday period, all our billboard space was used this month. Therefore, we are sorry to say that we could not give your charitable group free display space. However, next month, after the holidays, we hope to display your message as we promised.

Because our billboard space was completely filled during the holidays, we hope to display your message, as promised, next month.



Note: Radical Rewrites are provided at www.cengagebrain.com for you to download and revise. Your instructor may provide a suggested solution.

7.1 Radical Rewrite: Request Refusal—Bitter Taste of the Beach (Obj. 1–4)

The following blunt refusal from a restaurant owner rejects a previously agreed-to favor. To avoid endangering a friendship and losing community goodwill, this writer needs to draft a radical rewrite.

YOUR TASK. List at least five weaknesses and suggest ways to improve this message. If your instructor directs, revise.

Current date

Ms. Diane Hinchcliffe
Taste of the Beach
310 Ocean Avenue, Suite 304
Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA 93521

Dear Ms. Hinchcliffe:

Unfortunately, we cannot participate in this summer's Taste of the Beach event. This may be particularly disappointing to you because, merely as a friendly gesture, I had earlier agreed to provide a selection of tasty hors d'oeuvres from my restaurant, The Zodiac. I'm sorry to let you down like this. We have participated in the past, but we just can't do it this year because our sad kitchen facilities require major and extensive remodeling.

I heard that this year's Taste of the Beach is really going to be a blast with new and old food, wine, music, and artistic offerings. How did you get so many prized vintners and all those well-known chefs, artists, and music groups to participate and perform?

This is probably quite disappointing to you (and to me) because the event supports Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. I know that BBBSA is simply the very best as a youth mentoring organization.

Let me repeat—I'm sorry we can't participate. Don't bother to beg me. But for your silent raffle we can offer you a coupon for a dinner for two. Of course, this could not be used until October when our renovations are completed.

Sincerely,

List at least five weaknesses.

- a. Fails to develop a positive tone with a gracious opening and closing.
- b. Instead of opening bluntly, the writer should have started with positive remarks about the popularity of this recurring summer event and his enjoyment at past participation.
- c. Emphasizes the refusal instead of softening it throughout and suggesting an alternate benefit.
- d. Could have softened the bad news by implying it or by inserting it into a subordinating clause followed by a benefit (*Although major remodeling prevents us from participating this year, we can offer a free dinner. . .*).
- e. Closes with a negative statement instead of emphasizing a benefit and looking forward positively.

7.2 Radical Rewrite: Bad News to Customers—Hackers Hijack E-Mail Addresses (Obj. 1–4)

The following poorly written e-mail tells customers that their e-mail addresses have been hacked. However, the message is clumsy and fails to include essential information in revealing security breaches to customers.

YOUR TASK. Analyze the message and list at least seven weaknesses. If your instructor directs, revise it using the suggestions you learned in this chapter about security breach messages.

To: Kara Khalial [kkhalial@coastal.net]
From: Justin Small [jsmall@princetonpayment.org]
Subject: Customer Security Incident at Princeton Payment Systems
Cc:
Bcc:

Companies and individuals across the country are experiencing more and more security breaches. This is just to let you know that you are receiving this e-mail because of a recent unfortunate security breach at Princeton Payment Systems. Rest assured, however, that as a customer of Princeton, your privacy was never at risk. We promise to guard your privacy around the clock.

Hackers last week were able to maliciously exploit a new function that we were trying to use to make the customer log-in process faster for you and our other customers. The hackers were ingenious and malicious, going to extreme lengths to gain access to some customer addresses at Princeton. You should now beware of scams that may result from your address being used in phishing scams. To learn more, go to <http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/alerts/phishing.html>.

To provide even more information about this incident, the U.S. postal service will bring you a letter with more information. Taking your privacy very seriously, e-mail addresses are heavily protected here at Princeton. Within hours of the hacker break-in, the log-in mechanism was disabled and a new procedure was established. The user is now required to enter their e-mail address and their password before they can log in successfully. E-mail addresses were the only information the hackers got. Other information such as account information and other personal information were never risked.

We appreciate you being a Princeton customer.

Sincerely,

List at least seven weaknesses.

- a. Begins weakly with a general statement leaving receivers wondering why the message was written.
- b. Includes a long lead-in (*This is just to let you know that*).
- c. Fails to explain exactly what happened and when the security breach took place.
- d. Places the promise to guard privacy in the first paragraph when it would be more logical in the last paragraph.
- e. Includes many dangling modifiers (*as a customer of Princeton, your privacy. . . ; Taking your privacy very seriously, e-mail addresses. . . ; To provide even more information about this incident, the U.S. postal service. . .*)
- f. Suffers from lack of agreement (*the user is now required to enter their e-mail address and their password before they can. . .*) and other grammar faults.
- g. Fails to organize the message logically with an introduction, body, and conclusion.
- h. Does not conclude with customer assurance and the mention of a letter coming with more information.

7.3 Radical Rewrite: Claim Denial—Warranty Does Not Mean a New Device (Obj's. 1–4)

Following is a letter to a customer who demanded a brand-new replacement smartphone under her wireless phone protection plan.

YOUR TASK. Analyze the message. List at least five weaknesses. If your instructor directs, revise the message.

Current date

Ms. Haley Tranquillo
501 Westhampton Way
Richmond, VA 23173

Dear Ms. Tranquillo:

This letter is being sent to you to inform you that warranty repairs or replacements are not available for damage caused by operator fault. The dot inside your smartphone indicates in bright red that the device suffered prolonged exposure to liquid. The phone also shows signs of heavy external abuse—quite rightly excluded from coverage under your protection plan.

Your phone retailer, Westhampton Wireless, at 422 Pleasant Valley Road, forwarded your device to us. Our service technician made an inspection. That's when he discovered that your Droid had not been treated with proper caution and care. He said he had never

seen such a gunky phone interior, and that without a doubt the gadget was subjected to blunt force on top of that! You are lucky that the touch screen did not crack or break and that you didn't lose all your data irretrievably since you apparently didn't bother to arrange for a backup. Today's smartphones are sophisticated high-tech devices. They must be handled with utmost respect. You wouldn't believe how many users accidentally drop their phones into the toilet.

The Peace of Mind Plan that you have purchased gets rave reviews from users. They love the protection their expensive equipment enjoys at a low monthly cost of \$5.99. However, this plan plus the manufacturer's warranty on your Droid covers only this one thing: manufacturing defects. Your warranty has expired by now, but it wouldn't cover neglect and abuse anyway. Your Peace of Mind Plan is in effect but only covers you for theft, loss, and malfunction. It explicitly excludes liquid and physical damage. In any case, there is always a deductible of \$89. We can't replace the Droid at no charge, as you request. But we could sell you a remanufactured model, at a cost of \$49 plus tax. Your other option is to purchase a new device at full retail cost. Furthermore, since you have a two-year contract, you will be eligible for an upgrade as you are nearing month 20. You could go to www.alphawireless.com to browse new calling plans and see current smartphones and perhaps order a product or service online.

Let us know what you want to do. We pride ourselves on our unparalleled customer service.

Sincerely,

List at least five weaknesses.

- a. Begins with a long lead-in (*This letter is being sent to you to inform you that*).
- b. Delivers the bad news bluntly with no effort to soften the blow.
- c. Heaps blame on the customer and chastises her for not handling the smartphone properly.
- d. Emphasizes the bad news by repeating it in the middle of the letter.
- e. Fails to present the reasons logically or positively.
- f. Presents the options to the reader poorly without much effort to promote the product or renew good feelings.
- g. Does not conclude with a way for the customer to get in touch with the writer easily.

ACTIVITIES AND CASES

7.4 Request Refusal: Advocating for Abused Children (Obj. 1-4)

As a vice president of a financial services company, you serve many clients and they sometimes ask your company to contribute to their favorite charities. You recently received a letter from Paulina Ramirez asking for a substantial contribution to the National Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association. On visits to your office, she has told you about its programs to recruit, train, and support volunteers in their work with abused children. She herself is active in your town as a CASA volunteer, helping neglected children find safe, permanent homes. She told you that children with CASA volunteers are more likely to be adopted and are less likely to reenter the child welfare system.

You have a soft spot in your heart for children and especially for those who are mistreated. You sincerely want to support CASA and its good work. However, times are tough, and you can't be as generous as you have been in the past. Ms. Ramirez wrote a special letter to you asking you to become a Key contributor, with a pledge of \$1,000.

YOUR TASK. Write a refusal letter that maintains good relations with your client. Address it to Ms. Paulina Ramirez, 4382 Congress Avenue, Austin, TX 78701.

7.5 Request Refusal: Pink Dragons Sink Application (Obj. 1-4)

Read

Web

Adobe Systems Incorporated prides itself on its commitment to employees who receive generous benefits and enjoy a supportive corporate culture. This core value may have contributed to the company's ranking among the top 50 of *Fortune* magazine's 100 Best Companies to Work For. The software giant is also known for its community involvement and corporate social responsibility efforts. This is why, like most large companies, Adobe receives many requests for sponsorships of charity events and community projects. True to its innovative spirit, the software company has streamlined the application process by providing an online sponsorship request form at its website.

You work in Corporate Affairs/Community Relations at Adobe and periodically help decide which nonprofits will obtain support. Just yesterday you received an e-mail from the Pink Dragons of San Diego, a dragon boat racing team of breast cancer survivors. The ancient Chinese sport has spread around the globe with competitions held not only in Asia but also in many Western countries. Dragon boat racing has gained popularity in North America among breast cancer patients who bond with fellow survivors, engage in healthy competition, and exercise regularly on the water. Synchronicity and technique are more important than brute strength, which is the main reason even recreational paddlers enjoy this fast-growing water sport.

The newly formed survivor team would like Adobe to sponsor a dragon boat festival in San Diego in less than a month, an event potentially drawing at least 20 survivor teams that would compete against each other. Your company is already funding several cancer charities and has a policy of sponsoring many causes. Naturally, no corporate giving program has infinite funds, nor can it green-light every request. Adobe steers clear of religious, political, and “pornographic” events. The team judging the sponsorship entries wants to ensure that each proposal reaches audiences affiliated with Adobe. Most important, applicants must submit their requests at least six weeks before the event.

YOUR TASK. As a junior staff member in Corporate Affairs/Community Relations, write an e-mail to Pink Dragon captain Josephine Rosa (jrosa@pinkdragons.org) refusing her initial request and explaining the Adobe sponsorship philosophy and submission rules.

7.6 Request Refusal: No Favors for Jamba Juice (Obj. 1-4)

In an aggressive expansion effort, Jamba Juice became a good customer of your software company. You have enjoyed the business it brought, and you are also quite fond of its products—especially Banana Berry and Mega Mango smoothies. Jamba Inc. is in the midst of expanding its menu with the goal of becoming the Starbucks of the smoothie. “Just as Starbucks defined the category of coffee, Jamba has the opportunity to define the category of the healthy snack,” said market analyst Brian Moore. One goal of Jamba is to boost the frequency of customer visits by offering some products that are more filling. Then it could attract hungry customers as well as thirsty ones. It has been experimenting with adding grains such as oatmeal and nuts such as almonds so that a smoothie packs more substance and could substitute for a meal.

You receive a letter from Joe Wong, your business friend and contact at Jamba Juice. He asks you to do him and Jamba Juice a favor. He wants to set up a juice-tasting bar in your company cafeteria to test his new experimental drinks. All the drinks would be free, of course, but employees would have to fill out forms to evaluate each recipe. The details could be worked out later.

You definitely support healthy snacks, but you think this idea is terrible. First of all, your company doesn't even have a cafeteria. It has a small lunchroom, and employees bring their own food. Second, you would be embarrassed to ask your boss to do this favor for Jamba Juice, despite the business it has brought your company.

YOUR TASK. Write a letter that retains good customer relations with Jamba Juice but refuses this request. What reasons can you give, and what alternatives are available? Address your message to Joe Wong, Vice President, Product Development, Jamba Inc., 450 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102.¹⁷

7.7 Request Refusal: Loud Music Bothers Tenant Neighbor (Obj. 1-4)

Web

As the owner of Two Buckhead Plaza, you must respond to the request of Manuel Quinones, one of the tenants in your three-story office building. Mr. Quinones, a CPA, demands that you immediately evict a neighboring tenant who plays loud music throughout the day, interfering with Mr. Quinones' conversations with clients and with his concentration. The noisy tenant, Scott Eslan, seems to operate an entertainment booking agency and spends long hours in his office. You know you can't evict Mr. Eslan because, as a legal commercial tenant, he is entitled to conduct his business. However, you might consider adding soundproofing, an expense that you would prefer to share with Mr. Eslan and Mr. Quinones. You might also discuss limiting the time of day that Mr. Eslan could make noise.

YOUR TASK. Before responding to Mr. Quinones, you decide to find out more about commercial tenancy. Use the Web to search the keywords *commercial eviction*. Then develop a course of action. In a letter to Mr. Quinones, deny his request but retain his goodwill. Tell him how you plan to resolve the problem. Write to Manuel Quinones, CPA, Suite 300, Two Buckhead Plaza, 3050 Peachtree Rd., NW, Atlanta, GA 30305. Your instructor may also ask you to write an appropriate message to Mr. Scott Eslan, Suite 330.

7.8 Claim Denial: Lost in Flight (Obj. 1-4)

National Airlines had an unhappy customer. Genna Frymoyer-Morris flew from Washington, DC, to Los Angeles. The flight stopped briefly at Denver International Airport, where she got off the plane for half an hour. When she returned to her seat, her \$500 prescription reading glasses were gone. She asked the flight attendant where the glasses were, and the attendant said they probably were thrown away since the cleaning crew had come in with big bags and tossed everything in them. Ms. Frymoyer-Morris tried to locate the glasses through the airline's lost-and-found service, but she failed.

Then she wrote a strong letter to the airline demanding reimbursement for the loss. She felt that it was obvious that she was returning to her seat. The airline, however, knows that an overwhelming number of passengers arriving at hubs switch planes for

their connecting flights. The airline does not know who is returning. What's more, flight attendants usually announce that the plane is continuing to another city and that passengers who are returning should take their belongings. Cabin cleaning crews speed through planes removing newspapers, magazines, leftover foods, and trash. Airlines feel no responsibility for personal items left in cabins.

YOUR TASK. As a staff member of the customer relations department of National Airlines, deny the customer's claim but retain her goodwill using techniques learned in this chapter. The airline never refunds cash, but it might consider travel vouchers for the value of the glasses. Remember that apologies cost nothing. Write a claim denial to Ms. Genna Frymoyer-Morris, 1805 Panorama Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93305.

7.9 Claim Denial: Going Ape After Botched Gorilla Party (Objs. 1-4)



BuyCostumes, the world's largest online costume and accessories retailer, is proud of its extensive stock of costumes, its liberal return policy, and its many satisfied customers. However, one day an e-mail arrived with a request that went beyond the company's ability to deliver. The customer said that he had ordered the Gorilla Blinky Eye With Chest costume. This popular gorilla costume comes with a unique gorilla mask, attractive suit with rubber chest, foot covers, and hands. The customer complained that the gorilla costume did not arrive until two days after his Halloween party. He planned an elaborate party with a gorilla theme, and he was extremely unhappy that he did not have his costume. He asks BuyCostumes to reimburse \$300 that he spent on theme-related decorations, which he says were useless when he failed to receive his costume.

As a customer service representative, you checked his order and found that it was not received until five days before Halloween, the busiest time of the year for your company. It's so busy that your staff grows from 60 core employees to over 300 during this season. His order was filled the next day, but standard shipping requires three to six business days for delivery. The customer did not order express or premium delivery; his shipping option was marked "Standard."

You showed the e-mail to the owner, Mr. Schwartz, who said that this request was ludicrous. However, he wanted to retain the customer's goodwill. Obviously, BuyCostumes was not going to shell out \$300 for late delivery of a costume. Mr. Schwartz suggested that the company would allow the customer to return the costume (in its original packaging). In addition, BuyCostumes would send a digital coupon for \$20 off the next costume purchase. You can check its return policy at buycostumes.com.

YOUR TASK. Mr. Schwartz asks you to write an e-mail that retains the goodwill of this customer. Address your e-mail to Paul Littleton <plittleton@outlook.com>.

7.10 Claim Denial: Raising a Stink About a Charge for Smoking in the Room (Objs. 1-4)

Recently, the Metropal Grand Hotel embarked on a two-year plan to provide enhanced value and improved product quality to its guests. It always strives to exceed guest expectations. As part of this effort, Metropal Grand Hotel has been refurbishing many rooms with updated finishes. The new carpet, paint, upholstery, and draperies, however, absorb the heavy odor of cigarette smoke. To protect the hotel's investment, Metropal Grand Hotel enforces a strict nonsmoking policy for its nonsmoking rooms.

Metropal Grand Hotel makes sure that guests know about its policy regarding smoking in nonsmoking rooms. It posts a notice in each nonsmoking room, and it gives guests a handout from the manager detailing its policy and the consequences for smoking in nonsmoking rooms. The handout clearly says, "Should a guest opt to disregard our nonsmoking policy, we will process a fee of \$150 to the guest's account." For those guests who prefer to smoke, a smoking accommodation can be provided.

On May 10 Trevor H. Taylor was a guest in the hotel. He stayed in a room clearly marked "Nonsmoking." After he left, the room cleaners reported that the room smelled of smoke. According to hotel policy, a charge of \$150 was processed to Mr. Taylor's credit card. Mr. Taylor has written to demand that the \$150 charge be removed. He doesn't deny that he smoked in the room. He just believes that he should not have to pay.

YOUR TASK. As hotel manager, deny Mr. Taylor's claim. You would certainly like to see Mr. Taylor return as a Metropal Grand Hotel guest, but you cannot budge on your smoking policy. Address your response to Mr. Trevor H. Taylor, 580 Lottie Street, Bellingham, WA 98225.

7.11 Customer Bad News: Putting the Brakes on Bakery Deliveries (Objs. 1-4)

As the owner of La Boulangerie Bakery in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, you have a devoted clientele savoring your delicacies. Your salty caramel cupcakes offer an irresistible salty-sweet flavor combination using fleur de sel crystals hand harvested from the pristine seas off Brittany, France. These salt granules complement the sweet buttery caramel that flavors both the cake and frosting. Although your cupcakes are a trendy hit, you also feature delicious cakes, squares, cookies, croissants, and breads. Your bakery has a medium-sized storefront; however, most of your business comes from supplying local restaurants and coffee shops with your tantalizing treats. You own two trucks that make deliveries to customers throughout the Baton Rouge metropolitan area.

Although La Boulangerie is financially successful, rising costs have severely undercut your profits over the past few months. You know that you are not the only business owner dealing with rising prices. Many of your suppliers have raised their prices over the past year. Specifically, the higher prices of wheat and sugar have resulted in a drastic increase in your production costs. Previously, you did not charge for deliveries made to your wholesale clients. However, you now feel that you have no choice but to add a delivery charge for each order to cover your increased costs and the rising price of gas.

YOUR TASK. As the owner of La Boulangerie Bakery, write a letter to your wholesale clients in which you announce a \$20 charge per delivery. Try to think of a special offer to soften the blow. Address the first letter to Mr. Emil Broussard, Café Broussard, 2013 West Lee Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70820.

7.12 Customer Bad News: Blunder in Scheduling Fairytale Cottage Wedding (0bjs. 1-4)

As the wedding planner at Sea Island Resort in Georgia, you just discovered a terrible mistake. Two weddings have been scheduled for the same Saturday in June. How could this happen? You keep meticulous records, but six months ago, you were away for two weeks. Another employee filled in for you. She apparently didn't understand the scheduling system and lined up two weddings for the Cloister Chapel on June 14. The month of June, of course, is the busiest month of the year. Weddings in the popular fairytale cottage Cloister Chapel are usually booked for two years in advance, and it can handle only one wedding a day.

It's now January, and Kellie Singer, one of the brides-to-be called to check on her arrangements. That's when you discovered the mistake. However, you didn't reveal the blunder to Kellie on the telephone. From experience, you know how emotional brides can be when their plans go awry. Now you must decide what to do. Your manager has given you complete authority in scheduling weddings, and you know he would back nearly any decision you make to rectify the mistake. Unfortunately, all of your Sea Island wedding venues are booked for June Saturdays. However, you do have some midweek openings for the Cloister Chapel in early June. If one of the brides could change to midweek, you might offer one free night in a sumptuous bridal suite to smooth ruffled feathers.

Sea Island offers dreamlike settings for unforgettable wedding celebrations. Brides, grooms, and their guests can enjoy five-star resort services, five miles of private coastline, glittering ballrooms, custom banquets, and alluringly wooded and landscaped strolling areas.

YOUR TASK. Decide what course of action to take. The two brides-to-be are Kellie Singer, 3201 Peachtree Lane, Cumming, GA 30016, and Julie Brehm, 240 Lakeview Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30305. In a memo to your instructor, explain your response strategy. If you plan a phone call, outline what you plan to say. If your instructor requests, write a letter and copy your instructor.

7.13 Customer Bad News: Which Elliptical for Commercial Gym? (0bjs. 1-4)

E-mail

You are delighted to receive a large order from Rudy Cardenas at 24-Hour Fitness gym. This order includes two Olympic Benches (at \$349 each), three Stamina Power Towers (at \$249 each), three sets of Premier Dumbbells (at \$105 each), and two Titanic 20 Ellipticals (at \$1,099 each).

You could ship immediately except for one problem. The Titanic 20 Elliptical, as rated by *Consumer Reports*, is intended for home use, not for gym or club use. More and more fitness lovers are purchasing ellipticals because they have better track records than treadmills and stair climbers for aerobic exercise. The Titanic 20 is definitely effective for personal use. However, this is not the model you would recommend for club use. The Titanic 90 is larger, sturdier, and safer for commercial gyms. It also has extras such as a built-in cooling fan, water bottle holder, and speakers that allow users to hook up to any MP3 player (iPod, etc.) for easy listening. You believe that Mr. Cardenas should order the Titanic 90 Elliptical. It's solidly built, comes with a chest-strap heart-rate monitor, has 20 resistance levels, and features a lifetime warranty on its frame. For gym use, the Titanic 90 is clearly better. The bad news is that it is considerably more expensive at \$3,100 per machine.

You get no response when you try to telephone Mr. Cardenas to discuss the problem. Should you ship what you can, or hold the entire order until you learn whether he wants the Titanic 20 or the Titanic 90 Elliptical? Another option is to substitute the Titanic 90 and send only one of them. Another possibility is sending one of the home models and one of the gym models.

YOUR TASK. Decide what to do and then send an e-mail to Rudy Cardenas (rcardenas@24hourfitness.com).

7.14 Employee Bad News: Rising Tuition? You're on Your Own (0bjs. 1-5)

Sabrina Sparks, a hardworking bank teller, has sent an e-mail request asking that the company create a program to reimburse the tuition and book expenses for employees taking college courses. Although some companies have such a program, First Federal Bank has not felt that it could indulge in such an expensive employee perk. Moreover, the CEO is not convinced that companies see any direct benefit from such programs. Employees improve their educational credentials and skills, but what is to keep them from moving that education and those skill sets to other employers? First Federal has over 200 employees. If even a fraction of them started classes, the company could see a huge bill for the cost of tuition and books.

Because the bank is facing stiff competition and its profits are sinking, the expense of such a program makes it out of the question. In addition, it would involve administration—applications, monitoring, and record keeping. It is just too much of a hassle. When employees were hard to hire and retain, companies had to offer employment perks. With a soft economy, however, such inducements are unnecessary.

YOUR TASK. As director of Human Resources, send an individual response to Sabrina Sparks. The answer is a definite *no*, but you want to soften the blow and retain the loyalty of this conscientious employee.

7.15 Employee Bad News: Only Employees Can Play (Objs. 1–5)

E-mail

As director of Human Resources at Portland Paper Company, you received an unusual request. Several employees asked that their spouses or friends be allowed to participate on Portland intramural sports teams. Although the teams play only once a week during the season, these employees claim that they can't afford more time away from friends and family. Over 100 employees currently participate on the eight coed volleyball, softball, and tennis teams, which are open to company employees only. The teams were designed to improve employee friendships and to give employees a regular occasion to have fun together.

If nonemployees were to participate, you fear that employee interaction would be limited. Although some team members might have fun if spouses or friends were included, you are not so sure all employees would enjoy it. You are not interested in turning intramural sports into "date night." Furthermore, the company would have to create additional teams if many nonemployees joined, and you don't want the administrative or equipment costs of more teams. Adding teams also would require changes to team rosters and game schedules. This could create a problem for some employees. You do understand the need for social time with friends and families, but guests are welcome as spectators at all intramural games. Also, the company already sponsors a family holiday party and an annual company picnic.

YOUR TASK. Write an e-mail or hard-copy memo to the staff denying the request of several employees to include nonemployees on Portland's intramural sports teams.

7.16 Employee Bad News: Nixing Facebook at Work (Objs. 1–5)

E-mail

Your boss at MarketingMatters, a hip midsized public relations agency, is concerned that the youngest employee generation may be oversharing on Facebook. Two supervisors have complained that they spotted inappropriate photos on Facebook posted by a small group of millennials on the company payroll. This group of twentysomethings is close-knit. Its members maintain friendships outside the office and in cyberspace. They are smart and plugged in, but they seem to have trouble recognizing boundaries of age and authority. They party every weekend, which is code for a lot of drinking, marijuana use, and even salacious escapades—all of which the young workers generously document with smartphone cameras on the spot and occasionally in real time. Sometimes they share snarky comments about their workplace, such as "Rough day at work" or "Talked to the most idiotic client ever!" On top of that, the young people think nothing of friending their colleagues and supervisors. Their "friends" rank in the hundreds; some in the group have exceeded 1,000 friends on Facebook.

MarketingMatters has embraced cutting-edge technology because the management believes that information sharing and collaboration tools can lead to networking opportunities and, if used correctly, to increased productivity. The company maintains a permissive stance toward Internet use, but concern is growing that the young people are headed for trouble. The abuses continue despite the company's comprehensive Internet and social media use policy, which was widely disseminated. Probably the biggest risk MarketingMatters fears is the leaking of confidential information on social networking sites. The managers also complain that the millennials spend too much time on Facebook during office hours. Your boss is becoming impatient. After several meetings, the management decides to disallow Facebook use during work hours and to caution all employees against dangerous breaches of company policy and social media netiquette.

YOUR TASK. Draft an e-mail for the signature of your boss, Darcy M. Diamond, Director, Human Resources. Your message should remind all employees about the existing social networking policy and tactfully yet clearly announce the end of Facebook use at the office. The prohibition is effective immediately. Your message should also warn about the pitfalls of oversharing online.

GRAMMAR/MECHANICS CHECKUP—7

Commas 2

Review the Grammar/Mechanics Handbook Sections 2.05–2.09. Then study each of the following statements and insert necessary commas. In the space provided, write the number of commas you added; write 0 if no commas were needed. Also record the number of the G/M principle(s) illustrated. When you finish, compare your responses with those provided at the end of the book. If your answers differ, study carefully the principles shown in parentheses.

- 1 (2.06a) **EXAMPLE** When U.S. organizations engage in overseas business, they must train their staffs accordingly.
- 1 (2.06a) 1. If you are based in New York City and working with a sales office in Australia you will be dealing with a 16-hour time difference.
- 1 (2.05) 2. One international support person works with time zones around the world, and she keeps several clocks set to different zones.
- 0 (2.05) 3. Dealing with the unfamiliar is less challenging if you are patient and if you are able to avoid becoming irritated at misunderstandings.
- 2 (2.06c) 4. Lourdes Luna, who was recently transferred to the parent company in France, quickly became fluent in French.
- 1 (2.08) 5. The imaginative, promising software company opened its offices April 22 in Paris.
- 0 (2.06c) 6. Any sales associate who earns at least 1,000 recognition points this year will be honored with a bonus vacation trip to Tahiti.
- 2 (2.09) 7. James Manning, the marketing manager for Chevron's Global Power Generation, frequently engages in videoconferences that span time zones.
- 1 (2.07) 8. In a period of less than six weeks, Mr. Manning made several trips to the West Coast and to Asia.
- 1 (2.06a) 9. When you are working with foreign clients for whom English is a second language, you may have to speak slowly and repeat yourself.
- 1 (2.07) 10. To be most successful, you must read between the lines and learn to pick up on different cultural vibes.

Review of Commas 1 and 2

- 2 (2.01) 11. Lourdes' new job involved setting up meetings, arranging travel plans, and communicating with people who did not speak her language.
- 3 (2.06a, 2.04a) 12. After she was hired, she was told to report for work on Monday, June 2, in Paris.
- 1 (2.06c) 13. In the fall we expect to open a new branch in Sunnyvale, which is an area of considerable growth.
- 3 (2.06a, 2.04a) 14. As we discussed on the telephone, the ceremony is scheduled for Thursday, March 4, at 3 p.m.
- 1 (2.05) 15. Lourdes had to ask a foreign executive with a thick accent to repeat himself several times, and she was uncomfortable in this situation.

EDITING CHALLENGE—7

INSTRUCTOR: See the Instructor's Manual, which is at the instructor's website, for a suggested Editing Challenge Solution.

To fine-tune your grammar and mechanics skills, in every chapter you will be editing a message. This price-increase message suffers from lapses in proofreading, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other writing problems that require correction. Study the guidelines in the Grammar/Mechanics Handbook as well as the lists of Confusing Words and Frequently Misspelled Words to sharpen your skills.

YOUR TASK. Edit the following message (a) by correcting errors in your textbook or on a photocopy using proofreading marks from Appendix A or (b) by downloading the message from the premium website at www.cengagebrain.com and correcting at your computer. Your instructor may show you a possible solution.

ConnexCable The Nation's Largest Cable TV Producer

November 14, 2016

Mrs. Conchetta Stacko
467 East Lavacca
Beaumont, TX 77704

Dear Mr. Stacko:

As the nation's leading producer of cable entertainment, ConnexCable has been working continuously to bring you the highest-quality programming and cable features. Because many next-generation technology features are now available at this point in time, we are investing in them to make sure of the fact that you have more programming choices and improvements in customer service.

Some of the recent improvements include a main dashboard laid out in a tile format. This will give you direct access to recorded and bookmarked shows, as well as access to Facebook, Pandora, and additional online media. Other improvements include voice commands on your remote control so that you can search with verbal commands for shows, movies, and Web videos based on title, topic, or actors. Our new system is four times faster than the current model and uses less energy than other cable boxes.

However, these improvements, when combined with the rising costs of doing business and escalating programming charges, have increased our operating budget. Although we are forced to make price adjustments in selected packages, many adjustments are small and the cost of some programs in actuality really declines.

If you receive the Basic Cable package, you won't see a price increase. Depending on where you live, that package will remain at the price of \$23 to \$28 per month. If you receive the Digital Economy package, you will see a rate decline, depending on your package, this decline will range from eight cents to ten dollars per month.

A complete schedule showing rate adjustments is enclosed. Although the cost of some packages are increasing, you are receiving the best in voice, video, and data transmission. It's an exceptional entertainment value, and we are planning even more innovations for future programming. We appreciate your loyalty, and we promise to continue to bring you the best in service and entertainment.

Sincerely,

Colson Bryant
Colson Bryant, President

Enclosure

COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP

Presenting Bad News in Other Cultures

To minimize disappointment, Americans generally prefer to present negative messages indirectly. Other cultures may treat bad news differently, as illustrated in the following:

- In Germany business communicators occasionally use buffers but tend to present bad news directly.
- British writers tend to be straightforward with bad news, seeing no reason to soften its announcement.
- In Latin countries the question is not how to organize negative messages but whether to present them at all. It is considered disrespectful and impolite to report bad news to superiors. Therefore, reluctant employees may fail to report accurately any negative situations to their bosses.
- In Thailand the negativism represented by a refusal is completely alien; the word *no* does not exist. In many cultures negative news is offered with such subtlety or in such a positive light that it may be overlooked or misunderstood by literal-minded Americans.
- In many Asian and some Latin cultures, one must look beyond an individual's actual words to understand what is really being communicated. One must consider the

communication style, the culture, and especially the context. Consider the following phrases and their possible meanings:

CAREER APPLICATION. Interview fellow students or work colleagues who are from other cultures. Collect information by asking the following questions:

- How is negative news handled in your culture?
- How would typical business communicators refuse a request for a business favor (such as a contribution to a charity)?
- How would typical business communicators refuse a customer's claim?
- How would an individual be turned down for a job?

YOUR TASK. Report the findings of your interviews in class discussion or in a memo report. In addition, collect samples of foreign business letters. You might ask foreign students, your campus admissions office, or local export/import companies whether they would be willing to share business letters from other countries. Compare letter styles, formats, tone, and writing strategies. How do these elements differ from those in typical North American business letters?

Phrase	Possible Meaning
I agree.	I agree with 15 percent of what you say.
We might be able to...	Not a chance!
We will consider...	We will consider, but the real decision maker will not.
That is a little too much...	That is outrageous!
Yes.	Yes, I'm listening. <i>OR:</i> Yes, you have a good point. <i>OR:</i> Yes, I understand, but I don't necessarily agree.

ENDNOTES

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