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People Make The Difference whitepaper

October 08 2016

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Bearers of Bad News

It's no secret that words are powerful, they can build up and tear down in seconds. There are some things that leaders say that ripple through a team long after they are originally spoken. Many times, this can be a positive thing, but there are also phrases and words that can slowly but surely seep into the attitudes of the team members and cause more harm than good.

Have you ever heard the phrase "Don't bring me any bad news" or, "I don't want any nasty surprises" or even "Don't bring me problems, bring me solutions"? These phrases often have a positive intention at the root, but they can cause considerable damage and create a negative team environment.

You might have heard these phrases or even said them yourself, but have you ever thought about how much of an impact those words have had on your team? Using these phrases can convey an unwillingness to hear bad news, but just wanting to hear good news doesn't magically make the bad news disappear – it's still there, lurking in the shadows and slowly snowballing with other little bits of bad news until eventually, one tiny bit of bad news has grown into a full-blown catastrophe, ready to pop.

Unfortunately, these aren't just one-time explosions, they're constant disasters waiting to happen because, inadvertently, leaders who use these types of phrases have created an environment where team members no longer feel comfortable sharing or providing details of potentially tricky situations.

If you think that your approach to bad news might be affecting your team's environment and attitude, the good news is that there are three simple steps you can take to start to turn things around:

1. Welcome

Leaders can start to create a positive culture by welcoming in bad news and surprises. Instead of projecting anxiety and negativity in regards to bad news, it's time to welcome it in and create an environment where your team feels comfortable sharing and delivering bad news, as well as the good. This does not mean you need to celebrate the bad news, simply approaching tricky situations with a positive outlook can be a breeding ground for great team culture.

2. Plan

It's inevitable that bad news will come. Whether it's today or six months down the track, eventually it will show up. The worst thing a leader can do is ignore this fact, operating blindly while the bad news hurtles towards you. Don't wait until the crisis hits – put systems, action plans and procedures in place now so your course runs a little smoother later on.

3. Lead

There's nothing like a trial to bring a team closer together. Instead of going into a panicked frenzy when a problem arises, use the opportunity to lead your team as they work closely together to find a suitable solution.

Adjusting your mindset when it comes to bad news can be a long process, but it's one that could really boost your team's confidence and performance in the long-run.

If you're ready to change your approach to bad news, People Make the Difference can help you with training workshops, one-on-one coaching and Coach On Call services. To find out more, call us on 0412 333 415 or visit peplemakethedifference.com.au.