CHAPTER 9

Sharing Informative and Positive Messages with Appropriate Technology

Chapter Outline

A Positive Message that Backfired

Sharing good news is often considered the easiest part of a writer's job. However, just as with any message, writers must craft positive messages carefully and pay attention to their audience and the situation.

In March 2011, Transocean issued its annual report to its shareholders and the United States Securities and Exchange Commission. As the largest offshore oil drilling contractor in the world, Transocean had enjoyed a profitable year with, according to standard industry measures, an exemplary safety record. In the filing, the company stated, "We recorded the best year in safety performance in our Company's history."

Unfortunately, Transocean is the owner of Deepwater Horizon, the oil rig that exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, April 2010. The accident killed 11 workers, injured another 17, and triggered the largest—and most publicized—oil spill in the history of the United States. Millions of barrels of oil gushed into the ocean over three months, causing an environmental disaster.

But in its report, Transocean attempted to minimize the Deepwater Horizon accident to place greater emphasis on its good news: "Notwithstanding the tragic loss of life in the Gulf of Mexico, we achieved an exemplary statistical safety record as measured by our total recordable incident rate and total potential severity rate."

The strategy backfired. News articles about the report focused on the phrase "the best year in safety performance" and the six-figure bonuses and salary increases for the executives, all only months after the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Days after the annual report's filing, Transocean apologized for the wording.

"Writers must craft positive messages carefully and pay attention to their audience and the situation."

By failing to craft its positive annual report with sensitivity to the situation and public opinion, Transocean saw a positive message turned into another negative strike against the company.

Sources: Transocean website, accessed June 7, 2011, http://www.deepwater.com; CNN Wire Staff, "Despite Gulf Oil Spill, Rig Owner Executives Get Big Bonuses," Cable News Network, April 4, 2011, http://edition.cnn.com/2011/BUSINESS/04/03/gulf.spill.bonuses/index.html; and CNN Wire Staff, "Gulf Oil Rig Owner Apologizes for Calling 2010 'Best Year' Ever," Cable News Network, April 4, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/04/04/gulf.spill.bonuses/index.html?hpt=T2.

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will know

LO 9-1 How technology is changing business communication.

LO 9-2 When and how to use common business media effectively.

LO 9-3 How to organize informative and positive messages.

LO 9-4 How to compose some of the common varieties of informative and positive messages.

A Vision of the Future

Have you ever dreamed about moving objects without using a muscle? Do you wish you could control objects using only your brain?

Thought-conversion technology is the main focus of a company called Emotiv. Right now, the company has advanced the technology to a point where users can move objects with their thoughts in a video game environment. Users wear a wireless headset that contains 16 electrodes that press against the scalp. The device has the capability to measure brain waves and turn thoughts into electronic actions.

Expanded from the science behind EEGs, thought-conversion technology could be the wave of the future. Emotiv doesn't want consumers just to be able to play video games. Eventually, they hope to develop the system so that users can control everything they do on their computer and around the house by mental power.

What implications would a device like this have for the business world? How could it increase productivity? What, if any, drawbacks would there be to a device like this?

Adapted from David H. Freedman, "Reality Bites," *Inc.*, December 2008, 92–99.

Business messages must meet the needs of the sender (and the sender's organization), be sensitive to the audience, and accurately reflect the topic being discussed. Informative and positive messages are the bread-and-butter messages in organizations.

When we need to convey information to which the receiver's basic reaction will be neutral, the message is **informative.** If we convey information to which the receiver's reaction will be positive, the message is a **positive or good news message.** Neither message immediately asks the receiver to do anything. You usually do want to build positive attitudes toward the information you are presenting, so in that sense, even an informative message has a persuasive element. Chapter 10 will discuss messages where the receiver will respond negatively; Chapter 11 will discuss messages where you want the receiver to change beliefs or behavior.

Informative and positive messages include acceptances; positive answers to requests; information about meetings, procedures, products, services, or options; announcements of policy changes that are neutral or positive; and changes that are to the receiver's advantage.

Even a simple informative or good news message usually has several purposes:

Primary purposes:

To give information or good news to the receiver or to reassure the receiver.
To have the receiver view the information positively.

Secondary purposes:

To build a good image of the sender.
To build a good image of the sender's organization.
To cement a good relationship between the sender and the receiver.
To deemphasize any negative elements.
To reduce or eliminate future messages on the same subject.

Informative and positive messages are not necessarily short. Instead, the length of a message depends on your purposes, the audience's needs, and the complexity of the situation.

In addition to these concerns, you also have to ensure you are communicating with appropriate tools and media.

COMMUNICATION HARDWARE LO 9-1

Businesses are quick to adopt new forms of technology that can enhance the experience of workers and improve the bottom line. New software programs and devices continually enter the market to help businesses. However,

Technology plays a large role in the changing face of business communication. Conference rooms are frequently equipped with laptops, projectors and videoconferencing equipment, making it possible for people to have meetings across continents and time zones.

acquiring new technology and helping workers master it entail an enormous capital investment. Learning to use new-generation software and improved hardware takes time and may be especially frustrating for people who were perfectly happy with old technology.

Some of the most popular workplace tools that improve productivity are smartphones, portable media players, and videoconferences.

Smartphones

Smartphones, such as Apple's iPhone or any in the Android lineup, allow users to send and receive e-mail, access websites, conduct word processing, learn their next tasks, update a job's status, complete a time sheet, and make telephone calls. Many of these devices have touch screens or full QWERTY keyboards. These devices can also broadcast streaming video and audio. Every day more applications become available for these smartphones, which can enhance productivity. With the full functionality of these devices, employees can be connected to their work 24/7. However, this does not mean they should be. Be considerate and try to limit business calls to business hours.

Portable Media Players

Portable media players (like iPods and MP3 players) feature the ability to broadcast streaming video and audio. Some organizations give employees these devices pre-loaded with recordings of meetings, new product information, or general announcements. These devices help keep employees connected, even when they're not in the office.

Videoconferences

With rising travel costs, many businesses are seeking alternatives to traditional face-to-face meetings. One solution is videoconferences, which allow two or more parties to communicate and hold meetings with full audio and visual capabilities. They can occur across different time zones or between different nations instantaneously. As an added benefit, meetings never have to be delayed or postponed because of late flights or weather problems.

Cellphone Blindness

"How blind to their surroundings can people be when they are talking on their cellphones?

Enough to miss seeing a clown riding a unicycle as they walked across the Western Washington University campus, according to a study conducted by a professor and his students. Seventy-five percent of the people who were walking and talking on their phones did not see the clown—until he was pointed out to them.

While the idea of cellphone users being so oblivious they fail to see a unicycling clown is humorous, Ira Hyman, a psychology professor who conducted the study, said the implications are serious and show that people should not be talking on cellphones while driving.

Numerous studies already have shown that people fail to notice things while they're talking on their cellphones. But many of those studies were conducted in a laboratory setting, typically in driving simulators."

What do you think? Should talking on cellphones while driving be banned?

Quoted from "Cell Phone Talkers Miss the Obvious, School's Study Finds," *Des Moines Register,* November 5, 2009, 4A.

Cellular phone technology is spreading worldwide.

One type of videoconferencing is telepresence, which uses high-end 50-inch plasma screens and broadcast-quality cameras to create virtual meetings that are almost lifelike. Pepsi, Bank of American, and Proctor & Gamble are just some of the companies that have adopted this technology. These state-of-the-art telepresence rooms can be pricey, costing up to $300,000. Some of the cost is associated with the equipment necessary to create a room, but most of the cost comes from the large amounts of bandwidth required for the conferencing. Projected revenue for telepresence services will reach $2.3 billion by 2015.[1]

Lower-cost alternatives for videoconferencing exist as well. Services like Skype, Apple's FaceTime, or GoToMeeting allow employees to connect and collaborate remotely with web cameras that are standard on many newer laptops or tablets. Cisco and Logitech have also introduced systems that require HDTVs and a broadband connection for videoconferencing in the comfort of your home.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

One of the realities of communication today is information overload. Technology enables other people to bombard us with junk mail, sales calls, advertisements, and spam. Spam clutters mailboxes—or leads to filters that stop some needed e-mail. Spam also means that many people do not open e-mail if they do not recognize the sender or the topic.

Basex, a knowledge economy research and advisory company, surveyed knowledge workers and found that over 50% of them felt that the amount of information coming to them daily was detrimental to accomplishing their work. In fact, 94% of them reported that at some point they were overwhelmed by information to the point of incapacity.[2] A similar survey by Xerox of government and education workers found that 58% spent almost half their work time sorting, filing, or deleting information, and that this effort amounts to over $31 billion spent annually on managing information.[3]

On another level, even more routine communications are becoming overwhelming. With fast and cheap e-mails, plus the genuine belief in more transparent business procedures, businesses send more announcements of events, procedures, policies, services, and employee news. Departments send newsletters. Employees send announcements of and best wishes for births, birthdays, weddings, and promotions. Customers send comments about products, service, policies, and advertisements.

Yet another factor in overload is inappropriate e-mails. This group includes jokes, personal information, and non-job-related e-mails, as well as e-mails that are unnecessarily long, trivial, and irrelevant. Too many people forward too many messages to uncaring receivers, and the "Reply to All" button is getting a notorious reputation.

According to the Radicati Group, a technology market research firm, the average corporate e-mail user sends and receives 167 e-mails per day.[4] Radicati calculates that 294 billion e-mail messages were sent *daily* in 2010, of which 89.1% were spam.[5] An internal survey at Intel found that employees were spending an average of 20 hours a week on e-mails, 30% of which were unnecessary.[6]

With this flood of information, you need to protect your communication reputation.

WARNING: You do not want to be the person whose e-mails or voice-mail messages are opened last because they take so long to get to the point, or even worse, the person whose messages are rarely opened at all because you send so many that aren't important or necessary.

One research study on e-mail overload found that length was not the problem: most e-mails in the study were short, four lines or less. Rather, the study found three factors that contributed to the perception of e-mail overload. The first, unstable requests, included requests that got refined in the process of e-mail correspondence and frequently morphed into requests for more work. The second, pressure to respond, included requests for information within hours. People in the study noted that they were never away from their e-mail, and that these requests could come any time. The third factor, delegation of tasks and shifting interactants, included tasks that were indirectly delegated (Could anyone get me the figures on X for the noon meeting?) or that recipients of the group e-mail then gave to their own subordinates.[7]

Some organizations and software applications are taking a stand to help employees deal with information overload. For instance, software add-ons for e-mail systems can now prioritize messages after analyzing which senders have the most importance. Companies such as Intel are declaring e-mail-free days, where employees are encouraged to meet face-to-face.

USING COMMON MEDIA LO 9-2

In the office, most informative and positive communications are made through six channels: face-to-face contacts, phone calls, instant messages and text messaging, e-mails, letters, and paper memos. Many people have personal preferences that need to be recognized. They may keep up with their e-mail but avoid listening to voice-mail messages; they may enjoy drop-in visitors but think instant messages are silly. Similarly, some channels seem better fitted for some situations than others.

Face-to-Face Contacts

Some businesses are encouraging their employees to write fewer e-mails and visit each other's desks more often. They believe such visits contribute to a friendlier, more collaborative work environment. Visits are a good choice when

- You know a colleague welcomes your visits.
- You are building a business relationship with a person.
- A real-time connection saves messages (e.g., setting a meeting agenda).
- Your business requires dialogue or negotiation.
- You need something immediately (like a signature).
- Discretion is vital and you do not want to leave a paper trail.
- The situation is complex enough that you want as many visual and aural cues as possible.

Phone Answering Machine Pet Peeves

- Callback numbers that are mumbled or given too quickly.
- Messages longer than 30 seconds.
- Messages that require serious note taking (when an e-mail would have been better).
- Too much or too little information.
- Demands to contact people without saying why.
- Messages expecting an immediate response.
- Angry messages.

Use these tips for effective face-to-face contact:

- Ensure the timing is convenient for the recipient.
- If you are discussing something complex, have appropriate documents in hand.
- Don't usurp their space. Don't put your papers on top of their desk or table without their permission.
- Look for "time to go" signs. Some people have a limited tolerance for small talk, especially when they are hard at work on a task.

Phone Calls

Phone calls provide fewer contextual cues than face-to-face visits, but more cues than electronic or paper messages. Phone calls are a good choice when

- Tone of voice is important.
- A real-time connection saves multiple phone calls or e-mails (e.g., setting a meeting time).
- You need something immediately (like an OK).
- You do not want to leave a paper trail (but remember that phone records are easily obtained).

Use these tips for effective phone calls (also see sidebar on this page):

- Ensure the timing is convenient for the recipient; try to limit cellphone calls to business hours:
- Promptly return calls to your answering machine.
- Speak clearly, especially when giving your name and phone number (even more important when leaving your name and phone number on an answering machine). Do not assume they have a phone that records your number.
- Use an information hook: I am calling about. . . .
- Keep the call short and cordial. If you need to leave a message, keep it brief: 1–2 sentences. Most people resent long messages on their answering machines.
- Repeat your phone number at the end of the call. Too often, people don't write the number down at the beginning of the call.
- Focus on the call; do not do other work. Most people can tell if you are reading e-mail or web pages while talking to them, and they get the message that their concern is not important to you.

Remember that unplanned phone calls are an interruption in a busy worker's day. If that person works in an open office, as many do, the call will also interrupt other employees to some extent.

Instant Messaging and Text Messaging

Formerly limited primarily to students, instant and text messaging are beginning to gain acceptance in the business world, especially among people who work closely together. Instant messaging services, like AOL Instant Messenger, Google chat, and Yahoo Messenger, have quickly found their way into office settings. Because they are less intrusive than phone calls or visits, these messages are good for short messages on noncritical topics, such as running commentary or questions on tasks you and your colleagues are working on simultaneously. And because they are generally answered immediately, they can decrease the time needed to solve an issue. Some organizations also believe that IMing fosters better collaborations among employees, particularly those who work from home.

You will probably find more enthusiasm for these media among your younger colleagues. But not always! Many parents have been initiated to these messages by their children. Even among users, audience distinctions will be important, especially with abbreviations. Although even the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists LOL, BFF, IMHO, and OMG, some people will not recognize other abbreviations. And abbreviations like OMG disturb some readers.

Remember that, like e-mails, these messages can be saved, forwarded, and printed. They too leave a paper trail, and many businesses monitor them. Do not use them to send sensitive information, such as files or passwords, and always keep them professional in both mechanics and content. Florida Congressman Mark Foley lost his position for holding sexual and otherwise inappropriate IM conversations with underage pages.

Wikis

With the popularity of websites like Wikipedia, the business world has been quick to follow suit. Many organizations are using wikis, an online form of content knowledge management, in which users can post information or collaborate on projects. The access to these wikis is limited to employees of the particular organization using them, much like intranets. Employees can use wikis to:

- Bookmark and summarize web pages.
- Upload drafts of working documents.
- Create new entries about workplace practices.

Other employees can then quickly search for information using keywords or modify existing uploaded documents.

Wikis are a great way for corporations to create knowledge databases of workplace practices for their particular organization. In addition, wikis reduce the e-mailing of drafts between employees who are collaborating on a project. As an added bonus, every change made to documents on a wiki can be tracked. Moreover, when employees leave an organization, their job knowledge is still stored on the wiki and can be a valuable resource for new employees.

Social Media

Many organizations are adapting social media tools at an ever increasing rate. And they have good reason to do so. In addition to reaching thousands of clients in a single message, social media offer a relatively inexpensive way to connect. Employees can post profiles, updates, blogs, or useful links, all for free.

For businesses, the challenge of social media is figuring out how to harness the positives to increase productivity, particularly when dealing with customers. Dell Inc. has created a social media university for employees who are interested in learning the basics of social media by taking four courses. Over 9,000 employees started the program to better integrate social media into their positions.[8]

Facebook and Divorce

While sharing too much information on Facebook is known to be a danger at workplaces, here is a new situation demanding great caution: divorce.

Mounting evidence exists online for lawyers to sort and use in divorce cases. In fact, 81% of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers have used or encountered evidence from social media sites over the last five years. Facebook is the largest source of virtual evidence, accounting for 66%.

Divorce lawyers recounted cases where the husband went on vacation with a new mistress and posted pictures to his Facebook profile. Unfortunately, the husband forgot that he was still friends with his wife. In another situation, a father who wanted custody of the children showed evidence of the mother logged onto Facebook's Farmville when she should have been attending the children's sporting events.

These are just more reminders to be conscious of what you're sharing online.

Adapted from Leanne Italie, "Divorce Lawyers Revel in Online Evidence," *Des Moines Register*, July 4, 2010, 1E, 2E.

Like Dell, many organizations use social networking sites to establish an identity and harness a relationship with clients. The United States Army has a social media division in charge of recruiting. Even the Pope has encouraged priests to tap into digital media options.

Some businesses seem to adapt easily to social media. Blendtec, a manufacturer of blenders, became a media star with a series of YouTube videos, *Will It Blend?* which put various objects (computer games, iPod, iPad) in its blenders. The video with the iPhone has been viewed over 9 million times, and Blendtec sales have increased sevenfold. Other businesses have to be more cautious. Mutual funds were slow to embrace social media, partly because of industry regulations.[9]

Four of the most common ways to connect with customers are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs.

Facebook Facebook is a social networking tool where users create a profile and then can chat and share interests with other users. The site has over 600 million users worldwide and has become the most popular site in the United States, surpassing Google in 2010 by having 8.9% of all Internet visits.[10]

Beyond buying advertising space, organizations use Facebook as a communication channel with customers by providing updates about business activities, introducing new products, informing about upcoming events, encouraging participation in philanthropic causes, or offering discounts or incentives.

Organizations can also create focus groups where they can receive or share feedback from clients about products and services. Dr Pepper measures the social conversation about their brand from their 8.5 million fan base and adjusts marketing messages accordingly. As a result, Dr Pepper gets free marketing when users pass their messages on to other Facebook friends.[11]

As an added bonus to businesses, Facebook connections can increase awareness about their brand by boosting their presence in search engines. Best of all, Facebook easily integrates with other social media platforms, such as Twitter, which offer organizations a complete media link to consumers.

Employees within the same organization can build stronger relationships by friending each other. In some organizations, teams have even established Facebook groups to promote camaraderie and create a place to discuss project documents and other concerns.

Facebook users, however, need to be aware of the public nature of Facebook. In fact, poor judgment has cost some workers their jobs as a result of posting controversial updates about their employers or uploading inappropriate photos. For example, an Atlanta police officer was terminated after posting sensitive job information; Virgin Atlantic fired 13 crew members after they posted mean comments about passengers and spiteful opinions about the airline's safety standards.[12]

Twitter Twitter is a microblog that allows users to let their followers know what they're doing by posting tweets, short messages of 140 characters or less.

Twitter offers another way for organizations to create a following, share information, brand themselves, and even eavesdrop on what people say about their competitors. Organizations can follow what other people tweet about them and use the service to provide an additional form of customer service. For example, when a patron in a Fort Worth branch of Chipotle tweeted about the restaurant lacking corn tortillas, the corporate office called the manager before the customer even left the store.[13]

Similar to many restaurants and other organizations, Chipotle has service representatives dedicated to social media relations. With over 55 million tweets sent per day worldwide, it can be overwhelming for organizations to manage their image and plan appropriate 140-word responses.

As is true for all social media, Twitter users must be careful what they say. Tweets can be searched on Google and can be recalled in defamation lawsuits. Comedian Gilbert Gottfriend, the voice of the Aflac duck, got fired over insensitive tweets about the Japanese earthquake and tsunami. New York Congressman Anthony Weiner had to step down after sexual tweets were reported in the media. As a final note to make us all even more cautious, in 2010, the Library of Congress announced that it would archive all tweets.

LinkedIn LinkedIn allows professionals to connect with colleagues and other industry members. Over 100 million people use the site. Unlike Facebook or Twitter, which can easily blur the professional and personal line, LinkedIn profiles tend to remain strictly work oriented.

Professionals can use the site to network and earn recommendations from past and current clients. These referrals, in turn, could create more business opportunities. Employees can also join industry associations or alumni groups to expand their network of connections. LinkedIn Answers provides a forum for industry professionals to ask questions and share their expertise, which may also spark new clients. For job searches, LinkedIn allows users to search for new job opportunities, post a résumé, or recruit new employees.

Blogs Blogs allow businesses to connect with customers and clients in a more social way than they can on traditional websites. Internal corporate blogs allow managers and employees to share ideas and information.

Many public corporate blogs offer information relevant to their business; a catering service may offer food safety tips and recipes; a travel agency may offer travel tips and descriptions of exotic destinations. Other popular content includes employee stories, glimpses inside the business, insider business tips, and question-and-answer features.

Good blogs present their content in ways that inspire conversations and encourage readers to comment and then to share the information. The best blogs offer a unique perspective that enables them to stand out from the millions of other blogs on the Internet. While all blogs should be visually attractive, bloggers need to remember that many of their readers will have opted to turn off the visuals. Too many visuals will create an empty-looking blog.

Other Social Media Other new social media sites are on the rise. Here are a few that professionals have been quick to adapt to their business needs:

- Xing—Similar features as LinkedIn, but more popular in Europe and India.
- Google+—Google's version of Facebook containing many similar options.
- Ning—A site for users to create their own social networking site adapted to their business.
- NetParty—A site for professionals to connect online to meet up for happy hour and other after-work activities.
- Yammer—A Facebook–Twitter mashup tool exclusively for internal corporate communications.
- Sermo—Site dedicated exclusively to the medical profession; helps doctors solicit opinions, share information, and improve patient care.

Information about Your Medicine

Informing people about their medicines is not so simple. Hospitals annually treat 1.9 million people for medication problems; emergency rooms treat an addition 838,000. These figures for 2008, the latest available, are up 52% from 2004.

Part of the problem results from the growing complexity of medication regimes, particularly for the elderly and those with multiple, chronic conditions. These regimes are becoming so complex that even well-educated patients make mistakes.

Another group with special problems consists of patients with low literacy. In one study, only 34% of such patients could accurately demonstrate the precise number of pills they were to take, even after correctly repeating "take two twice a day."

These patients are not alone. Another study showed that more than half of adults misunderstood at least one of the common prescription warnings.

Experts are recommending language changes on medicine labels: "use only on your skin" to replace "for external use only," or "limit your time in the sun" to replace "avoid prolonged or excessive exposure to direct sunlight." They are also recommending new drug information sheets.

Adapted from Laura Landro, "'Use Only as Directed' Isn't Easy," *Wall Street Journal,* April 26, 2011, D1.

The realm of social media is expanding exponentially. Some systems are designed specifically for businesses, such as IBM's BluePages, where 26,000 employees have blogs on which they post opinions about their work and technology in general. More than 100,000 employees work on 20,000 wikis.[14] On the site PatientsLikeMe, consenting participants provide detailed medical histories and discuss side effects of prescribed drugs they're taking. The company then packages this information and sells it to drug and insurance companies, a knowledge transfer which participants believe will help find cures faster. The site can also be used by pharmaceutical companies to invite clinical trial subjects, helping speed up research.[15]

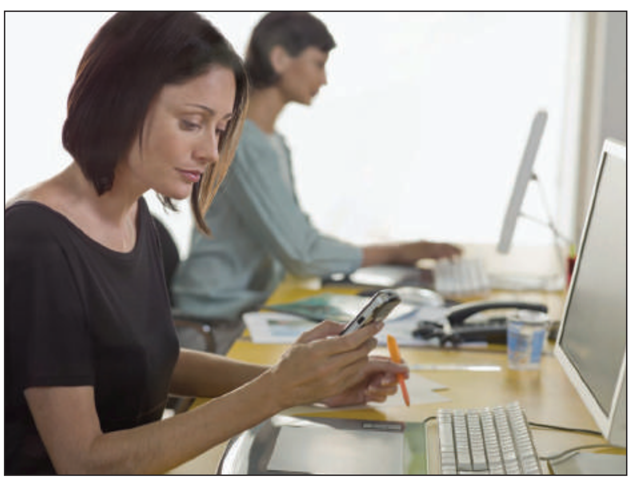
Another way that businesses are trying to reach customers is through **widgets,** tiny software programs that can be dragged, dropped, and embedded into social media sites. Widgets are changing the way people use the Internet. In the past, people surfed from page to page, but now widgets can bring the power of all those pages into a central location, like a social networking site.

Of course, like all technological tools, social media sites have some drawbacks. If workers spend much of their day immersed in social media, how much of their regular work routine is not being completed? A survey of 1,400 large U.S. companies reported that more than half prohibit social media use.[16] However, how do organizations differentiate between social media use for professional and personal purposes, especially when some employees have a single account? A final thought about social media: once workers post information about themselves, electronic copies of that information are stored indefinitely.

E-Mails, Letters, and Paper Memos

When people think of business communications, many think of e-mails, letters, and paper memos. Letters go to someone outside your organization; paper memos go to someone in your organization; e-mails can go anywhere. Today most memos are sent as e-mails rather than paper documents.

E-mails, letters, and memos use different formats. The most common formats are illustrated in Appendix A. The simplified letter format is very similar to memo format: it uses a subject line and omits the salutation and the complimentary close. Thus, it is a good choice when you don't know the reader's name.



E-mails, instant and text messages, telephone calls, social media entries, and web searches can all be tracked by your employer and used in lawsuits. You should always observe professional practices while in the workplace.

The differences in audience and format are the only differences among these documents. All of these messages can be long or short, depending on how much you have to say and how complicated the situation is. All of these messages can be informal when you write to someone you know well, or more formal when you write to someone you don't know, to several audiences, or for the record. All of these messages can be simple responses that you can dash off in minutes; they can also take hours of analysis and revision when you're facing a new situation or when the stakes are high.

E-mails are commonly used for these purposes:

- To accomplish routine, noncontroversial business activities (setting up meetings/appointments, reminders, notices, quick updates, information sharing).
- To save time: many people can look through 60–100 e-mails an hour.
- To save money: one e-mail can go to many people, including global teams.
- To allow readers to deal with messages at their convenience, when timing is not crucial.
- To communicate accurately.
- To provide readers with details for reference (meetings).
- To create a paper trail.

E-mails do not work well for some purposes. Negative critiques and bad news generally have better outcomes when delivered in person. Sarcasm and irony are too frequently misinterpreted to be safely used. Similarly, avoid passing on gossip in your e-mails. The chances of having your gossip forwarded with your name attached are just too great.

Salutations for e-mails are in a state of transition. *Dear* is saved mostly for formal e-mails; *Hey* is generally considered too informal for business use. Many writers are now starting their e-mails with *Hi* or *Hello* (e.g., "Hi Udi,"). And when e-mailing people with whom they are in constant contact, many writers use no salutation at all.

Many people read their e-mails quickly. They may read for only a few seconds or lines to decide if the e-mail is pertinent. Value your readers' time by designing your e-mail to help them:

- Put the most important information in the first sentence.
- If your e-mail is more than one screen long, use an overview, headings, and enumeration to help draw readers to successive screens.
- Limit your e-mail to one topic. Delete off-topic material.

Another factor in e-mail miscommunication is the lack of nonverbal cues. Many of the billions of e-mails sent daily contain intentional and unintentional emotions that can cause misinterpretation of information. One study showing this misinterpretation found that study participants believed they could accurately convey emotions in e-mail but doubted the abilities of their co-workers to do so.[17]

Remember that e-mails are public documents and may be widely forwarded. Save lowercase and instant message abbreviations for friends, if you use them at all. Even a quick confirmation to your boss should look professional.

E-Mail Pet Peeves

- Missing or vague subject lines.
- Copying everyone rather than just the people that might find the information useful/interesting.
- Too much information/too little information.
- Too many instant messaging acronyms.
- Lack of capitalization and punctuation.
- Long messages without headings or bullets.
- Delayed response e-mails that don't include the original message. Sometimes readers have no idea what the e-mails are responding about.
- Writers who send a general request to multiple people, creating confusion about who is responsible for handling the request.
- People who expect an immediate answer.
- People who never respond to queries.
- People who don't read their e-mail carefully enough to absorb a simple message.
- People who send too many unimportant e-mails.
- Superfluous images and attachments.
- Flaming.

Not this:

> that time should work. bring the donuts and coffee!!! i'm hungry!
> CU L8r

But this:

> 3 works for me, too. I'll bring copies of the Wolford schedule. See you there.

Never put anything in an e-mail that would embarrass you or harm your career if your employer, colleague, parent, or child saw it. Examples abound of public and corporate officials forced to resign because of misbehaviors documented in e-mails they sent to others. But the senders don't have to be officials to cause the organization trouble.

- An employee e-mail arranging for a group to leave work early and go drinking at a topless bar was used as evidence of poor oversight in a product-contamination lawsuit against the company.[18]
- An American employee responded to a request for floor mats from an American GI in Iraq by saying "We would NEVER ship to Iraq. If you were sensible, you and your troops would pull out of Iraq." The e-mail quickly circulated on the Internet, getting the employee fired and the business boycotted.[19]
- Leaked e-mails from the Climate Research Unit at East Anglia University, UK, showing bias and exclusion not only created a furor for that research group, but also called into question all research on global warming.

A survey by the American Management Association found that over a quarter of companies have fired employees for e-mail misuse.[20] And of course WikiLeaks has reminded everyone of the dangers hiding in even supposedly secure e-mails.

ORGANIZING INFORMATIVE AND POSITIVE MESSAGES LO 9-3

The patterns of organization in this chapter and others follow standard conventions of business. The patterns will work for many of the writing situations most people in business, nonprofits, and government face. Using the appropriate pattern can help you compose more quickly, create a better final product, and demonstrate you know the conventions.

WARNING: The patterns should never be used blindly. You must always consider whether your audience, purpose, and context would be better served with a different organization.

If you decide to use a pattern:

- Be sure you understand the rationale behind each pattern so that you can modify the pattern when necessary.
- Realize not every message that uses the basic pattern will have all the elements listed.
- Realize sometimes you can present several elements in one paragraph; sometimes you'll need several paragraphs for just one element.

Figure 9.1 shows how to organize informative and positive messages. Figures 9.2 and 9.3 illustrate two ways that the basic pattern can be applied.

Figure 9.1 How to Organize Informative and Positive Messages

1. **Start with good news or the most important information.** Summarize the main points. If the audience has already raised the issue, make it clear that you're responding.
2. **Give details, clarification, background.** Answer all the questions your audience is likely to have; provide all the information necessary to achieve your purposes. If you are asking or answering multiple questions, number them. Enumeration increases your chances of giving or receiving all the necessary information. Present details in the order of importance to the reader or in some other logical order.
3. **Present any negative elements—as positively as possible.** A policy may have limits; information may be incomplete; the audience may have to satisfy requirements to get a discount or benefit. Make these negatives clear, but present them as positively as possible.
4. **Explain any benefits.** Most informative messages need benefits. Show that the policy or procedure helps your audience, not just the company. Give enough detail to make the benefits clear and convincing. In letters, you may want to give benefits of dealing with your company as well as benefits of the product or policy.

   In a good news message, it's often possible to combine a short benefit with a goodwill ending.
5. **Use a goodwill ending: positive, personal, and forward-looking.** Shifting your emphasis away from the message to the specific audience suggests that serving the audience is your real concern.

The letter in Figure 9.2 announces a change in a magazine's ownership. Rather than telling subscribers that their magazine has been acquired, which sounds negative, the first two paragraphs describe the change as a merger that will give subscribers greater benefits from the combined magazine. Paragraph 3 provides details about how the arrangement will work, along with a way to opt out. A possible negative is that readers who already have subscriptions to both magazines will now receive only one. The company addresses this situation positively by extending the subscription to the jointly published magazine. The goodwill ending has all the desired characteristics: it is positive ("we're confident"), personal ("your continued loyalty"), and forward-looking ("you will enjoy").

The memo in Figure 9.3 announces a new employee benefit. The first paragraph summarizes the new benefits. Paragraphs 2–3 give details. Negative elements are stated as positively as possible. The last section of the memo gives benefits and a goodwill ending.

SUBJECT LINES FOR INFORMATIVE AND POSITIVE MESSAGES

A **subject line** is the title of a document. It aids in filing and retrieving the document, tells readers why they need to read the document, and provides a framework in which to set what you're about to say. Subject lines are standard in memos and e-mails. Letters are not required to have subject lines (see Appendix A, Formats for Letters, Memos, and E-Mail Messages).

A good subject line meets three criteria: it is specific, concise, and appropriate to the kind of message (positive, negative, persuasive).

Making Subject Lines Specific

The subject line needs to be specific enough to differentiate its message from others on the same subject, but broad enough to cover everything in the message.

Too general: Training Sessions

Better: Dates for 2012 Training Sessions

Use To/CC/BCC Lines to Your Advantage

To

Send your e-mail only to people who will really want or need it. If you are sending to multiple people, decide in which order to place the names. Is organizational rank important? Should you alphabetize the list? Don't hit "reply to all" unless all will appreciate your doing so.

CC

CC stands for "carbon copy," from the days of typewriters when carbon paper was used to make multiple copies. CC people who are not directly involved in the business of the e-mail but are interested in it. Marketing may not be helping you produce your new software, but they may want to stay abreast of the changes so they can start generating marketing ideas. A committee might CC a secretary who does not attend committee meetings but does maintain the committee's paper records.

Sometimes the CC line is used politically. For example, an administrative assistant doing routine business may CC the boss to give added weight to the e-mail.

BCC

BCC stands for "blind carbon copy," a copy that the listed receivers do not know is being sent. Blind copies can create ill will when they become known, so be careful in their use.

Figure 9.2 A Positive Letter

eBusCompanyToday

P.O. Box 12345
Tampa, FL 33660
813-555-5555

June 17, 2012

Dear Ms. Locker:

Main point presented as good news

We're excited to share some great news! *eBusCompanyToday* has merged with another business magazine, *High-Tech Business News*. This merged publication will be called *High-Tech Business News* and will continue to be edited and published by the *eBusCompanyToday* staff.

Details focus on benefits to the reader

The "new" *High-Tech Business News* is a great tool for navigating today's relentlessly changing marketplace, particularly as it's driven by the Internet and other technologies. It reports on the most innovative business practices and the people behind them; delivers surprising, useful insights; and explains how to put them to work. Please be assured that you will continue to receive the same great editorial coverage that you've come to expect from *eBusCompanyToday*.

You will receive the "new" *High-Tech Business News* in about 4 weeks, starting with the combined August/September issue. If you already subscribe to *High-Tech Business News*, your subscription will be extended accordingly. And if you'd rather not receive this publication, please call 1-800-555-5555 within the next 3 weeks.

Option to cancel is offered but not emphasized

Positive, personal, forward-looking ending

Thank you for your continued loyalty to *eBusCompanyToday*; we're confident that you will enjoy reading *High-Tech Business News* every month.

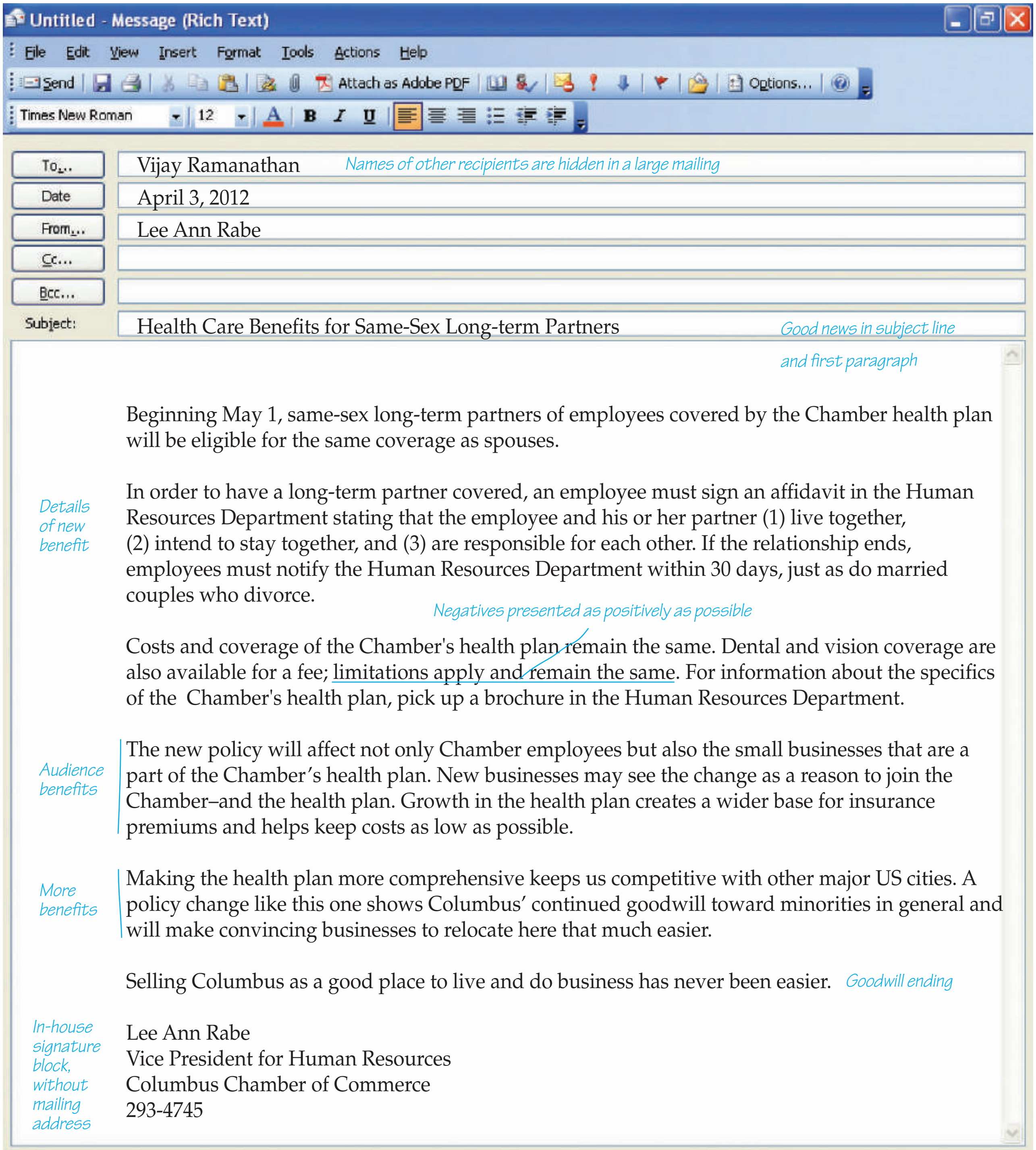
Sincerely,

Alan Schmidt

Alan Schmidt, Editor and President

High-Tech Business News is published monthly except for two issues combined periodically into one and occasional extra, expanded or premium issues.

Figure 9.3 A Positive Memo, Sent to Chamber of Commerce Employees and Members



To: Vijay Ramanathan

Date: April 3, 2012

From: Lee Ann Rabe

Subject: Health Care Benefits for Same-Sex Long-term Partners

Beginning May 1, same-sex long-term partners of employees covered by the Chamber health plan will be eligible for the same coverage as spouses.

In order to have a long-term partner covered, an employee must sign an affidavit in the Human Resources Department stating that the employee and his or her partner (1) live together, (2) intend to stay together, and (3) are responsible for each other. If the relationship ends, employees must notify the Human Resources Department within 30 days, just as do married couples who divorce.

Costs and coverage of the Chamber's health plan remain the same. Dental and vision coverage are also available for a fee; limitations apply and remain the same. For information about the specifics of the Chamber's health plan, pick up a brochure in the Human Resources Department.

The new policy will affect not only Chamber employees but also the small businesses that are a part of the Chamber's health plan. New businesses may see the change as a reason to join the Chamber–and the health plan. Growth in the health plan creates a wider base for insurance premiums and helps keep costs as low as possible.

Making the health plan more comprehensive keeps us competitive with other major US cities. A policy change like this one shows Columbus' continued goodwill toward minorities in general and will make convincing businesses to relocate here that much easier.

Selling Columbus as a good place to live and do business has never been easier.

Lee Ann Rabe
Vice President for Human Resources
Columbus Chamber of Commerce
293-4745

Making Subject Lines Concise

Most subject lines are relatively short. MailerMailer, a web-based e-mail management service, found that e-mails whose subject lines were 35 characters or fewer were significantly more likely to be opened by readers than subject lines with more than 35 characters.[21]

Wordy: Student Preferences in Regards to Various Pizza Factors

Better: Students' Pizza Preferences

If you can't make the subject both specific and short, be specific.

Making Subject Lines Appropriate for the Pattern of Organization

Since your subject line introduces your reader to your message, it must satisfy the psychological demands of the situation; it must be appropriate to your purposes and to the immediate response you expect from your reader. In general, do the same thing in your subject line that you would do in the first paragraph.

When you have good news for the reader, build goodwill by highlighting it in the subject line. When your information is neutral, summarize it concisely for the subject line.

Subject: Discount on Rental Cars Effective January 2

Starting January 2, as an employee of Amalgamated Industries you can get a 15% discount on cars you rent for business or personal use from Roadway Rent-a-Car.

Subject: Update on Arrangements for Videoconference with France

In the last month, we have chosen the participants and developed a tentative agenda for the videoconference with France scheduled for March 21.

Pointers for E-Mail Subject Lines

Many people skim through large lists of e-mails daily, so subject lines in e-mails are even more important than those in letters and memos. Subject lines must be specific, concise, and catchy. In these days of spam, some e-mail users get so many messages that they don't bother reading messages if they don't recognize the sender or if the subject doesn't catch their interest. Create a subject line that will help your e-mail get read:

- Use important information in the subject line. Many people delete blanks and generic tags such as "hello," "your message," "thank you," and "next meeting," if they don't recognize the sender, especially now that so much spam has common business tags.
- Put good news in the subject line.
- Name drop to make a connection: Lee Pizer gave me your name.
- Make e-mail sound easy to deal with: Two Short Travel Questions.

The following subject lines would be acceptable for informative and good news e-mail messages:

Travel Plans for Sales Meeting
Your Proposal Accepted
Reduced Prices during February
Your Funding Request Approved

Do not use indefinite dates such as Today, Tomorrow, Next Week, or even Wednesday, as subject lines. They are no longer clear if read at a later time.

When you reply to a message, check to see that the automatic subject line "Re: [subject line of message to which you are responding]" is still appropriate. If it isn't, you may want to create a new subject line. And if a series of messages arises, you probably need a new subject line. "Re: Re: Re: Re: Question" is not an effective subject line.

MANAGING THE INFORMATION IN YOUR MESSAGES

Information control is important. You want to give your audience the information they need, but you don't want to overwhelm them with information. Sometimes you will have good reasons for not providing all the information they want.

When you are the person in the know, it is easy to overestimate how much your audience knows. As a patient seeking medical treatment, you understand how much you would appreciate being told how long the wait is. When you leave a medical facility, you know how difficult it is to remember accurately those complicated instructions given to you orally by a doctor or nurse. Unfortunately, most of the huge medical industry seems to be just discovering these facts now. Medical offices are beginning to communicate waiting times and send patients home with written instructions for self-care and follow-up visits.

But, of course, information management is not always that simple. Pharmaceutical companies struggle with how much information to provide about their drugs. In 2004, the FDA publicized an analysis showing that young people on antidepressants had a 2% risk of suicidal thoughts. There were no actual suicides reported in the studies, just suicidal thoughts. Nevertheless, the FDA put a Black Box warning—the strongest possible warning—on antidepressants. Parents and physicians began backing away from the medications. Use of SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) medications in young people declined 14%, and suicides increased 18% among young people the first year of the warnings.[22]

Sometimes pharmaceutical companies, and other organizations, get in trouble because their information management withholds information that others—shareholders, regulators, customers, etc.—believe should be revealed. Glaxo-SmithKline was sued by shareholders and patients for not fully disclosing the risks of its diabetes drug Avandia. Merck faced similar lawsuits for its painkiller Vioxx. Both drugs were linked to an increased risk of heart attacks.[23] In a different venue, responding to donor desires for more transparency about how charities spend their money, the IRS revised the charities' annual tax form to require more information. This form must be made available on request.[24]

Other concerns about managing information are more prosaic.

- If you send out regularly scheduled messages on the same topic, such as monthly updates of training seminars, try to develop a system that lets people know immediately what is new. Use color for new or changed entries. Put new material at the top.

Goldman Sachs' Communication Policies

These are some statements from Goldman Sachs' communication policies:

- "It is the policy of the firm to make no comment on rumors whatsoever, even to deny rumors you believe to be untrue."
- "Prior to recommending that a customer purchase, sell or exchange any security, salespeople must have reasonable grounds for believing that the recommendation is suitable."
- "Firm employees frequently provide so-called 'trade ideas' to multiple recipients. Such trade ideas are designed to help clients take advantage of market conditions and intelligence, but are not intended to be specific buy/sell recommendations."
- "All sales correspondence from or to employees working from home offices must be routed through regional offices for purposes of review, approval, distribution and retention."
- "Casual correspondence, thank you notes, confirmations or schedules for meetings, invitations, and other correspondence that does not relate to business does not require approval."
- "Each individual's correspondence must be sampled no less often than annually."
- "'To All' memos . . . must be approved as described . . . in the Employee Handbook."

Quoted from Max Abelson and Caroline Winter, "The Goldman Rules," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, April 25, 2011, 90–91.

- If you are answering multiple questions, use numbers.
- If your e-mail is long (more than one screen), use overviews, headings, and bullets so readers can find the information they need.
- If you are asking people to complete processes involving multiple steps or complicated knowledge, use checklists. Once maligned as too elementary, checklists are being recognized as a major tool to prevent errors. Atul Gawande has popularized the trend with his book, *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*, showing how checklists are used in fields as diverse as aviation, construction, and medicine to eliminate mistakes.
- If you send messages with an attachment, put the most vital information in the e-mail too. Don't make readers open an attachment merely to find out the time or location of a meeting.

Check your message for accuracy and completeness. Remember all the e-mails you receive about meetings that forget to include the time, place, or date, and don't let your e-mails fall in that incomplete category. Make a special effort to ensure that promised attachments really are attached. Be particularly careful with the last messages you send for the day or the week, when haste can cause errors.

USING BENEFITS IN INFORMATIVE AND POSITIVE MESSAGES

Not all informative and positive messages need benefits. You don't need benefits when

- Presenting factual information only.
- The audience's attitude toward the information doesn't matter.
- Stressing benefits may make the audience sound selfish.
- The benefits are so obvious that to restate them insults the audience's intelligence.

You do need benefits when

- Presenting policies.
- Shaping your audience's attitudes toward the information or toward your organization.
- Stressing benefits presents the audience's motives positively.
- Some of the benefits may not be obvious.

Benefits are hardest to develop when you are announcing policies. The organization probably decided to adopt the policy because it appeared to help the organization; the people who made the decision may not have thought at all about whether it would help or hurt employees. Yet benefits are most essential in this kind of message so employees see the reason for the change and support it.

When you present benefits, be sure to present advantages *to the audience.* Most new policies help the organization in some way, but few workers will see their own interests as identical with those of the organization. Employees' benefits need to be spelled out, as do those of customers. To save money, an organization may change health care providers, but the notice to employees should spell out new benefits for employees and their families. Airlines announced their new check-in kiosks to customers as a way to avoid lines and save travelers' time.

To develop benefits for informative and positive messages, use the steps suggested in Chapter 2. Be sure to think about benefits that come from the activity or policy itself, in addition to any financial benefits. Does a policy improve customers' experience or the hours employees spend at work?

ENDING INFORMATIVE AND POSITIVE MESSAGES

Ending a letter or memo gracefully can be a problem in short informative and positive messages. In a one-page memo where you have omitted details and proof, you can tell readers where to get more information. In long messages, you can summarize your basic point. In a short message containing all the information readers need, either write a goodwill paragraph that refers directly to the reader or the reader's organization, or just stop. In many short e-mails, just stopping is the best choice.

Goodwill endings should focus on the business relationship you share with your reader rather than on the reader's hobbies, family, or personal life. Use a paragraph that shows you see your reader as an individual. Possibilities include complimenting the reader for a job well done, describing a benefit, or looking forward to something positive that relates to the subject of the message.

> Thank you so much for sending those two extra sales tables. They were just what I needed for Section IV of the report.

When you write to one person, a good last paragraph fits that person so specifically that it would not work if you sent the same basic message to someone else or even to a person with the same title in another organization. When you write to someone who represents an organization, the last paragraph can refer to your company's relationship to the reader's organization. When you write to a group (for example, to "All Employees"), your ending should apply to the whole group.

> Remember that the deadline for enrolling in this new benefit plan is January 31.

Some writers end every message with a standard invitation:

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

That sentence implies both that your message did not answer all questions, and that readers will hesitate to contact you. Both implications are negative. But revising the line to say "feel free to call" is rarely a good idea. People in business aren't shrinking violets; they will call if they need help. Don't make more work for yourself by inviting calls to clarify simple messages. Simply omit this sentence.

Wacky Warning Contest Winners

M-LAW (Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch) posts these winners:

- "Do not iron while wearing shirt" (on iron-on T-shirt transfer).
- "Caution: Safety goggles recommended" (on letter opener).
- "Do not put any person in this washer" (on clothes washer).
- "Never use a lit match or open flame to check fuel level" (instructions for a personal water craft).
- "Harmful if swallowed" (on a fishing lure with a three-pronged hook).
- "If you do not understand, or cannot read, all directions, cautions and warnings, do not use this product" (on bottle of drain cleaner).
- "This product not intended for use as a dental drill" (on electric drill for carpenters).
- "Remove child before folding" (on baby stroller).

Adapted from "M-LAW's Wacky Warning Labels: 11th Annual Wacky Warning Label Contest Winners," Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch, accessed June 7, 2011, http://www.mlaw.org/wwl/photos.html.

HUMOR IN INFORMATIVE MESSAGES

Some writers use humor to ensure their messages are read. Humor is a risky tool because of its tendency to rile some people. However, if you know your audience well, humor may help ensure that they read and remember your messages.

If you decide to use humor, these precautions will help keep it useful.

- Do not direct it against other people, even if you are sure they will never see your message. The Internet abounds with proof that such certainties are false. In particular, never aim humor against a specific group of people.
- Political, religious, and sexual humor should always be avoided; it is against discrimination policies in many businesses.
- Use restraint with your humor; a little levity goes a long way.

Used with care, however, humor in carefully chosen situations can help your communications. An information technology person sent the following e-mail in his small, nonprofit organization:[25]

> My set of screw driver tips is missing. I may well have loaned them to someone, perhaps weeks ago. If you have them, please return them to me. I use them when someone reports that they have a screw loose.

He got his tips back promptly. Because he has a reputation for clever e-mails, people regularly read his messages.

Signs with information about nutritional content of food help consumers make healthier choices.

Information for Healthy Eating

To help consumers make better choices in the grocery store and fight the alarming rates of obesity in the country, some supermarket chains are creating informational signage displayed near healthy foods. These signs help consumers quickly understand that the products have met federal guidelines. They also help simplify choices between similar products.

Stop & Shop and Giant Food have introduced the "Healthy Ideas" system, which provides labels on over 3,000 nutritious foods sold in their stores. Similarly, Price Chopper and HyVee supermarkets started the "NuVal" system, which rates the nutritional value of foods on a scale of 1 to 100. Another system, the "Guiding Stars," has been used in Hannaford Bros. supermarkets since 2006. This system gives stars to foods in three categories: good, better, and best.

Adapted from: Timothy W. Martin, "Grocers Launch Labels to Identify Healthy Foods," *Wall Street Journal,* January 2, 2009, A4.

VARIETIES OF INFORMATIVE AND POSITIVE MESSAGES LO 9-4

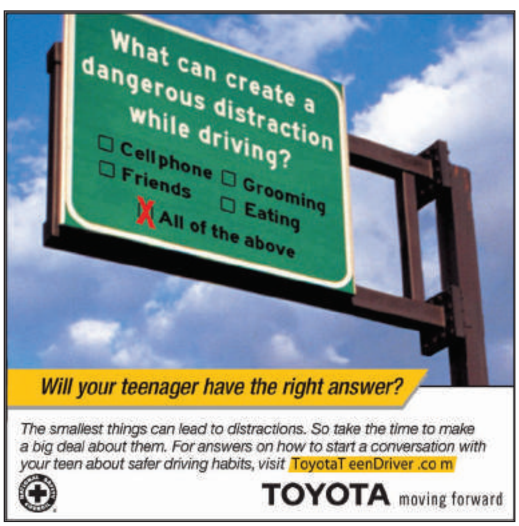
Many messages can be informative, negative, or persuasive depending on what you have to say. A transmittal, for example, can be positive when you're sending glowing sales figures or persuasive when you want the reader to act on the information. A performance appraisal is positive when you evaluate someone who's doing superbly, negative when you want to compile a record to justify firing someone, and persuasive when you want to motivate a satisfactory worker to continue to improve. Each of these messages is discussed in the chapter of the pattern it uses most frequently. However, in some cases you will need to use a pattern from a different chapter.

Transmittals

When you send someone something, you frequently need to attach a memo or letter of transmittal explaining what you're sending. A transmittal can be as simple as a small yellow Post-it™ note with "FYI" ("for your information") written on it, or it can be a separate typed document.

Organize a memo or letter of transmittal in this order:

1. Tell the reader what you're sending.
2. Summarize the main point(s) of the document.
3. Indicate any special circumstances or information that would help the reader understand the document. Is it a draft? Is it a partial document that will be completed later?
4. Tell the reader what will happen next. Will you do something? Do you want a response? If you do want the reader to act, specify exactly what you want the reader to do and give a deadline.



Toyota conducted an ad campaign to encourage safe driving among teenagers, who hold the highest rate for being in an accident. In the ads, Toyota attempted to inform the public about safety issues of driving recklessly, while also appealing to the viewers' emotions.

Source: Toyota Advertisements, *Wall Street Journal,* October 4, 2006, A1, and September 27, 2006, A1.

Frequently transmittals have important secondary purposes. Consider the writer's purpose in Figure 9.4, a transmittal from a lawyer to her client. The primary purpose of this transmittal is to give the client a chance to affirm that his story and the lawyer's understanding of it are correct. If there's anything wrong, the lawyer wants to know *before* she files the brief. But an important secondary purpose is to build goodwill: "I'm working on your case; I'm earning my fee." The greatest number of complaints officially lodged against lawyers are for the lawyer's neglect—or what the client perceives as neglect—of the client's case.

Summaries

You may be asked to summarize a conversation, a document, or an outside meeting for colleagues or superiors. (Minutes of an internal meeting are usually more detailed. See Chapter 8 for advice on writing minutes of meetings.)

Figure 9.4 A Transmittal

DREW & Associates

100 Barkley Plaza • Denver, CO 80210 • 303.555.4783 • Fax 303.555.4784

October 8, 2012

Mr. Charles Gibney
Personnel Manager
Roydon Interiors
146 East State Street
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Mr. Gibney:

Paragraph one tells reader what is enclosed and summarizes main points.

Here is a copy of the brief we intend to file with the Tenth Circuit Court in support of our position that the sex discrimination charge against Roydon Interiors should be dropped.

Will you please examine it carefully to make sure that the facts it contains are correct? If you have changes to suggest, please call my office by October 22nd, so that we can file the brief by October 24th.

Last paragraph asks for action by a specific date.

Sincerely,

Diana Drew

Diana Drew

In a summary of a conversation for internal use, identify the people who were present, the topic of discussion, decisions made, and who does what next.

To summarize a document, start with the main point. Then go on to give supporting evidence or details. In some cases, your audience may also want you to evaluate the document. Should others in the company read this report? Should someone in the company write a letter to the editor responding to this newspaper article?

When you visit a client or go to a conference, you may be asked to share your findings and impressions with other people in your organization. Chronological accounts are the easiest to write but the least useful for the reader. Your company doesn't need a blow-by-blow account of what you did; it needs to know what *it* should do as a result of the meeting.

Summarize a visit with a client or customer in this way:

1. Put the main point from your organization's point of view—the action to be taken, the perceptions to be changed—in the first paragraph.
2. Provide an **umbrella paragraph** to cover and foreshadow the points you will make in the report.
3. Provide necessary detail to support your conclusions and cover each point. Use lists and headings to make the structure of the document clear.

In the following example, the revised first paragraph summarizes the sales representative's conclusions after a call on a prospective client:

Weak original:

> On October 10th, Rick Patel and I made a joint call on Consolidated Tool Works. The discussion was held in a conference room, with the following people present:
>
> 1. Kyle McCloskey (Vice President and General Manager)
> 2. Bill Petrakis (Manufacturing Engineer)
> 3. Garett Lee (Process Engineering Supervisor)
> 4. Courtney Mansor-Green (Project Engineer)

Improved revision:

> Consolidated Tool Works is an excellent prospect for purchasing a Matrix-Churchill grinding machine. To get the order, we should
>
> 1. Set up a visit for CTW personnel to see the Matrix-Churchill machine in Kansas City;
> 2. Guarantee 60-day delivery if the order is placed by the end of the quarter; and
> 3. Extend credit terms to CTW.

Thank-You and Positive Feedback Notes

We all like to feel appreciated. Praising or congratulating people can cement good feelings between you and them and enhance your own visibility.

> Congratulations, Sam, on winning the Miller sales award. I bet winning that huge Lawson contract didn't hurt any!

Make your praise sound sincere by offering specifics and avoiding language that might seem condescending or patronizing. For example, think how silly it would sound to praise an employee for completing basic job requirements

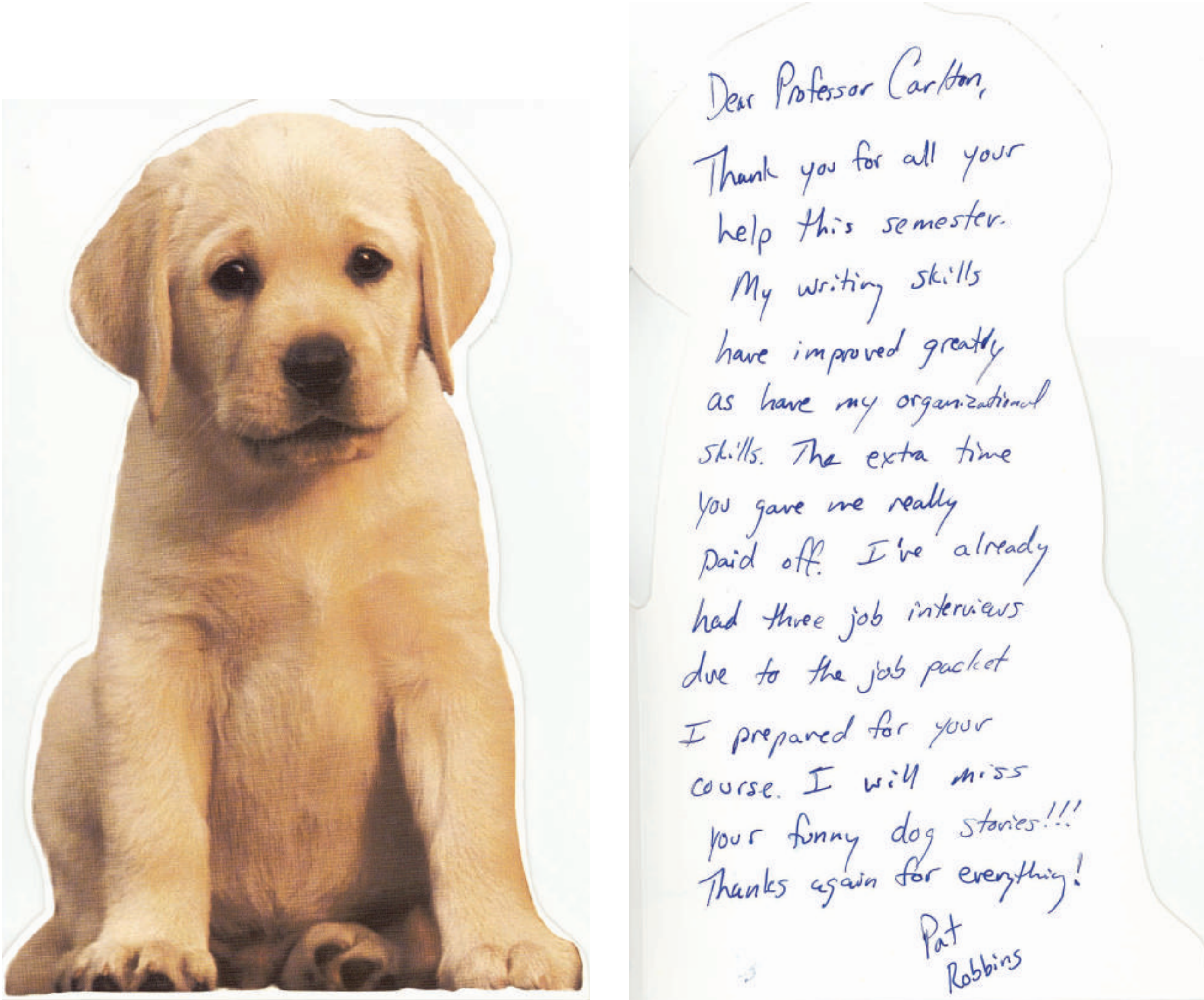
Compliment Carefully

Compliments can be valuable for building goodwill in informative messages. But too often they offer back-handed compliments. Consider these examples:

- "That dress looks better on you every year."
- "You short people sure are intelligent."
- "You must have been really pretty when you were young."

If you decide to use a compliment in your message, proceed carefully. Make sure you are being sincere and specific and that your compliment can't be misunderstood. You should also limit your compliments to those that will be most significant to your reader. Using compliments correctly can help you build goodwill and good relationships with others.

Adapted from Elizabeth Bernstein, "Why Do Compliments Cause So Much Grief?" *Wall Street Journal,* May 4, 2010, D1.



Dear Professor Carlton,

Thank you for all your help this semester. My writing skills have improved greatly as have my organizational skills. The extra time you gave me really paid off. I've already had three job interviews due to the job packet I prepared for your course. I will miss your funny dog stories!!! Thanks again for everything!

Pat Robbins

Thank-you notes can be written on standard business stationery, using standard formats. But one student noticed that his professor really liked dogs and told funny dog stories in class. So the student found a dog card for a thank-you note.

or to gush that one's mentor has superior knowledge. In contrast, thanks for a kind deed and congratulations or praise on completing a difficult task are rewarding in almost any situation.

Sending a **thank-you note** will make people more willing to help you again in the future. Thank-you letters can be short but must be prompt. They need to be specific to sound sincere.

> Chris, thank you for the extra-short turnaround time. You were a major reason we made the deadline.

Most thank-you notes are e-mails now, so handwritten ones stand out.

If you make it a habit to watch for opportunities to offer thanks and congratulations, you may be pleasantly surprised at the number of people who are extending themselves. During his six-year term, Douglas Conant, Chief Executive of Campbell, sent over 16,000 handwritten thank-you notes to employees ranging from top executives to hourly workers. Linden Labs has a "Love Machine" that allows employees to send other employees a note of thanks. These notes are tracked in a database, which is accessed during performance reviews.[26] As Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, authors of the business best seller *The One Minute Manager,* note, "People who feel good about themselves produce good results."[27]

Hey Manager! Are You Getting the Employee Input You Need?

Probably not, according to research reported in the *Harvard Business Review.* Even employees who do speak up sometimes frequently have issues on which they keep silent.

The most common reason for holding back is a sense of futility, not fear of retribution. This is especially true for routine problems and opportunities.

And even that fear deterrent may not be just what you think. You may think it applies only to serious problems: allegations about illegal or unethical activities. But it too, like the sense of futility, applies to routine problems and opportunities. Silence on these day-to-day issues prevents action to avoid larger problems in the future.

When you become a manager, what steps will you take to promote effective communication to and from your employees?

Adapted from James R. Deter, Ethan R Burris, and David A Harrison, "Debunking Four Myths about Employee Silence," *Harvard Business Review* 88, no.6 (June 2010): 26.

Positive Responses to Complaints

Complaining customers expect organizations to show that they are listening and want to resolve the problem. When you grant a customer's request for an adjusted price, discount, replacement, or other benefit to resolve a complaint, do so in the very first sentence.

> Your Visa bill for a night's lodging has been adjusted to $163. Next month a credit of $37 will appear on your bill to reimburse you for the extra amount you were originally asked to pay.

Don't talk about your own process in making the decision. Don't say anything that sounds grudging. Give the reason for the original mistake only if it reflects credit on the company. (In most cases, it doesn't, so the reason should be omitted.)

SOLVING A SAMPLE PROBLEM

Workplace problems are richer and less well defined than textbook problems and cases. But even textbook problems require analysis before you begin to write. Before you tackle the assignments for this chapter, examine the following problem. See how the analysis questions from Chapter 1 probe the basic points required for a solution. Study the two sample solutions to see what makes one unacceptable and the other one good. Note the recommendations for revision that could make the good solution excellent. The checklist at the end of the chapter can help you evaluate a draft.

Problem

At Interstate Fidelity Insurance (IFI) there is often a time lag between receiving a payment from a customer and recording it on the computer. Sometimes, while the payment is in line to be processed, the computer sends out additional notices: past-due notices or collection letters. Customers are frightened or angry and write or call asking for an explanation. In most cases, if they just waited a little while, the situation would be straightened out. But policyholders are afraid that they'll be without insurance because the company thinks the bill has not been paid.

IFI doesn't have the time to check each individual situation to see if the check did arrive and has been processed. It wants you to write a letter that will persuade customers to wait. If something is wrong and the payment never reached IFI, IFI would send a legal notice to that effect saying the policy would be canceled by a certain date (which the notice would specify) at least 30 days after the date on the original premium bill. Continuing customers always get this legal notice as a third chance (after the original bill and the past-due notice).

Prepare a form letter that can go out to every policyholder who claims to have paid a premium for automobile insurance and resents getting a past-due notice. The letter should reassure readers and build goodwill for IFI.

I Agreed to What?

Every piece of software or app installed on a computer or smartphone comes with an End User License Agreement (EULA) that acts as a contract between the user and the company. But these long statements, written in heavy legalese, sometimes ask users to agree to odd conditions.

One agreement placed online in April 2010 by the British online store Gamestation says, "By placing an order via this Web site, you agree to grant us a non-transferable option to claim, for now and forever more, your immortal soul." Proving that most do not read these agreements, more than 7,500 people agreed to the terms in only one day.

Adapted from Eric Felten, "Video Game Tort: You Made Me Play You," *Wall Street Journal,* September 3, 2010, W17.

Analysis of the Problem

1. Who is (are) your audience(s)?

   Automobile insurance customers who say they've paid but have still received a past-due notice. They're afraid they're no longer insured. Since it's a form letter, different readers will have different situations: in some cases payments did arrive late, in some cases the company made a mistake, in some the reader never paid (check was lost in mail, unsigned, bounced, etc.).

2. What are your purposes in writing?

   To reassure readers that they're covered for 30 days. To inform them that they can assume everything is OK *unless* they receive a second notice. To avoid further correspondence on this subject. To build goodwill for IFI: (a) we don't want to suggest IFI is error-prone or too cheap to hire enough people to do the necessary work; (b) we don't want readers to switch companies; (c) we do want readers to buy from IFI when they're ready for more insurance.

3. What information must your message include?

   Readers are still insured. We cannot say whether their checks have now been processed (company doesn't want to check individual accounts). Their insurance will be canceled if they do not pay after receiving the second past-due notice (the legal notice).

4. How can you build support for your position? What reasons or benefits will your audience find convincing?

   We provide personal service to policyholders. We offer policies to meet all their needs. Both of these points would need specifics to be interesting and convincing.

5. What aspects of the total situation may affect audience response? The economy? The time of year? Morale in the organization? The relationship between the communicator and audience? Any special circumstances?

   The insurance business is highly competitive—other companies offer similar rates and policies. The customer could get a similar policy for about the same money from someone else. The economy is making money tight, so customers will want to keep insurance costs low. Yet the fact that prices are steady or rising means that the value of what they own is higher—they need insurance more than ever.

   Many insurance companies are refusing to renew policies (car, liability, home). These refusals to renew have gotten lots of publicity, and many people have heard horror stories about companies and individuals whose insurance has been canceled or not renewed after a small number of claims. Readers don't feel very kindly toward insurance companies.

   People need car insurance. If they have an accident and aren't covered, they not only have to bear the costs of that accident alone but also (depending on state law) may need to place as much as $50,000 in a state escrow account to cover future accidents. They have a legitimate worry.

   We are slow in processing payments. We don't know if the checks have been processed. We will cancel policies if their checks don't arrive.

Discussion of the Sample Solutions

The solution in Figure 9.5 is unacceptable. The red marginal comments show problem spots. Since this is a form letter, we cannot tell customers we have their checks; in some cases, we may not. The letter is far too negative. The explanation in paragraph 2 makes IFI look irresponsible and uncaring. Paragraph 3 is far too negative. Paragraph 4 is too vague; there are no benefits; the ending sounds selfish. A major weakness with the solution is that it lifts phrases straight out of the problem; the writer does not seem to have thought about the problem or about the words he or she is using. Measuring the draft against the answers to the questions for analysis suggests that this writer should start over.

Figure 9.5 An Unacceptable Solution to the Sample Problem

Need date

Dear Customer:

Relax. We got your check. *Not necessarily true. Reread problem.*

This explanation makes company look bad.

There is always a time lag between the time payments come in and the time they are processed. While payments are waiting to be processed, the computer with super-human quickness is sending out past-due notices and threats of cancellation.

Too negative

Cancellation is not something you should worry about. No policy would be canceled without a legal notice to that effect giving a specific date for cancellation which would be at least 30 days after the date on the original premium notice.

Need to present this positively

If you want to buy more insurance, just contact your local Interstate Fidelity agent. We will be happy to help you.

Sincerely,

This paragraph isn't specific enough to work as a reader benefit. It lacks you-attitude and positive emphasis.

The solution in Figure 9.6 is much better. The blue marginal comments show the letter's good points. The message opens strongly with the good news that is true for all audiences. Paragraph 2 explains IFI's policy in more positive terms. The negative information is buried in paragraph 3 and is presented positively: the notice is information, not a threat; the 30-day extension is a "grace period." Telling the reader now what to do if a second notice arrives eliminates the need for a second exchange of letters. Paragraph 4 offers benefits for being insured by IFI. Paragraph 5 promotes other policies the company sells and prepares for the last paragraph.

As the red comments indicate, this good solution could be improved by personalizing the salutation and by including the name and number of the local agent. Computers could make both of those insertions easily. This good letter could be made excellent by revising paragraph 4 so that it doesn't end on a negative note and by using more benefits. For instance, can agents advise clients of the best policies for them? Does IFI offer good service—quick, friendly, nonpressured—that could be stressed? Are agents well trained? All of these might yield ideas for additional benefits.

You—A Most Important Subject

On the job, one of the most important subjects you can communicate about is your own performance. Make sure your boss knows what you are doing. You don't have to brag; simply noting your accomplishments is usually enough, because many employees do not take the time to do so.

Remember that raises are based not on the hard work you actually do, but the hard work your boss knows about. Furthermore, bosses count the work they want done, which is not always the work employees emphasize.

Provide your boss with paper copies of your work; CC him/her on major e-mails, if appropriate. Have 30-second blurbs ready for times when you and your boss are alone in the elevator or break room: "We got the McCluskey contract ready a day early" or "the new G7 database is going to IT tomorrow."

Checklist — Checklist for Informative and Positive Messages

- ☐ In positive messages, does the subject line give the good news? In either message, is the subject line specific enough to differentiate this message from others on the same subject?
- ☐ Does the first paragraph summarize the information or good news? If the information is too complex to fit into a single paragraph, does the paragraph list the basic parts of the policy or information in the order in which the memo discusses them?
- ☐ Is all the information given in the message? What information is needed will vary depending on the message, but information about dates, places, times, and anything related to money usually needs to be included. When in doubt, ask!
- ☐ In messages announcing policies, is there at least one benefit for each segment of the audience? Are all benefits ones that seem likely to occur in this organization?

- ☐ Is each benefit developed, showing that the benefit will come from the policy and why the benefit matters to this audience? Do the benefits build on the specific circumstances of the audience?
- ☐ Does the message end with a positive paragraph—preferably one that is specific to the readers, not a general one that could fit any organization or policy?

And, for all messages, not just informative and positive ones,

- ☐ Does the message use you-attitude and positive emphasis?
- ☐ Is the tone friendly?
- ☐ Is the style easy to read?
- ☐ Is the visual design of the message inviting?
- ☐ Is the format correct?
- ☐ Does the message use standard grammar? Is it free from typos?

Originality in a positive or informative message may come from

  - ☐ Creating good headings, lists, and visual impact.
  - ☐ Developing benefits.
  - ☐ Thinking about audiences; giving details that answer their questions and make it easier for them to understand and follow the policy.

Figure 9.6 A Good Solution to the Sample Problem

Need date

Dear Customer: *Better: use computer to personalize. Put in name and address of a specific reader*

Your auto insurance is still in effect. *Good ¶ 1. True for all readers*

Good to treat notice as information, tell reader what to do if it arrives

Past-due notices are mailed out if the payment has not been processed within three days after the due date. This may happen if a check is delayed in the mail or arrives without a signature or account number. When your check arrives with all the necessary information, it is promptly credited to your account. *Good you-attitude*

Even if a check is lost in the mail and never reaches us, you still have a 30-day grace period. If you do get a second notice, you'll know that we still have not received your check. To keep your insurance in force, just stop payment on the first check and send a second one.

Benefits of using IFI

IFI is always checking to ensure that you get any discounts you're eligible for: multicar, accident-free record, good student. If you have a claim, your agent finds quality repair shops quickly, whatever car you drive. You get a check quickly—usually within 3 working days—without having to visit dealer after dealer for time-consuming estimates. *Too negative*

Better to put in agent's name, phone number

Need to add benefits of insuring with IFI

Today, your home and possessions are worth more than ever. You can protect them with Interstate Fidelity's homeowners' and renters' policies. Let your local agent show you how easy it is to give yourself full protection. If you need a special rider to insure a personal computer, jewelry, a coin or gun collection, or a fine antique, you can get that from IFI, too. *Good specifics*

Whatever your insurance needs—auto, home, life, or health—one call to IFI can do it all.

Sincerely, *Acceptable ending*

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Good communicators need to thoughtfully select one of the common modes of communications: face-to-face contact, phone calls, instant messages and text messaging, social media, letters, e-mails, and paper memos.
- Informative and positive messages normally use the following pattern of organization:
  1. Start with good news or the most important information; summarize the main points.
  2. Give details, clarification, background.
  3. Present any negative elements—as positively as possible.
  4. Explain any benefits.
  5. Use a goodwill ending: positive, personal, and forward-looking.
- A **subject line** is the title of a document. A good subject line meets three criteria: it's specific; it's reasonably short; and it's adapted to the kind of message (positive, negative, persuasive). If you can't make the subject both specific and short, be specific.
- The subject line for an informative or positive message should highlight any good news and summarize the information concisely.
- Good messages provide the necessary information without overwhelming their audience.
- Use benefits in informative and positive messages when you want to shape your audience's attitudes toward the information or toward your organization.
- **Goodwill endings** should focus on the business relationship you share with your audience or the audience's organization. The last paragraph of a message to a group should apply to the whole group.
- Humor is a risky tool. Use it carefully in written messages, and only when you and your audience know each other well.
- Use the analysis questions listed in Chapter 1 to probe the basic points needed for successful informative and positive messages.

CHAPTER 9 Exercises and Problems

**Go to www.mhhe.com/locker10e for additional Exercises and Problems.*

9.1 Reviewing the Chapter

1. What technological changes are occuring in business communication? (LO 9-1)
2. What are the multiple purposes of informative and good news messages? (LO 9-2)
3. How does information overload impact your communications? (LO 9-2)
4. When do you use face-to-face contacts? Phone calls? Instant messages? Text messaging? Social media? Letters? Memos and e-mails? (LO 9-2)
5. What are some tips for effectively using face-to-face contacts? Phone calls? Instant messages? Text messaging? Social media? Letters? Memos and e-mails? (LO 9-2)
6. How do you organize informative and positive messages? (LO 9-3)
7. What are some concerns to consider when choosing and ordering the information in your message? (LO 9-3)
8. What are tips for composing some of the common varieties of informative and positive messages? (LO 9-4)

9.2 Reviewing Grammar

Good letters and e-mails need correct grammar. Practice yours by doing the exercises from Appendix B on correcting sentence errors (B.8) and editing for grammar and usage (B.9).

9.3 Describing the Role of Technology Where You Work

Analyze the role of technology in an organization where you—or a friend or family member—have worked.

- What kinds of communication technology do you use most?
- What are some of the newest communication technologies introduced there?
- What kinds of technology upgrades do you wish would be made?
- Are certain kinds of technology used for certain situations? (for instance, are layoffs announced face-to-face or by e-mail?)
- What kinds of data security measures are in force?
- Has anyone there gotten in trouble for misuse of technology?

As your instructor directs,

a. Share your information in small groups.

b. Present your group findings to your classmates.

c. Post your information online for your classmates.

9.4 Saying Yes to a Subordinate—E-Mails for Discussion

Today, you get this request from a subordinate.

> Subject: Request for Leave
>
> You know that I've been feeling burned out. I've decided that I want to take a three-month leave of absence this summer to travel abroad. I've got five weeks of vacation time saved up; I would take the rest as unpaid leave. Just guarantee that my job will be waiting when I come back!

You decide to grant the request. The following messages are possible responses. How well does each message meet the criteria in the checklist for informative and positive messages?

1.

> Subject: Re: Request for Leave
>
> I highly recommend Italy. Spend a full week in Florence, if you can. Be sure to visit the Brancacci Chapel—it's been restored, and the frescoes are breathtaking. And I can give you the names of some great restaurants. You may never want to come back!

2.

> Subject: Your Request for Leave
>
> As you know, we are in a very competitive position right now. Your job is important, and there is no one who can easily replace you. However, because you are a valued employee, I will permit you to take the leave you request, as long as you train a replacement before you leave.

3.

> Subject: Your Request for Leave Granted
>
> Yes, you may take a three-month leave of absence next summer using your five weeks of accumulated vacation time and taking the rest as unpaid leave. And yes, your job will be waiting for you when you return!
>
> I'm appointing Garrick to take over your duties while you're gone. Talk with him to determine how much training time he'll need, and let me know when the training is scheduled.
>
> Have a great summer! Let us know every now and then how you're doing!

9.5 Introducing a Suggestion System—Memos for Discussion

Your organization has decided to institute a suggestion system. Employees on hourly pay scales will be asked to submit suggestions. (Managers and other employees on salary are not eligible for this program; they are supposed to be continually suggesting ways to improve things as part of their regular jobs.) If the evaluating committee thinks that the suggestion will save money, the employee will receive 10% of the first year's estimated annual savings. If the suggestion won't save money but will improve work conditions, service, or morale, the employee will get a check for $100.

The following memos are possible approaches. How well does each message meet the criteria in the checklist for informative and positive messages?

1.

Subject: Suggestion System (SS)

I want to introduce you to the Suggestion System (SS). This program enables the production worker to offer ideas about improving his job description, working conditions, and general company procedures. The plan can operate as a finely tuned machine, with great ideas as its product.

Operation will begin October 1. Once a week, a designate of SS will collect the ideas and turn them over to the SS Committee. This committee will evaluate and judge the proposed changes.

Only employees listed as factory workers are eligible. This excludes foremen and the rest of supervisory personnel. Awards are as follows:

1. $100 awards will be given to those ideas judged operational. These are awarded monthly.
2. There will be grand prizes given for the best suggestions over the six-month span.

Ideas are judged on feasibility, originality, operational simplicity, and degree of benefit to the worker and company. Evaluation made by the SS Committee is final. Your questions should be channeled to my office.

2.

Subject: Establishment of Suggestion System

We announce the establishment of a Suggestion System. This new program is designed to provide a means for hourly employees to submit suggestions to company management concerning operations and safety. The program will also provide an award system to compensate nonmanagement employees for implemented suggestions.

Here is how the program will work: beginning October 1, suggestions can be submitted by hourly workers to the company on Form 292, which will be furnished to all plants and their departments by October 1st. On the form, the submitting employee should include the suggestion, his or her name, and the department number. The form can be deposited in a suggestion drop box, which will be located near the personnel office in each plant.

Any suggestion dealing with the improvement of operations, safety, working conditions, or morale is eligible for consideration. The award structure for the program will be as follows:

1. For an implemented suggestion which improves safety or efficiency with no associated monetary benefits or cost reduction: $100.00.
2. For an implemented suggestion which makes or saves the company money: 10% of the first year's estimated annual savings or additional revenue.

It is hoped that we will have a good initial and continuous response from all hourly employees. This year, we are out to try to cut production costs, and this program may be the vehicle through which we will realize new savings and increased revenues. New ideas which can truly increase operational efficiency or cut safety problems will make the company a nicer place for all employees. A safer work environment is a better work environment. If department operations can be made more efficient, this will eventually make everyone's job just a little easier, and give that department and its employees a sense of pride.

3\. Subject: New Employee Suggestion System

Beginning October 1, all of you who are hourly employees of Tyfor Manufacturing will be able to get cash awards when your suggestions for improving the company are implemented.

Ideas about any aspect of Tyfor Manufacturing are eligible: streamlining behind-the-counter operations, handling schedule problems, increasing the life of line machines.

- If your idea cuts costs or increases income (e.g., increasing production, decreasing line accidents), you'll receive 10% of the first year's estimated annual savings.
- If the idea doesn't save money but does improve service, work conditions, or morale, you'll receive a check for $100.

To submit a suggestion, just pick up a form from your manager. On the form, explain your suggestion, describe briefly how it could be implemented, and show how it will affect Tyfor Manufacturing. Return the completed form in the new suggestion box behind the back counter. Suggestions will be evaluated at the end of each month. Turn in as many ideas as you like!

Think about ways to solve the problems you face every day. Can we speed up the materials check-in process? Cut paperwork? Give customers faster service? Decrease the percentage of line flaws?

Your ideas will keep Tyfor Manufacturing competitive. Ten years ago, Tyfor Manufacturing was the only supplier in the Midwest. Now we have three regional competitors, in addition to numerous international ones. Efficiency, creativity, and quality can keep Tyfor Manufacturing ahead.

Employees whose ideas are implemented will be recognized in the regional Tyfor Manufacturing newsletter. The award will also be a nice accomplishment to add to any college application or résumé. By suggesting ways to improve Tyfor Manufacturing, you'll demonstrate your creativity and problem-solving abilities. And you'll be able to share the credit for keeping Tyfor Manufacturing a profitable manufacturing concern.

9.6 Critiquing a Letter—Economic Stimulus Payment Notice

The following letter was sent to more than 130 million households after the U.S. Congress passed a stimulus package in early 2008. Critique it in small groups. Here are some questions to get you started:

1. What are the purposes of this letter?
2. How well does this letter inform the audience of its purpose?

3. Does the letter violate any of the guidelines for constructing informational messages you read about in this chapter? If so, which ones?
4. What kind of impression is given to readers by the document design choices?

As your instructor directs,

a. Write a memo to your instructor summarizing your group discussion.
b. As a group, record your answers to the questions, plus other observations you made. Trade summaries with another group. Where did they agree with you? Disagree? What observations did they make that your group did not? Write a memo to your instructor summarizing the differences between the two critiques. Submit the memo and the two critiques to your instructor.

IRS
Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service
Notice 1377 (February 2008)
Catalog Number 51255B
www.irs.gov

Economic Stimulus Payment Notice

Dear Taxpayer:

We are pleased to inform you that the United States Congress passed and President George W. Bush signed into law the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008, which provides for economic stimulus payments to be made to over 130 million American households. Under this new law, you may be entitled to a payment of up to $600 ($1,200 if filing a joint return), plus additional amount for each qualifying child.

We are sending this notice to let you know that based on this new law the IRS will begin sending the one-time payments starting in May. To receive a payment in 2008, individuals who qualify will not have to do anything more than file a 2007 tax return. The IRS will determine eligibility, figure the amount, and send the payment. This payment should not be confused with any 2007 income tax refund that is owed to you by the federal government. Income tax refunds for 2007 will be made separately from this one-time payment.

For individuals who normally do not have to file a tax return, the new law provides for payments to individuals who have a total of $3,000 or more in earned income, Social Security benefits, and/or certain veterans' payments. Those individuals should file a tax return for 2007 to receive a payment in 2008.

Individuals who qualify may receive as much as $600 ($1,200 if married filing jointly). Even if you pay no income tax but have a total of $3,000 or more in earned income, Social Security benefits, and/or certain veterans' payments, you may receive a payment of $300 ($600 if married filing jointly).

In addition, individuals eligible for payments may also receive an additional amount of $300 for each child qualifying for the child tax credit.

For taxpayers with adjusted gross income (AGI) of more than $75,000 (or more than $150,000 if married filing jointly), the payment will be reduced or phased out completely.

To qualify for the payment, an individual, spouse, and any qualifying child must have a valid Social Security number. In addition, individuals cannot receive a payment if they can be claimed as a dependent of another taxpayer or they filled a 2007 Form 1040NR, 1040NR-EZ, 1040-PR, or 1040-SS.

All individuals receiving payments will receive a notice and additional information shortly before the payment is made. In the meantime, for additional information, please visit the IRS website at www.irs.gov.

Source: Internal Revenue Service, "Economic Stimulus Payment Notice," February 2008, http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/economic_stimulus_payment_notice.pdf.

9.7 Critiquing a Letter—Introducing Kindle

The following letter was sent to Amazon shareholders after Kindle went on the market. Critique the letter in small groups. Here are some questions to get you started:

1. What are the purposes of this letter?
2. How well are these purposes accomplished?
3. What information does Bezos provide about Kindle? Why do you think he chose this information?
4. How is the information organized?
5. Where do you see you-attitude and positive tone? Do they contribute to the letter's effectiveness? Why or why not?

As your instructor directs,

a. Write a memo to your instructor summarizing your group discussion.

b. As a group, record your answers to the questions, plus other observations you made. Trade summaries with another group. Where did they agree with you? Disagree? What observations did they make that your group did not? Write a memo to your instructor summarizing the differences between the two critiques. Submit the memo and the two critiques to your instructor.

Jeffrey Bezos (Amazon Founder and Chief Executive Officer) letter to shareholders

To our shareowners:

November 19, 2007, was a special day. After three years of work, we introduced Amazon Kindle to our customers.

Many of you may already know something of Kindle—we're fortunate (and grateful) that it has been broadly written and talked about. Briefly, Kindle is a purpose-built reading device with wireless access to more than 110,000 books, blogs, magazines, and newspapers. The wireless connectivity isn't WiFi—instead it uses the same wireless network as advanced cellphones, which means it works when you're at home in bed or out and moving around. You can buy a book directly from the device, and the whole book will be downloaded wirelessly, ready for reading, in less than 60 seconds. There is no "wireless plan," no year-long contract you must commit to, and no monthly service fee. It has a paper-like electronic-ink display that's easy to read even in bright daylight. Folks who see the display for the first time do a double-take. It's thinner and lighter than a paperback, and can hold 200 books. Take a look at the Kindle detail page on Amazon.com to see what customers think—Kindle has already been reviewed more than 2,000 times.

As you might expect after three years of work, we had sincere hopes that Kindle would be well received, but we did not expect the level of demand that actually materialized. We sold out in the first 5 1/2 hours, and our supply chain and manufacturing teams have had to scramble to increase production capacity.

We started by setting ourselves the admittedly audacious goal of improving upon the physical book. We did not choose that goal lightly. Anything that has persisted in roughly the same form and resisted change for 500 years is unlikely to be improved easily. At the beginning of our design process, we identified what we believe is the book's most important feature. It disappears. When you read a book, you don't notice the paper and the ink and the glue and the stitching. All of that dissolves, and what remains is the author's world.

We knew Kindle would have to *get out of the way,* just like a physical book, so readers could become engrossed in the words and forget they're reading on a device. We also knew we shouldn't try to copy every last feature of a book—we could never out-book the book. We'd have to add new capabilities—ones that could never be possible with a traditional book.

The early days of Amazon.com provide an analog. It was tempting back then to believe that an online bookstore should have all the features of a physical bookstore. I was asked about a particular feature dozens of times: "How are you going to do electronic book signings?" Thirteen years later, we still haven't figured that one out!

Instead of trying to duplicate physical bookstores, we've been inspired by them and worked to find things we could do in the new medium that could never be done in the old one. We don't have electronic book signings, and similarly we can't provide a comfortable spot to sip coffee and relax. However, we can offer literally millions of titles, help with purchase decisions through customer reviews, and provide discovery features like "customers who bought this item also bought." The list of useful things that can be done only in the new medium is a long one.

I'll highlight a few of the useful features we built into Kindle that go beyond what you could ever do with a physical book. If you come across a word you don't recognize, you can look it up easily. You can search your books. Your margin notes and underlinings are stored on the server-side in the "cloud," where they can't be lost. Kindle keeps your place in each of the books you're reading, automatically. If your eyes are tired, you can change the font size. Most important is the seamless, simple ability to find a book and have it in 60 seconds. When I've watched people do this for the first time, it's clear the capability has a profound effect on them. Our vision for Kindle is every book ever printed in any language, all available in less than 60 seconds.

Publishers—including all the major publishers—have embraced Kindle, and we're thankful for that. From a publisher's point of view, there are a lot of advantages to Kindle. Books never go out of print, and they never go out of stock. Nor is there ever waste from over-printing. Most important, Kindle makes it more convenient for readers to buy more books. Anytime you make something simpler and lower friction, you get more of it.

We humans co-evolve with our tools. We change our tools, and then our tools change us. Writing, invented thousands of years ago, is a grand whopper of a tool, and I have no doubt that it changed us dramatically. Five hundred years ago, Gutenberg's invention led to a significant step-change in the cost of books. Physical books ushered in a new way of collaborating and learning. Lately, networked tools such as desktop computers, laptops, cellphones and PDAs have changed us too. They've shifted us more toward information snacking, and I would argue toward shorter attention spans. I value my BlackBerry—I'm convinced it makes me more productive—but I don't want to read a three-hundred-page document on it. Nor do I want to read something hundreds of pages long on my desktop computer or my laptop. As I've already mentioned in this letter, people do more of what's convenient and friction-free. If our tools make information snacking easier, we'll shift more toward information snacking and away from long-form reading. Kindle is purpose-built for long-form reading. We hope Kindle and its successors may gradually and incrementally move us over years into a world with longer spans of attention, providing a counterbalance to the recent proliferation of info-snacking tools. I realize my tone here tends toward the missionary, and I can assure you it's heartfelt. It's also not unique to me but is shared by a large group of folks here. I'm glad about that because missionaries build better products. I'll also point out that, while I'm convinced books are on the verge of being improved upon, Amazon has no sinecure as that agent. It will happen, but if we don't execute well, it will be done by others.

Your team of missionaries here is fervent about driving free cash flow per share and returns on capital. We know we can do that by putting customers first. I guarantee you there is more innovation ahead of us than behind us, and we do not expect the road to be an easy one. We're hopeful, and I'd even say optimistic, that Kindle, true to its name, will "start a fire" and improve the world of reading.

As always, I attach our 1997 letter to shareholders. You'll see that Kindle exemplifies our philosophy and long-term investment approach as discussed in that letter. Happy reading and many thanks!

Jeffrey P.Bezos
Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Amazon.com, Inc.

9.8 Critiquing a Letter—Airline Merger

The following letter was sent by Northwest Airlines before their merger with Delta. Critique the letter in small groups. Here are some questions to get you started:

1. What are the purposes of this letter?
2. How well are these purposes accomplished?
3. What information does the letter provide that an ordinary traveler would find useful?
4. How is the information organized?
5. Where do you see you-attitude and positive tone? Do they contribute to the letter's effectiveness? Why or why not?

As your instructor directs,

a. Write a memo to your instructor summarizing your group discussion.

b. As a group, record your answers to the questions, plus other observations you made. Trade summaries with another group. Where did they agree with you? Disagree? What observations did they make that your group did not? Write a memo to your instructor summarizing the differences between the two critiques. Submit the memo and the two critiques to your instructor.

Dear Steven Schmidt,

As a valued Northwest Airlines customer and WorldPerks® member, I wanted you to be among the first to hear that we have announced a merger with Delta Air Lines. Subject to regulatory review, our two airlines are joining forces to create America's premier global airline which, upon closing of the merger, will be called Delta Air Lines.

By combining Northwest and Delta, we are building a stronger, more resilient airline that will be a leader in providing customer service and value. Our combined airline will offer unprecedented access to the world, enabling you to fly to more destinations, have more flight choices and more ways than ever to earn and redeem your WorldPerks miles.

You can be assured that your WorldPerks miles and Elite program status will be unaffected by this merger. In addition, you can continue to earn miles through use of partners like WorldPerks Visa®. And once the new Delta Air Lines emerges you can look forward to being a part of the world's largest frequent flyer program with expanded benefits.

The combined Delta Air Lines will serve more U.S. communities and connect to more worldwide destinations than any global airline. Our hubs—both Delta's and Northwest's—will be retained and enhanced. We will be the only U.S. airline to offer direct service from the United States to all of the world's major business centers in Asia, Latin America, Europe, Africa and around North America.

Both airlines bring tremendous strengths to this new partnership. Our complementary service networks form an end-to-end system that is truly greater than the sum of its parts. This is a merger by addition, not subtraction, which means all of our hubs—both Northwest's and Delta's—will be retained. In addition, building on both airlines' proud decades-long history of serving small communities, we plan to enhance global connections to small towns and cities across the U.S.

All of these positive benefits of our combination mean that we can:

- Offer a true global network where our customers will be able to fly to more destinations, have more schedule options and more opportunities to earn and redeem frequent flyer miles in what will become the world's best and most comprehensive frequent flyer program.
- Continue to serve our current roster of destinations and to maintain our hubs in Atlanta, Cincinnati, Detroit, Memphis, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York, Salt Lake City, Amsterdam, and Tokyo.
- Improve our customers' travel experience, through new products and services including enhanced self-service tools, better bag-tracking technology, more onboard services, including more meal options, new seats and refurbished cabins.

While we work to secure approval of our merger, which may take up to 6 to 8 months, it will be business-as-usual at both airlines. We will continue to operate as independent airlines and the people of Northwest will remain focused on providing you with the very best in safe, reliable and convenient air travel. At the same time, both airlines will be planning for a seamless integration of our two airlines, one that delivers to you the enhanced benefits that will earn—and retain—your preference.

As we work through this process, we will keep you informed at every step along the way. Thank you for your business and we look forward to serving you on your next Northwest flight.

Sincerely,
Bob Soukup
Managing Director, WorldPerks

9.9 Discussing an Ethics Situation : Fired for an E-mail

"[In November 2006] Justen [sic] Deal, a 22-year-old Kaiser Permanente employee, blasted an email throughout the giant health maintenance organization. His message charged that HealthConnect—the company's ambitious $4 billion project to convert paper files into electronic medical records—was a mess.

"In a blistering 2,000-word treatise, Mr. Deal wrote: 'We're spending recklessly, to the tune of over $1.5 billion in waste every year, primarily on HealthConnect. . . .

"'For me, this isn't just an issue of saving money,' he wrote. 'It could very well become an issue of making sure our physicians and nurses have the tools they need to save lives.'"

Mr. Deal, who had believed he would be protected by Kaiser's policy encouraging people to report ethical problems, was fired. The CIO resigned, although the HMO said the timing was a coincidence. The appropriate California watchdog agency is now monitoring the system, and the Los Angeles *Times* ran a story with some of the same criticisms Mr. Deal had made.

Would you risk your job for an ethics issue this large? A smaller ethics issue? How could Mr. Deal have handled differently the problem he saw?

Quoted from Rhonda L. Rundle, "Critical Case: How an Email Rant Jolted a Big HMO: A 22-Year-Old's Tirade Made Trouble for Kaiser. Mr. Deal Got Fired, Famous," *Wall Street Journal,* April 24, 2007. Copyright © 2007 by Dow Jones & Company, Inc. Reproduced with permission of Dow Jones & Company, Inc. via Copyright Clearance Center.

9.10 Analyzing Goldman Sachs' Communication Policies

Reread the Goldman Sachs sidebars quoting some statements from Goldman Sachs' communication policies, *United States Policies for the Preparation, Supervision, Distribution and Retention of Written and Electronic Communications.* Answer the following questions:

- What are the implications of this guideline?

  "Prior to recommending that a customer purchase, sell or exchange any security, salespeople must have reasonable grounds for believing that the recommendation is suitable."
- Does this guideline contradict the above guideline?

  "Firm employees frequently provide so-called "trade ideas" to multiple recipients. Such trade ideas are designed to help clients take advantage of market conditions and intelligence, but are not intended to be specific buy/sell recommendations."
- What are the implications of the multiple statements that the firm surveys employee communications?
- Do you think that following these guidelines could have helped Goldman Sachs avoid its half-billion dollar fine?

9.11 Managing Overdraft Information

Banks make billions of dollars from overdraft fees. They maintain that the overdraft service allows customers to make vital purchases even when their account is empty.

On the other side, many customers are furious at how the current system allows them to rack up hundreds of dollars in overdraft fees without knowing they are doing so. Many of them claim they did not know they had overdraft service until they saw the fees. They want to be alerted when a purchase will result in an overdraft. They also object to the bank practice of processing a large purchase before several small ones that occurred at almost the same time, so that each small purchase gets an overdraft fee that it would not have gotten if the large purchase had been processed last.

In small groups, discuss how much overdraft information should be shared. Here are some questions to get you started:

- For what groups are overdraft services a benefit?
- Which groups do such services hurt most?
- Should people be automatically enrolled in such services, as is now the case for most customers?
- Should banks notify customers that they are about to incur an overdraft fee? How would third-party processors affect such notifications?

Write a memo to your instructor summarizing your group's discussion.

Source: Kelly Evans, "Consumers Vent on Overdraft Fees," *Wall Street Journal*, March 26, 2009, D2.

9.12 Offering Restaurant Nutrition Information

The Food and Drug Administration wants restaurants to provide more nutritional information, including calorie counts of offerings, so that customers can make more nutritious choices. You own a restaurant and are considering whether or not you should change your menu to comply. On the one hand, you know obesity is a national problem, and you might be able to attract health-conscious customers if you change your menu. On the other hand, the large majority of your customers do not seem to be counting calories. Their favorites on your menu are the comfort food selections such as fried chicken, mashed potatoes, pies, and cakes. Furthermore, it would cost you over $50,000 for a lab to test your menu items and provide nutritional content and calorie counts. In small groups, discuss whether or not your restaurant will comply. What are some compromises you can think of? Write a memo to your instructor summarizing your group's conclusions.

9.13 Revising a Letter

You work for a credit card company and asked your assistant to draft a letter to new customers who have recently opened an account. The purpose of the letter is to inform clients of the services available to them, persuade them to use the services, and build goodwill.

Subject: Credit Card

Dear Sir or Madame,

This letter will let you know about our organization and what we can do for you. We believe that you will like using our services, as we offer many convenient ones.

Before we tell you about the great services we have to offer, we want to let you know how glad we our to have you as a new customer. We got out of our way to make sure you get the best benefits. 2% back on grocery purchases, no annual fee, and reward dollars—who could ask for anything more?! Shop, Shop, Shop and the rewards will pile up. Go online to sign up for rewards so you don't lose out. While your there, don't forget to enroll in e-mail alerts to remind you of upcoming due dates.

We have been helping clients for almost a quarter of a century and are happy your apart of the family. Like a family member who just drops in, you get to chose your payment due date. Now how's that for convenience!

Thank you for joining our service. We look forward to continuing our business relationship with you.

Sincerely,

This draft definitely needs some work. It lacks you-attitude and needs attention to the organization. Moreover, the new services are not clearly explained, and there are many mechanical errors.

As your instructor directs,

a. Write a memo to your subordinate, explaining what revisions are necessary.
b. Revise the letter.

9.14 Accommodating a Hearing-Impaired Employee

You're manager of Human Resources at your company. Two weeks ago, you got this e-mail message:

> Subject: Accommodations for Employee
>
> Our work team includes a hearing-impaired employee. She is our most productive team member on the floor, but at team meetings, she can't effectively contribute. I e-mailed her about my concerns, and she says the conversations are too hard to follow. What can we do so she can contribute her ideas?

One of your staffers has researched the issue for you and brought you several recommendations. Based on the staffer's research, you have determined that you will contract with a sign language interpreter to be present at the regular staff meetings. You will also have your staffer meet with the work team to share some basic guidelines for communicating, such as looking directly at the deaf team member when speaking, speaking slowly, using facial expressions when possible, and avoiding any statements not intended for the interpreter to translate (the interpreter will translate anything spoken during the meeting). These plans are part of your existing policy of complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Write an e-mail message to the affected employees, telling them about the new practices for your employee.

9.15 Giving Employees Their Birthday Off

Your company holds a birthday celebration for everyone in your unit. After the last three celebrations, co-workers noticed a discrepancy. Some co-workers believe that Jane had much more effort, time, and money spent on her party than did Kurt and Barbara, both of whom do the same quantity and quality of work as Jane.

After some complaints about the unfairness of office birthday parties when one co-worker gets a much more lavish celebration, the management has decided to institute a new policy regarding employee birthdays. From now on, all employees will be given the day off to celebrate their birthday however they like.

Write a memo to all employees announcing the change in policy.

Hints:

- Choose an organization you know something about.
- Be sure to provide benefits for employees like Jane, who had a much better party than other co-workers.

9.16 Creating a Human Resources Web Page

As firms attempt to help employees balance work and family life (and as employers become aware that personal and family stresses affect performance at work), Human Resource departments sponsor an array of programs and provide information on myriad subjects. However, some people might be uncomfortable asking for help, either because the problem is embarrassing (who wants to admit needing help to deal with drug abuse, domestic violence, or addiction to gambling?) or because focusing on nonwork issues (e.g., child care) might lead others to think they aren't serious about their jobs. The web allows organizations to post information that employees can access privately—even from home.

Create a web page that could be posted by Human Resources to help employees with one of the challenges they face. Possible topics include

- Appreciating an ethnic heritage.
- Buying a house.
- Caring for dependents: child care, helping a child learn to read, living with teenagers, elder care, and so forth.
- Staying healthy: exercise, yoga, massage, healthy diet, and so forth.
- Dealing with a health problem: alcoholism, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and so forth.
- Dressing for success or dressing for casual days.
- Managing finances: basic budgeting, deciding how much to save, choosing investments, and so forth.
- Nourishing the spirit: meditation, religion.
- Getting out of debt.
- Planning for retirement.
- Planning vacations.
- Reducing stress.
- Resolving conflicts on the job or in families.

Assume that this page can be accessed from another of the organization's pages. Offer at least seven links. (More is better.) You may offer information as well as links to other pages with information. At the top of the page, offer an overview of what the page covers. At the bottom of the page, put the creation/update date and your name and e-mail address.

As your instructor directs,

a. Turn in one printed copy of your web page(s). On another page, give the URLs for each link.
b. Electronically submit your web page files.
c. Write a memo to your instructor identifying the audience for which the page is designed and explaining (1) the search strategies you used to find material on this topic, (2) why you chose the pages and information you've included, and (3) why you chose the layout and graphics you've used.
d. Present your page orally to the class.

Hints:

- Pick a topic you know something about.
- Realize that audience members will have different needs. You could explain the basics of choosing day care or stocks, but don't recommend a specific day care center or a specific stock.
- If you have more than nine links, chunk them in small groups under headings.
- Create a good image of the organization.

9.17 Praising Work Done Well

Write an e-mail to a co-worker (with a copy to the person's supervisor) thanking him or her for helping you or complimenting him or her on a job well done. Use details to give your note sincerity.

9.18 Giving Good News

Write to a customer or client, to a vendor or supplier, or to your boss announcing good news. Possibilities include a product improvement, a price cut or special, an addition to your management team, a new contract, and so forth.

9.19 Investigating E-mail

Interview a professional you know about his/her use of e-mail. You might consider questions such as these:

- How many e-mails do you receive on an average day? Send?
- How much time do you spend handling e-mails on an average day?
- What are the most common kinds of e-mails you receive? Send?
- What are the most difficult kinds of e-mails for you to write? Why?
- What are your pet peeves about e-mails?

Write up your findings in an informational memo to your instructor.

9.20 Reminding Guests about the Time Change

Annually in the United States, cities switch to daylight saving time and then back again. The time change can be disruptive for hotel guests, who may lose track of the date, forget to change the clocks in their rooms, and miss appointments as a result.

Prepare a form letter to leave in each hotel room reminding guests of the impending time change. What should guests do?

Write the letter.

Hints:

- Use an attention-getting page layout so readers don't ignore the message.
- Pick a specific hotel or motel chain you know something about.
- Use the letter to build goodwill for your hotel or motel chain. Use specific references to services or features the hotel offers, focusing not on what the hotel does for the reader, but on what the reader can do at the hotel.

9.21 Announcing a New Employee Benefit

Your company has decided to pay employees for doing charity work. Employees can spend 1 hour working with a charitable on nonprofit group for every 40 they work. Employees will be paid for this hour, so their salaries will not fall. People who choose not to participate will work and be paid for the same number of hours as before. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that essential business services are covered during business hours. Any employee who will be away during regular business hours (either to volunteer or to take off an hour in compensation for volunteering off-shift or on a weekend) will need to clear the planned absence with his or her supervisor. Your office is collecting a list of organizations that would welcome volunteers. People can work with an organized group or do something informal (such as tutoring at a local school or coaching kids at a local playground). People can volunteer 1 hour every week, 2 hours every other week, or a half-day each month. Volunteer hours cannot be banked from one month to the next; they must be used each month. The program starts January 1 (or June 1). The various groups that people work with will be featured in company publications.

As Vice President of Human Resources, write a memo to all employees announcing this new program.

Hints:

- Pick a business, government, or nonprofit organization that you know something about.
- What proportion of your employees are already involved in volunteer work?
- Is community service or "giving back" consistent with your corporate mission?
- Some employees won't be able or won't want to participate. What is the benefit for them in working for a company that has such a program?
- Will promoting community participation help your organization attract and retain workers?

9.22 Announcing an Employee Fitness Center

Your company is ready to open an employee fitness center with on-site aerobics and yoga classes, exercycles, tread mills, and weight machines. The center will be open 6 am to 10 pm daily; at least one qualified instructor will be on duty at all times. Employees get first preference; if there is extra room, clients, spouses, and children 14 and older may also use the facilities. Locker rooms and showers will also be available.

Your company hopes that the fitness center will help out-of-shape employees get the exercise they need to be more productive. Other companies have saved between $2.30 and $10.10 for every $1.00 spent on wellness programs. The savings come from lower claims on medical insurance, less absenteeism, and greater productivity.

Write the memo announcing the center.

Hints:

- Who pays the medical insurance for employees? If the employer pays, then savings from healthier employees will pay for the center. If another payment plan is in effect, you'll need a different explanation for the company's decision to open the fitness center.
- Stress benefits apart from the company's saving money. How can easier access to exercise help employees? What do they do? How can exercise reduce stress, improve strength, help employees manage chronic illnesses such as diabetes and high blood pressure, and increase productivity at work?
- What kind of record does the company have of helping employees be healthy? Is the fitness center a departure for the company, or does the company have a history of company sports teams, stop-smoking clinics, and the like?
- What is the company's competitive position? If the company is struggling, you'll need to convince readers that the fitness center is a good use of scarce funds. If the company is doing well, show how having fit employees can make people even more productive.
- Stress fun as a benefit. How can access to the center make employees' lives more enjoyable?

9.23 Announcing New Smoking Policy

During a recent board meeting, your organization's officers decided to respond to complaints from workers and clients about smokers who gather outside the main entrance to your office building. Complaints ranged from the effects of secondhand smoke to the message the smokers shed on the organization's image to outside clients who need to enter the building. The board decided that smoking will be allowed only in a designated area at the far end of the parking lot. Smokers can no longer congregate near the building's main entrance.

As vice president, write a memo to all employees announcing the immediate change in the smoking policy.

In addition, write a memo to your instructor that analyzes your rhetorical situation (context, audiences, and purposes) and the ethical decisions you had to make to construct this memo.

Hints:

- Pick a business, government, or nonprofit organization that you know something about.
- What benefits can you stress to employees about the new policy?
- Some employees, particularly those who smoke, may be disgruntled with the new policy. What benefits can you stress for them and how will you overcome their negative feelings?

9.24 Providing Information to Job Applicants

Your company is in a prime vacation spot, and as personnel manager you get many letters from students asking about summer jobs. Company policy is to send everyone an application for employment, a list of the jobs you expect to have open that summer with the rate of pay for each, a description of benefits for seasonal employees, and an interview schedule. Candidates must come for an interview at their own expense and should call to schedule a time in advance. Competition is keen: Only a small percentage of those interviewed will be hired.

Write a form letter to students who've written to you asking about summer jobs. Give them the basic information about the hiring procedure and tell them what to do next. Be realistic about their chances, but maintain their interest in working for you.

9.25 Announcing a Premium Holiday

Rather than paying fees to an insurer, your company is self-insured. That is, you set aside corporate funds to pay for medical bills. If claims are light, the company saves money.

Employees pay a monthly fee for part of the amount of their health insurance. However, with one month to go in the fiscal year, you have more than enough set aside to cover possible costs. You're going to pass along some of the savings to employees (who, by staying healthy, have kept medical costs down). Next month will be a "premium holiday." You will not deduct the monthly premium from employees' checks. As a result, they will have a slightly higher take-home pay next month. The holiday is just for one month; after it, the premium for health insurance will again be deducted each month.

Write a memo to all employees.

9.26 Announcing a Tuition Reimbursement Program

Your organization has decided to encourage employees to take courses by reimbursing each eligible employee a maximum of $3,500 in tuition and fees during any one calendar year. Anyone who wants to participate in the program must apply before the first class meeting; the application must be signed by the employee's immediate supervisor. The Office of Human Resources will evaluate applications. That office has application forms; it also has catalogs from nearby schools and colleges.

The only courses employees may choose are those either related to the employee's current position (or to a position in the company that the employee might hold someday) or part of a job-related degree program. Again, the degree must be one that would help the employee's current position or that would qualify him or her for a promotion or transfer in the organization.

Only tuition and fees are covered, not books or supplies. People whose applications are approved will be reimbursed when they have completed the course with a grade of C or better. An employee cannot be reimbursed until he or she submits a copy of the approved application, an official grade report, and a statement of the tuition paid. If someone is eligible for other financial aid (scholarship, veterans benefits), the company will pay tuition costs not covered by that aid as long as the employee does not receive more than $3,500 and as long as the total tuition reimbursement does not exceed the actual cost of tuition and fees.

Part-time employees are not eligible; full-time employees must work at the company a year before they can apply to participate in the program. Courses may be at any appropriate level (high school, college, or graduate). However, the Internal Revenue Service currently requires workers to pay tax on any reimbursement for graduate programs. Undergraduate and basic education reimbursements of $3,500 or less a year are not taxed.

As Director of Human Resources, write a memo to all employees explaining this new benefit.

Hints:

- Pick an organization you know something about. What do its employees do? What courses or degrees might help them do their jobs better?
- How much education do employees already have? How do they feel about formal schooling?
- The information in the problem is presented in a confusing order. Put related items together.
- The problem stresses the limits of the policy. Without changing the provisions, present them positively.
- How will having a better educated workforce help the organization? Think about the challenges the organization faces, its competitive environment, and so forth.

9.27 Summarizing Information

Summarize one or more of the following:

1. An article from a recent edition of *Bloomberg Businessweek* or *Harvard Business Review.*
2. A tip from Jakob Nielsen's Alertboxes, http://www.alertbox.com.
3. An article about college, career development, or job searching from Quintessential Careers, http://www.quintcareers.com/articles.html.
4. Online information about options for recycling or donating used, outdated computers.
5. Options for consolidating student loans and other finances.
6. Online information about protecting your credit card or debit card.
7. An article or web page assigned by your instructor.

As your instructor directs,

a. Write a summary of no more than 100 words.
b. Write a 250- to 300-word summary.
c. Write a one-page summary.
d. In a small group compare your summaries. How did the content of the summaries vary? How do you account for any differences?

9.28 Writing a Thank-You Letter

Write a thank-you letter to someone who has helped you achieve your goals.

As your instructor directs,

a. Turn in a copy of the letter.
b. Mail the letter to the person who helped you.
c. Write a memo to your instructor explaining the situation and choices you made in writing the thank-you letter.

CHAPTER 10

Delivering Negative Messages

Chapter Outline

Newsworthy Communication

Metaphors in Negative News

Sharing negative messages is never easy, but announcing to all of your employees that your company is failing could be the most difficult message a CEO has to share. But in February 2011, only days before announcing a major deal with Microsoft, Nokia CEO Stephen Elop did just that.

Nokia, in spite of being the world's largest maker of mobile phones, has been struggling to maintain its market lead in the face of increased competition from Apple's iPhone and Google's range of Android handsets. With shrinking demand for feature phones and no hit smartphone under its belt, Nokia is in real danger.

> *"By the time Elop finishes the memo, he has delivered the message . . . as an opportunity to innovate and shape the future of mobile communication."*

Elop shared the harsh realities of the situation with all Nokia employees in an internal memo, framing the entire message as an opportunity to improve. He began with a dramatic story: an oil platform worker forced to choose between a fire behind him and the icy North Atlantic waters in front of him. Elop then challenged his workers: "We too, are standing on a 'burning platform,' and we must decide how we are going to change our behaviour."

Using that story as a frame, Elop then outlined the advances of Nokia's competitors and Nokia's own missteps. "While competitors poured flames on our market share, what happened at Nokia? We fell behind, we missed big trends, and we lost time. . . . We poured gasoline on our own burning platform. I believe we have lacked accountability and leadership to align and direct the company through these disruptive times. We had a series of misses. We haven't been delivering innovation fast enough. We're not collaborating internally. Nokia, our platform is burning."

The 1,300-word memo details market losses, failed devices, corporate failures, and bad decisions. And yet, by the time Elop finishes the memo, he has delivered the message not as the death-knell of the company, but as an opportunity to innovate and shape the future of mobile communication. He concludes his memo by returning to the burning platform once again: "The burning platform, upon which the man found himself, caused the man to shift his behaviour, and take a bold and brave step into an uncertain future. He was able to tell his story. Now, we have a great opportunity to do the same."

By delivering his negative message in a carefully constructed memo, Stephen Elop avoided creating further problems for an already struggling company. Rather, he took the bold step of being direct and honest and asked for all of his employees to help Nokia regain its lead in the market.

Sources: Chris Ziegler, "Nokia CEO Stephen Elop Rallies Troops in Brutally Honest 'Burning Platform' Memo," Engadget.com, February 8, 2011, http://www.engadget.com/2011/02/08/nokia-ceo-stephen-elop-rallies-troops-in-brutally-honest-burnin/.

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will know

LO 10-1 Different ways to organize negative messages.

LO 10-2 Ways to construct the different parts of negative messages.

LO 10-3 How to improve the tone of negative messages.

LO 10-4 Ways to construct different kinds of negative messages.

In a negative message, the basic information we have to convey is negative; we expect the audience to be disappointed or angry. Some jobs entail conveying more negative messages than others. Customer service representatives, employee relations personnel, and insurance agents all have to say no on a regular basis.

Negative communications such as refusals, rejections, recalls, and apologies are hard to compose. Yet they are so important. Good ones restore corporate reputations as well as customer and employee goodwill. Bad ones can lead to lawsuits. Corporate officers can be promoted or fired on the basis of a negative communication. Employees reporting negative situations (whistle-blowing) are frequently penalized; one study found the percentage being penalized to be 82%. In spite of the penalties, the study found that 19% of corporate fraud was uncovered by employees.[1]

Negative messages are a vital part of business and administrative communication. One Silicon Valley company calculated the costs of negative communications from a sales person known for negative interpersonal skills and e-mails. Their costs included managerial time, HR time, anger management training and counseling, among others, and came to $160,000 for just one year. The company also deducted 60% of that cost from the employee's bonus. A British study estimated the costs of bullying in firms with 1,000 employees to be about $2 million a year per firm.[2]

The other side of the coin, and a classic illustration of how to handle negatives, is the 1982 Tylenol recall. When Johnson and Johnson learned that seven people in the Chicago area had died from cyanide-laced Tylenol capsules, they immediately communicated their knowledge. They ordered the entire supply withdrawn from store shelves, and they offered to replace Tylenol capsules in people's homes with tablets. This decision cost the company tens of millions of dollars. But it was the right decision. When Tylenol was released again several months later in new, tamper-resistant containers, it recovered its market share. The company's forthright communications of the situation confirmed its integrity.[3] This chapter will follow the 1982 Tylenol path and look at some of the preferred ways to convey negative messages.

Negative messages include rejections and refusals, announcements of policy changes that do not benefit the audience, requests the audience will see as insulting or intrusive, negative performance appraisals, disciplinary notices, and product recalls or notices of defects.

A negative message always has several purposes:

Primary purposes:

- To give the audience the bad news.
- To have the audience read, understand, and accept the message.
- To maintain as much goodwill as possible.

Sometimes corporations earn more bad publicity by keeping quiet about negative events than they would by explaining them. Rolls-Royce received much negative publicity when it delayed responding to the failure of one of its engines on an Airbus A380 superjumbo jet.

Secondary purposes:

- To maintain, as much as possible, a good image of the communicator and the communicator's organization.
- To reduce or eliminate future communication on the same subject so the message doesn't create more work for the sender.

In many negative situations, the communicator and audience will continue to deal with each other. Even when further interaction is unlikely (for example, when a company rejects a job applicant or refuses to renew a customer's insurance), the firm wants anything the audience may say about the company to be positive or neutral rather than negative.

Some messages that at first appear to be negative can be structured to create a positive feeling: a decision that may be negative in the short term may be shown to be a positive one in the long term; or the communication of a problem can be directly connected to an effective solution.

Even when it is not possible to make the audience happy with the news we must convey, we still want the audience to feel that

- They have been taken seriously.
- Our decision is fair and reasonable.
- If they were in our shoes, they would make the same decision.

ORGANIZING NEGATIVE MESSAGES LO 10-1

The best way to organize a negative message depends on your audience and on the severity of the negative information. This chapter presents several possible patterns and connects them with their most likely contexts. Be sure to always consider your particular situation when choosing an organizing pattern.

Giving Bad News to Clients and Customers

When you must give bad news to clients and customers, you need to be clear, but you also need to maintain goodwill. People are increasingly skeptical and have a hard time trusting organizations. One study found that in order to

Delivering Cancer News

Oncologists, doctors who specialize in treating cancer, have one of the toughest jobs when it comes to delivering negative news. These doctors often inform patients that they have a difficult battle to face or that there is almost no hope and death may be imminent.

Some medical schools now insist that students learn how to deliver bad news to patients, particularly those suffering from cancer. These medical programs have added classes where students learn to give the negative news through verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. Some of these schools also use role-playing with patient actors. The medical students have to inform the actors of an unwanted diagnosis and appropriately deal with the actor's response. Some studies suggest that the manner in which bad news is presented to a patient has significant effects on their overall health.

As an additional resource for doctors to be upfront with their patients, the American Society of Clinical Oncology has developed a booklet. It helps patients understand their options when they learn they have cancer. The goal is to help improve their quality of life, maximize their remaining time, and plan for end-of-life care. The society believes that currently less than 40% of patients have conversations with their doctors about their options.

Adapted from Dawn Sagario, "Doctors Learn to Convey Facts in Appropriate, Thoughtful Way," *Des Moines Register,* October 17, 2006, E1, E2; "Oncology Group Promotes Candor on End-of-Life-Care," *Des Moines Register,* February 8, 2011, 6A.

Figure 10.1 How to Organize Negative Messages

Negative messages to clients and customers	Negative messages to superiors	Negative messages to peers and subordinates
1. **When you have a reason that the audience will understand and accept, give the reason before the refusal.** A good reason prepares the audience to expect the refusal. 2. **Give the negative information or refusal just once, clearly.** Inconspicuous refusals can be missed altogether, making it necessary to say *no* a second time. 3. **Present an alternative or compromise, if one is available.** An alternative not only gives the audience another way to get what they want but also suggests that you care about them and helping them meet their needs. 4. **End with a positive, forward-looking statement.**	1. **Describe the problem.** Tell what's wrong, clearly and unemotionally. 2. **Tell how it happened.** Provide the background. What underlying factors led to this specific problem? 3. **Describe the options for fixing it.** If one option is clearly best, you may need to discuss only one. But if your superiors will think of other options, or if different people will judge the options differently, describe all the options, giving their advantages and disadvantages. 4. **Recommend a solution and ask for action.** Ask for approval so that you can make the necessary changes to fix the problem.	1. **Describe the problem.** Tell what's wrong, clearly and unemotionally. 2. **Present an alternative or compromise, if one is available.** An alternative not only gives the audience another way to get what they want but also suggests that you care about them and helping them meet their needs. 3. **If possible, ask for input or action.** People in the audience may be able to suggest solutions. And workers who help make a decision are far more likely to accept the consequences.

accept a message as true, more than 70% of people need exposure to it more than three times.[4] Compromises or alternatives can help you achieve clarity and goodwill. See the first column in Figure 10.1 for a way to organize these messages.

Figure 10.2 illustrates another basic pattern for negative messages. This letter omits the reason for the policy change, probably because the change benefits the company, not the customer. Putting the bad news first (though pairing it immediately with an alternative) makes it more likely that the recipient will read the letter. If this letter seemed to be just a routine renewal, or if it opened with the good news that the premium was lower, few recipients would read the letter carefully, and many would not read it at all. Then, if they had accidents and found that their coverage was reduced, they'd blame the company for not communicating clearly. Emphasizing the negative here is both good ethics and good business.

Giving Bad News to Superiors

Your superior expects you to solve minor problems by yourself. But sometimes, solving a problem requires more authority or resources than you have. When you give bad news to a superior, also recommend a way to deal with the problem. Turn the negative message into a persuasive one. See the middle column in Figure 10.1.

Giving Bad News to Peers and Subordinates

When passing along serious bad news to peers and subordinates, many people use the organization suggested in the last column in Figure 10.1.

Figure 10.2 A Negative Letter

Vickers

Insurance Company

3373 Forbes Avenue
Rosemont, PA 19010
(215) 572-0100

Negative information highlighted so reader won't ignore message

Liability Coverage
Is Being Discontinued—
Here's How to Replace It!

Negative
Alternative

Dear Policyholder:

Negative

When your auto insurance is renewed, it will no longer include liability coverage unless you select the new Assurance Plan. Here's why.

Liability coverage is being discontinued. It, and the part of the premium which paid for it, will be dropped from all policies when they are renewed.

Positive information underlined for emphasis

This change could leave a gap in your protection. But you can replace the old Liability Coverage with Vickers' new Assurance Plan.

Alternative

No reason is given. The change probably benefits the company rather than the reader, so it is omitted.

With the new Assurance Plan, you receive benefits for litigation or awards arising from an accident—regardless of who's at fault. The cost for the Assurance Plan at any level is based on the ages of drivers, where you live, your driving record, and other factors. If these change before your policy is renewed, the cost of your Assurance Plan may also change. The actual cost will be listed in your renewal statement.

To sign up for the Assurance Plan, just check the level of coverage you want on the enclosed form and return it in the postage-paid envelope within 14 days. You'll be assured of the coverage you select.

Forward-looking ending emphasizes reader's choice

Sincerely,

C. J. Morgan

C. J. Morgan
President

Alternative

P.S. The Assurance Plan protects you against possible legal costs arising from an accident. Sign up for the plan today and receive full coverage from Vickers.

No serious negative (such as being downsized or laid off) should come as a complete surprise, nor should it be delivered by e-mail. Researchers Timmerman and Harrison note that managers may be inclined to use electronic forms of communication to deliver bad news, but they should resist the temptation in most situations. Their study outlines four factors that should be considered when choosing a medium for delivering bad news: the

When Chrysler cut 25% of its dealers, it sent the bad news the same day it went public with the list of cut dealerships. Thus, many dealers first heard about their cuts on the news, not from Chrysler's letter, and created even more bad press for Chrysler.

severity of the message, the complexity of the explanation, the type of explanation, and the relationship between the superior and subordinates. Timmerman and Harrison suggest managers must always juggle the efficiency of delivering the message with its impact on receivers. Typically, managers who deliver bad news in face-to-face settings are more appreciated and accepted by employees.[5]

Managers can prepare for possible negatives by giving full information as it becomes available. It is also possible to let the people who will be affected by a decision participate in setting the criteria. Someone who has bought into the criteria for retaining workers is more likely to accept decisions using such criteria. And in some cases, the synergism of groups may make possible ideas that management didn't think of or rejected as "unacceptable."

Some workplaces incorporate employee suggestion systems to help reduce excess costs and improve organizational effectiveness. Nokia, for example, runs a BlogHub and Sphere. Both are social media sites that employees can use to critique products, rant about the company, and ask questions. Mangers hope that these sites, which allow employees to give anonymous honest opinions, will spawn new ideas and innovations.[6]

When the bad news is less serious, as in Figure 10.3, try using the pattern in the first column of Figure 10.1 unless your knowledge of the audience suggests that another pattern will be more effective. The audience's reaction is influenced by the following factors:

- Do you and the audience have a good relationship?
- Does the organization treat people well?
- Has the audience been warned of possible negatives?
- Has the audience bought into the criteria for the decision?
- Do communications after the negative decision build goodwill?

Figure 10.3 A Negative Memo to Subordinates

FIRST BANK
Great Plains, Nebraska

Memo

Date: January 10, 2012
To: All Employees
From: Floyd E. Mattson FEM

Subject: Group Dental Insurance

First Bank is always seeking to provide employees with a competitive benefits package that meets their needs.

In response to many requests, the Human Resource Department solicited bids for expanded dental coverage. At this time none of the responses from insurers serving our area are affordable for us. We continue to negotiate, but with costs rising at 20% per year, success seems unlikely. Other banks in the area are in a similar situation, so our current benefits package matches or exceeds what they offer.

Reason given before negative

Positive

First Bank continues to offer enrollment in an employee-funded group plan with ABC Dental. The coverage includes 37 dentists in our county and pays 50 percent of allowable fees. Many of our employees have found this coverage helpful. Employees also may use their medical savings account for dental care. Consider one of these options for the present, and First Bank will continue to investigate new opportunities for expanded coverage.

Alternatives

Positive close

THE PARTS OF A NEGATIVE MESSAGE LO 10-2

This section provides more information about wording each part of a negative message.

Subject Lines

Many negative messages put the topic, but not the specific negative, in the subject line.

Subject: Status of Conversion Table Program

Other negative message subject lines focus on solving the problem.

Subject: Improving Our Subscription Letter

Use a negative subject line in messages when you think readers may ignore what they believe is a routine message. Also use a negative subject line when the reader needs the information to make a decision or to act.

> Subject: Elevator to Be Out Friday, June 17

Many people do not read all their messages, and a neutral subject line may lead them to ignore the message.

Buffers

Traditionally, textbooks recommended that negative messages open with buffers. A buffer is a neutral or positive statement that allows you to delay the negative. Some research suggests that buffers do not make readers respond more positively,[7] and good buffers are hard to write. However, in special situations, you may want to use a buffer. The first sentence in the First Bank letter (Figure 10.3) is a buffer.

To be effective, a buffer must put the reader in a good frame of mind, not give the bad news but not imply a positive answer either, and provide a natural transition to the body of the letter. The kinds of statements most often used as buffers are good news, facts and chronologies of events, references to enclosures, thanks, and statements of principle.

1. **Start with any good news or positive elements the letter contains.**

> Starting Thursday, June 26, you'll have easier access to your money 24 hours a day at First National Bank.

Letter announcing that the drive-up windows will be closed for two days while new automatic teller machines are installed

2. **State a fact or provide a chronology of events.**

> As a result of the new graduated dues schedule—determined by vote of the Delegate Assembly last December and subsequently endorsed by the Executive Council—members are now asked to establish their own dues rate and to calculate the total amount of their remittance.

Announcement of a new dues structure that will raise most members' dues

3. **Refer to enclosures in the letter.**

> A new sticker for your car is enclosed. You may pick up additional ones in the office if needed.

Letter announcing increase in parking rental rates

4. **Thank the reader for something he or she has done.**

> Thank you for scheduling appointments for me with so many senior people at First National Bank. My visit there March 14 was very informative.

Letter refusing a job offer

How to Tell a Partner about an STD

"Dating etiquette demands it—and so does public health. If you have a sexually transmitted disease, you need to tell your partner.

But finding the right moment for that awkward conversation isn't easy. Whether out of fear, shame, or anger, people diagnosed with STDs often fail to tell.

So how about sending an e-card? That's an approach developed in part by the San Francisco Department of Public Health. Called the inSPOT program, it lets you send specialized STD alert e-cards to break the news. Since its launch a few years ago, more than 30,000 people have sent more than 49,500 cards. Considering the 19 million new STD cases diagnosed each year in the U.S., that's a drop in the bucket, but it's certainly a step in the right direction.

E-cards come in various designs, and the sender can choose a specific STD from a pull-down menu. One message reads: 'It's not what you brought to the party, it's what you left with. I left with an STD. You might have, too. Get checked out soon.' It then directs recipients to testing centers in their area. The e-cards can be sent anonymously, and according to inSPOT, it doesn't collect data about site users or card recipients."

5. **State a general principle.**

> Good drivers should pay substantially less for their auto insurance. The Good Driver Plan was created to reward good drivers (those with five-year accident-free records) with our lowest available rates. A change in the plan, effective January 1, will help keep those rates low.

Letter announcing that the company will now count traffic tickets, not just accidents, in calculating insurance rates—a change that will raise many people's premiums

Some audiences will feel betrayed by messages whose positive openers delay the central negative point. Therefore, use a buffer only when the audience (individually or culturally) values harmony or when the buffer serves another purpose. For example, when you must thank the reader somewhere in the letter, putting the "thank you" in the first paragraph allows you to start on a positive note.

Buffers are hard to write. Even if you think the reader would prefer to be let down easily, use a buffer only when you can write a good one.

Reasons

Research shows that audiences who described themselves as "totally surprised" by negative news had many more negative feelings and described their feelings as being stronger than did those who expected the negative.[8] A clear and convincing reason prepares the audience for the negative, resulting in people who more easily accept it.

The following reason is inadequate.

Weak reason: The goal of the Knoxville CHARGE-ALL Center is to provide our customers faster, more personalized service. Since you now live outside the Knoxville CHARGE-ALL service area, we can no longer offer you the advantages of a local CHARGE-ALL Center.

If the reader says, "I don't care if my bills are slow and impersonal," will the company let the reader keep the card? No. The real reason for the negative is that the bank's franchise allows it to have cardholders only in a given geographic region.

Real reason: Each local CHARGE-ALL center is permitted to offer accounts to customers in a several-state area. The Knoxville CHARGE-ALL center serves customers east of the Mississippi. You can continue to use your current card until it expires. When that happens, you'll need to open an account with a CHARGE-ALL center that serves Texas.

Don't hide behind "company policy": your audience will assume the policy is designed to benefit you at their expense. If possible, show how your audience benefits from the policy. If they do not benefit, don't mention policy at all.

Weak reason: I cannot write an insurance policy for you because company policy does not allow me to do so.

Better reason: Gorham insures cars only when they are normally garaged at night. Standard insurance policies cover a wider variety of risks and charge higher fees. Limiting the policies we write gives Gorham customers the lowest possible rates for auto insurance.

Avoid saying that you *cannot* do something. Most negative messages exist because the communicator or company has chosen certain policies or cutoff points. In the example above, the company could choose to insure a wider variety of customers if it wanted to do so.

As a middle manager, you will often enforce policies that you did not design and announce decisions that you did not make. Don't pass the buck by saying, "This was a terrible decision." Carelessly criticizing your superiors is never a good idea.

If you have several reasons for saying *no*, use only those that are strong and watertight. If you give five reasons and the audience dismisses two of the them, the audience may feel that they've won and should get the request.

Weak reason: You cannot store large bulky items in the dormitory over the summer because moving them into and out of storage would tie up the stairs and the elevators just at the busiest times when people are moving in and out.

If students say they will move large items before or after the two days when most people are moving in or out, you are still not going to grant the request, because you do not have the storage room. If you do not have a good reason, omit the reason rather than use a weak one. Even if you have a strong reason, omit it if it makes the company look bad.

Reason that hurts company: Our company is not hiring at the present time because profits are down. In fact, the downturn has prompted top management to reduce the salaried staff by 5% just this month, with perhaps more reductions to come.

Better: Our company does not have any openings now.

Refusals

Deemphasize the refusal by putting it in the same paragraph as the reason, rather than in a paragraph by itself.

Sometimes you may be able to imply the refusal rather than stating it directly.

Direct refusal: You cannot get insurance for just one month.

Implied refusal: The shortest term for an insurance policy is six months.

Be sure the implication is crystal clear. Any message can be misunderstood, but an optimistic or desperate audience is particularly unlikely to understand a negative message. One of your purposes in a negative message is to close the door on the subject. You do not want to have to send a second message saying that the real answer is *no.*

Alternatives

Giving your audience an alternative or a compromise, if one is available, is a good idea for several reasons:

- It offers the audience another way to get what they want.
- It suggests that you really care about your audience and about helping to meet their needs.
- It enables your audience to reestablish the psychological freedom you limited when you said *no.*
- It allows you to end on a positive note and to present yourself and your organization as positive, friendly, and helpful.

When you give an alternative, give your audience all the information they need to act on it, but don't take the necessary steps. Let your audience decide whether to try the alternative.

Waiting Impacts Business

The longer customers wait, the more annoyed they can become. A team of marketing professors examined the waiting experiences of 844 customers at banks, hair salons, restaurants, and oil change shops. The researchers identified five pieces of advice that affect how customers respond to waiting.

1. Give customers a focus other than the wait: If customers are doing something, they are less focused on how long the wait lasts.
2. Try to reduce anxiety of waiting: Providing wait estimates or music can help reduce customer anxiety.
3. Show fairness in waiting: If customers are waiting, they don't want to see (or perceive) other people getting special treatment.
4. Create a relaxed environment: Make sure seating, temperatures, and noise levels are all appropriate when customers wait.
5. Support regular customers.

Adapted from David Elbert, "Waiting Warps Customers' Sense of Time, Raises Dander," *Des Moines Register,* November 29, 2009, ID, 2D.

Negative messages limit your audience's freedom. People may respond to a limitation of freedom by asserting their freedom in some other arena. Sharon and Jack Brehm calls this phenomenon **psychological reactance.**[9] Psychological reactance is at work when a customer who has been denied credit no longer buys even on a cash basis, a subordinate who has been passed over for a promotion gets back at the company by deliberately doing a poor job, or someone who has been laid off sabotages the company's computers.

An alternative allows your audience to react in a way that doesn't hurt you. By letting your audience decide for themselves whether they want the alternative, you allow them to reestablish their sense of psychological freedom.

The specific alternative will vary depending on the circumstances. In Figure 10.4, the company suggests using a different part. In different circumstances, the writer might offer different alternatives.

Endings

If you have a good alternative, refer to it in your ending: "If you can use A515 grade 70, please let me know."

The best endings look positively to the future.

> Wherever you have your account, you'll continue to get all the service you've learned to expect from CHARGE-ALL, and the convenience of charging items at over a million stores, restaurants, and hotels in the United States and abroad–and in Knoxville, too, whenever you come back to visit!

Letter refusing to continue charge account for a customer who has moved

Avoid endings that seem insincere.

> We are happy to have been of service, and should we be able to assist you in the future, please contact us.

This ending lacks you-attitude and would not be good even in a positive message. In a situation where the company has just refused to help, it's likely to sound sarcastic.

APOLOGIES

Apologizing is never an easy task, but it's something most of us do. New research suggests that people, on average, say they're sorry four times a week. And most people have an easier time saying they're sorry to friends and strangers than they do family members or partners.[10]

Organizations have to routinely offer apologies, too. The news frequently has stories of corporations providing apologies. Southwest Airlines CEO offered an apology to customers and safety regulators for poor maintenance measures in an effort to restore a tarnished reputation.[11] Descriptions of other apologies from JetBlue and the *Los Angeles Times* can be found in sidebars in this chapter.

Timing is crucial for apologies. After Toyota vehicles had an issue with sticking gas pedals that forced a recall of about 6 million cars, they issued full page pledges in most major newspapers to their customers on how they're fixing the situation. The president of Toyota, Akio Toyoda, also issued a formal apology. However, some critics were upset that Toyota Motors sent an American sales executive, Jim Lentz, to initially handle questions rather than Toyado himself as the face of the company. Others believe that Toyota mishandled the situation by offering a slow response, minimizing the problem, and delaying the recall.[12]

Disgruntled Customer with a Hammer

Providing good customer service should be a goal of any business. When it's not, customers get angry and can exert their frustrations in negative ways.

In Bristow, Virginia, Mona Shaw, a 75-year-old woman who wanted phone, Internet, and cable service installed, vented her frustrations with Comcast by going to their office and smashing a keyboard, monitor, and telephone . . . with a hammer.

She claims her frustration was the result of poor customer service. She waited for an installation technician who showed up two days late. Once there, he never finished the job. To top things off, two days later Comcast cut all her services. The tipping point came when she waited two hours to talk to a Comcast manager before being informed he had left for the day.

For her brash response, Shaw received a fine and three-month suspended sentence. She is also forbidden to go near the Comcast office. She eventually got her phone, Internet, and cable working, but with different providers.

Adapted from "Woman, 75, Fined for Smashing Comcast Office with Hammer in Customer Service Dispute," *Associated Press Archive,* October 19, 2007.

Figure 10.4 A Refusal with an Alternative

ROYSNER
Steel Fabrication

"Serving the needs of America since 1890"

1800 Olney Avenue • Philadelphia, PA 19140 • 215•555•7800 • Fax: 215•555•9803

April 27, 2012

Mr. H. J. Moody
Canton Corporation
2407 North Avenue
Kearney, NE 68847

Subject: Bid Number 5853, Part Number D-40040

Dear Mr. Moody:

Buffer Thank you for requesting our quotation on your Part No. D-40040.

Reason Your blueprints call for flame-cut rings 1/2" thick A516 grade 70. To use that grade, we'd have to grind down from 1" thick material. However, if you can use A515 grade 70, which we stock in 1/2" thick, you can cut the price by more than half.

Quantity	Description	Gross Weight	Price/Each
75	Rings Drawing D-40040, A516 Grade 70 1" thick x 6" O.D. x 2.8" I.D. ground to .5" thick.	12 lbs.	$15.08
75	Rings Drawing D-40040, A515 Grade 70 1/2" thick x 6" O.D. x 2.8" I.D.	6 lbs.	$6.91

Alternative (Depending on circumstances, different alternatives may exist.)

If you can use A515 grade 70, please let me know.

Leaves decision up to reader to re-establish psychological freedom

Sincerely,

Valerie Prynne

Valerie Prynne

VP:wc

Not all negative messages, however, need to include apologies. In business documents, apologize only when you are at fault. If you need to apologize, do it early, briefly, and sincerely. Do so only once, early in the message. Do not dwell on the bad things that have happened. The reader already knows this negative information. Instead, focus on what you have done to correct the situation.

Schwinn needed a new product line to attract sophisticated cyclists. This apology for its old, boring line moves quickly to a discussion of its new technology. By evoking an experience every cyclist has had, the headline also suggests that falling is a minor event.

No explicit apology is necessary if the error is small and if you are correcting the mistake.

Negative: We're sorry we got the nutrition facts wrong in the recipe.

Better: You're right. We're glad you made us aware of this. The correct amounts are 2 grams of fat and 4 grams of protein.

Do not apologize when you are not at fault. The phrase "I'm sorry" is generally interpreted to mean the sorry person is accepting blame or responsibility. When you have done everything you can and when a delay or problem is due to circumstances beyond your control, you aren't at fault and don't need to apologize. It may, however, be appropriate to include an explanation so the reader knows you weren't negligent. In the previous example acknowledging an error, the writer might indicate the source of the error (such as a reference book or a government website). If the news is bad, put the explanation first. If you have good news for the reader, put it before your explanation.

Negative: I'm sorry that I could not answer your question sooner. I had to wait until the sales figures for the second quarter were in.

Better (neutral or bad news): We needed the sales figures for the second quarter to answer your question. Now that they're in, I can tell you that. . . .

Better (good news): The new advertising campaign is a success. The sales figures for the second quarter are finally in, and they show that. . . .

If the delay or problem is long or large, it is good you-attitude to ask the audience whether they want to confirm the original plan or make different arrangements.

Negative: I'm sorry that the chairs will not be ready by August 25 as promised.

Better: Because of a strike against the manufacturer, the desk chairs you ordered will not be ready until November. Do you want to keep that order, or would you like to look at the models available from other suppliers?

Star Apology

The *Los Angeles Times* ran an article that implied associates of rapper Sean Combs (a.k.a. "Diddy") carried out the 1994 robbery and shooting of rapper Tupac Shakur, and that Combs knew about it ahead of time. The *Times* initially reported that FBI records, interviews with people at the crime scene, and statements to the FBI by an informant were the source of the article. However, none were actually named in the article.

Combs and his lawyers were outraged about the attacks on his character and stated that he had no involvement in the murder.

After The Smoking Gun website posted doubt about the validity of the FBI documents, the *Times* ran its own investigation. The Smoking Gun noted the documents appeared to be written on a typewriter, not a computer, and contained unusual blacked-out sections. These investigations of the sources of the article led the *Times* to eventually retract its story and offer a public apology.

Public apologies are never easy but sometimes are necessary.

Adapted from "*LA Times* Apologizes, Says Documents Used for Tupac Shakur Story Likely Fabricated," *Associated Press Archive,* March 27, 2008.

JetBlue's Nightmare

On February 14, 2007, JetBlue attempted to continue operations during an ice storm. They boarded passengers and rolled planes to runways for de-icing, betting that planes would be able to take off as the storm subsided.

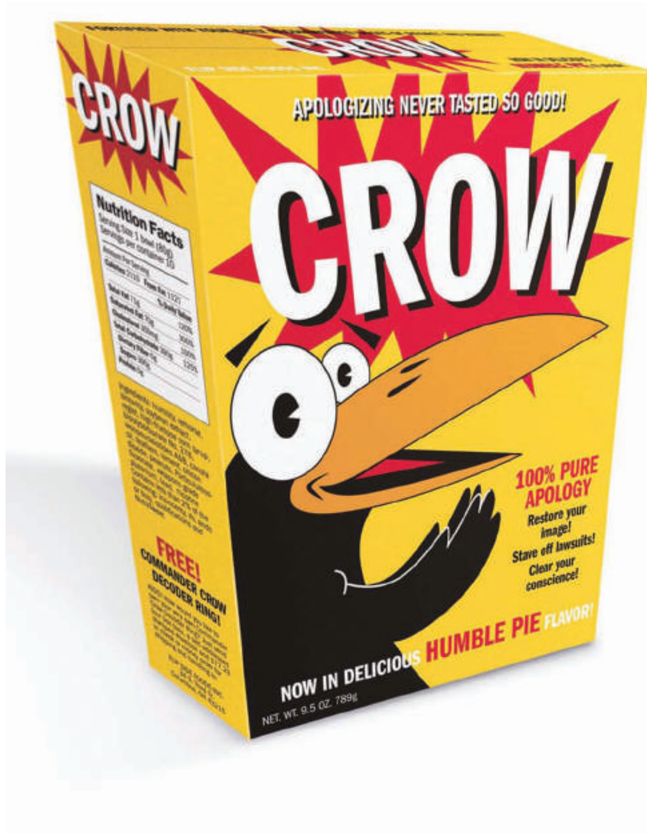
Other planes were subsequently parked at terminal gates, preventing JetBlue planes from returning to the gates to unload passengers. Hundreds of passengers were held aboard planes, some for as long as 11 hours. Thousands more passengers and mounds of baggage were stranded at the terminal.

JetBlue's problems were exacerbated by the company's poor communication:

- Posting delays for flights instead of cancellations kept passengers waiting for hours.
- Passengers stranded on planes reported they were not given information about their status because the flight crews were not being informed.
- The JetBlue phone number was overloaded. Callers experienced lengthy holds, and many could not get through at all.
- The airline's computer system and crew-scheduling software were inadequate for the task of scheduling crews after the storm, slowing the return to full service.

JetBlue publicly apologized and offered refunds, free flight vouchers, and penalty-free rebooking. Besides the damage to the company's reputation, estimated costs to JetBlue included $14 million in customer refunds, $16 million in vouchers, and $4 million in staff overtime.

Sources: Allan Sloan, with Temma Ehrenfeld, "Skies Were Cloudy before Jet Blew It," *Newsweek,* March 5, 2007, 26; and Jesus Sanchez and Alana Semuels, "JetBlue Struggles to Get Past Last Week's Fiasco," *Chicago Tribune,* February 19, 2007.



This cereal box mocks the accelerating trend for apologies in the workplace.

Source: The Denver Post and The Flip Side Staff, "Eating Crow," *Columbus Dispatch,* September 8, 2004, F8.

Sometimes you will be in a fortunate position where you can pair your apology with an appropriate benefit.

- When the Hallmark Flowers web site stopped taking orders the week before Mother's Day, Hallmark sent an e-mail asking customers to try again and offering free shipping for a day.[13]
- When Apple sharply cut the price on the iPhone a few months after it came on the market, Steve Jobs offered an apology to earlier buyers and provided them with a $100 Apple store credit.
- Many airlines now have computer programs that generate apology letters for customers on flights with lengthy delays or other major problems; the letters frequently offer additional frequent-flyer miles or discount vouchers for future trips.[14]

Sincere apologies go hand in hand with efforts to rectify the problem. Some hospitals have found that disclosing medical errors, apologizing, and quickly offering a financial settlement to the victims actually reduces litigation and prevents future mistakes. After a program was established at the University of Illinois Medical Center in Chicago to help communicate with wronged patients, the number of lawsuits declined 40% in four years, even though the number of procedures increased by 23%. When mistakes happen, the hospital also tries to establish new protocols to avoid similar problems in the future.[15]

It's easy to get angry in negative situations; avoid that temptation.

TONE IN NEGATIVE MESSAGES LO 10-3

Tone—the implied attitude of the author toward the reader and the subject—is particularly important when you want readers to feel that you have taken their requests seriously. Check your draft carefully for positive emphasis and you-attitude (see Chapter 3), both at the level of individual words and at the level of ideas. In many situations, empathizing with your audience will help you create a more humane message.

Figure 10.5 lists some of the words and phrases to avoid in negative messages. Figure 3.3 in Chapter 3 suggests more negative words to avoid.

Even the physical appearance and timing of a message can convey tone. An obvious form rejection letter suggests that the writer has not given much consideration to the reader's application. An immediate negative suggests that the rejection didn't need any thought. A negative delivered just before a major holiday seems especially unfeeling.

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES FOR NEGATIVE SITUATIONS

Whenever you face a negative situation, consider recasting it as a positive or persuasive message. Southwest Airlines, the low-cost airline, is famous for saying no to its customers. It says no to such common perks as reserve seats,

Figure 10.5 Avoid These Phrases in Negative Messages

Phrase	Because
I am afraid that we cannot	You aren't fearful. Don't hide behind empty phrases.
I am sorry that we are unable	You probably are able to grant the request; you simply choose not to. If you are so sorry about saying no, why don't you change your policy and say *yes*?
I am sure you will agree that	Don't assume that you can read the reader's mind.
Unfortunately	*Unfortunately* is negative in itself. It also signals that a refusal is coming.

Workplace Violence

An increasing number of people respond violently to bad news.

In August 2010, a man killed nine people at a distributor in Hartford, Connecticut, after he signed a resignation letter as the result of disciplinary action. He brought two handguns, which he used to shoot his victims, to work in a red metal lunchbox.

In another incident in July 2010, a former employee of Emcore, a fiber optics company in Albuquerque, New Mexico, killed two co-workers and himself and injured four more.

These workplace incidents are only a few of many that routinely occur in businesses. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2008, the year with the most recent statistics, 421 workers nationwide were homicide victims. Typically, workplace violence ensues when a person feels mistreated or betrayed by an organization. Many businesses now have formal workplace procedures to cope with these incidents.

Adapted from Ross Arrowsmith, "Gunman Came Prepared to Connecticut Shooting," *Workplace Violence News,* August 4, 2010, http://workplaceviolencenews.com/2010/08/04/gunman-came-prepared-to-connecticut-shooting/; Ben Casselman, "Albuquerque Shooting Leaves 3 Dead," *Wall Street Journal,* July 13, 2010, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704288204575363133284257738.html; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Workplace Shootings," July 2010, http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/osar0014.htm.

International Firing

"When doing business in another country, it is often easy to assume that things there are the same as in your country. . . . It is wise to know the proper way to dismiss an employee when working with other cultures. This is a difficult task to perform in a familiar territory but it is especially tricky when one is in a foreign country and does not always fully understand the local culture. An American manager stationed in Indonesia reportedly discovered this when he tried to fire an oil-rig employee. Rather than notifying the employee privately of this dismissal, the manager publicly told the timekeeper to send the man 'packing.' In Indonesia, this public dismissal was considered unacceptable 'loss of face' which offended both the dismissed man and his friends. So, rather than leave quietly, the man grabbed fire axes and ran after the American manager. Reportedly, the American was barely rescued in time. Obviously, it is dangerous to ignore local management practices and customs!"

Quoted from David A. Ricks, *Blunders in International Business,* 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 105.

meals, and interairline baggage transfers. But it recasts all those negatives into its two biggest positives, low-cost fares and conveniently scheduled frequent flights.[16]

Recasting the Situation as a Positive Message

If the negative information will directly lead to a benefit that you know readers want, use the pattern of organization for informative and positive messages:

Situation:	Your airline has been mailing out quarterly statements of frequent-flier miles earned. To save money, you are going to stop mailing statements and ask customers to look up that information at your website.
Negative:	Important Notice: This is your last Preferred Passenger paper statement.
Positive emphasis:	New, convenient online statements will replace this quarterly mailing. Now you can get up-to-the-minute statements of your miles earned. Choose e-mail updates or round-the-clock access to your statement at our website, www.aaaair.com. It's faster, easier, and more convenient.

After Taco Bell had a law firm voluntarily withdraw a suit that questioned the amount of meat in their ground beef, the company turned the negative situation into a positive. Taco Bell bought full pages in the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* and ran advertisements with a headline, "Thank you for suing us." They used the rest of the space to discuss the ingredients in their ground beef and to avoid a public relations scandal.[17]

Recasting the Situation as a Persuasive Message

Often a negative situation can be recast as a persuasive message. If your organization has a problem, ask the audience to help solve it. A solution that workers have created will be much easier to implement.

When the Association for Business Communication raised dues, the Executive Director wrote a persuasive letter urging members to send in renewals early so they could beat the increase. The letter shared some of the qualities of

After an alligator escaped from his cage at the Los Angeles Zoo, a spokesperson recast the negative situation as a positive by telling reporters that the escape proved the alligator was smart and healthy.

Source: Justin Scheck and Ben Worthen, "When Animals Go AWOL, Zoos Try to Tame Bad PR," *Wall Street Journal,* January 1, 2008, A1, A10.

any persuasive letter: using an attention-getting opener, offsetting the negative by setting it against the benefits of membership, telling the reader what to do, and ending with a picture of the benefit the reader received by acting. More recent increases, however, have been announced directly.

If you are criticizing someone, your real purpose may be to persuade the reader to act differently. Chapter 11 offers patterns for problem-solving persuasive messages.

VARIETIES OF NEGATIVE MESSAGES LO 10-4

Some of the most common negative messages are claims and complaints. Three of the most difficult kinds of negative messages to write are rejections and refusals, disciplinary notices and negative performance appraisals, and layoffs and firings.

Claims and Complaints

Claims and complaint messages are needed when something has gone wrong: you didn't get the files you needed in time for the report; the supplier didn't send enough parts; the copy machine breaks down daily. Many claims and complaints are handled well with a quick phone call or office visit, but sometimes you will need a paper trail.

Technology has certainly influenced the way complaints are processed. United Airlines stopped their customer relations phone service. Complaint responses are now handled by United representatives through e-mail and letters. The company believes customers will get a better quality of feedback.[18] Delta Air Lines has a team of customer service agents who monitor social media applications like Twitter for real-time complaints. When travelers complain about the company, the agents try to solve problems before they go viral by offering updated gate information or rebooking details. Sometimes they even bend the rules to null complaints in the Twittersphere. In one instance, a passenger got frequent flier miles that she wasn't entitled to receive because she posted complaining tweets about Delta.[19]

A lot of consumers are angry these days, and organizations should be responsive to their complaints. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, people believe negative news about an organization with a low trust level after one or two encounters, while people believe positive news only after four or five.[20]

Organizations, like Delta, need fast response times in handling complaints before a situation tarnishes their brand. The speed of complaints is growing faster with websites exclusively dedicated to the issue. Sites such as Angie's List, Consumer Affairs, Planet Feedback, Ripoff Report, Tello, and Yelp offer forums for disgruntled customers. Many of these sites also have smartphone applications that allow consumers to report incidents almost instantaneously. To stay on top of the reviews, new electronic tools are emerging that help organizations scan for key words and monitor reviews related to their brand.

When writing a claim or complaint, you generally will use a direct organization: put a clear statement of the problem in the first sentence. An indirect approach, such as starting with a buffer, may be interpreted as a weak claim.

Give supporting facts—what went wrong, the extent of the damage. Give identifiers such as invoice numbers, warranty codes, and order dates. If this is a claim, specify what is necessary to set things right (be realistic!). Avoid anger and sarcasm; they will only lessen your chances of a favorable settlement. In particular, avoid saying you will never use the company, service, machine again. Such a statement may eliminate your audience's will to rectify the problem. See Figure 10.6 for the *Wall Street Journal*'s suggestions for e-mail claims to airlines.

Turning Tables on Complaints

While consumers have many avenues for complaining, the organizations that are complained about may feel a bit powerless. However, the Alamo Drafthouse, a movie theater in Austin, Texas, found a way to turn the tables on one complainer.

The movie theater has one simple rule: don't text or use a phone during the movie. One woman broke this simple rule and was kicked out of the theater. She then called the theater to complain about the situation; she believed they were ripping her off.

The theater now uses this woman's ridiculous message as a public service announcement that shows before all movies begin to remind movie goers of the one simple rule. In other words, instead of allowing the customer, who was clearly in the wrong, to create negative publicity, the theater owners created a positive situation for their business. You can watch the video at the web address in the source below.

In another instance, a pizza shop in New York turned the tables by printing T-shirts for employees with the negative reviews they received online at Yelp. The strategy helped increase business and create more loyal customers.

What do you think? Are the actions of these businesses justified? How else can organizations gain more power in this electronic age when it is so easy for anonymous consumers to complain?

Adapted from Lani Rosales, "Austin Business Proves That Social Media Cuts Both Ways," AGBeat, June 6, 2011, http://agentgenius.com/real-estate-technology-new-media/austin-business-proves-that-social-media-cuts-both-ways/.

Figure 10.6 Airline Complaint Tips

These tips can improve your chances of a favorable response from an airline:

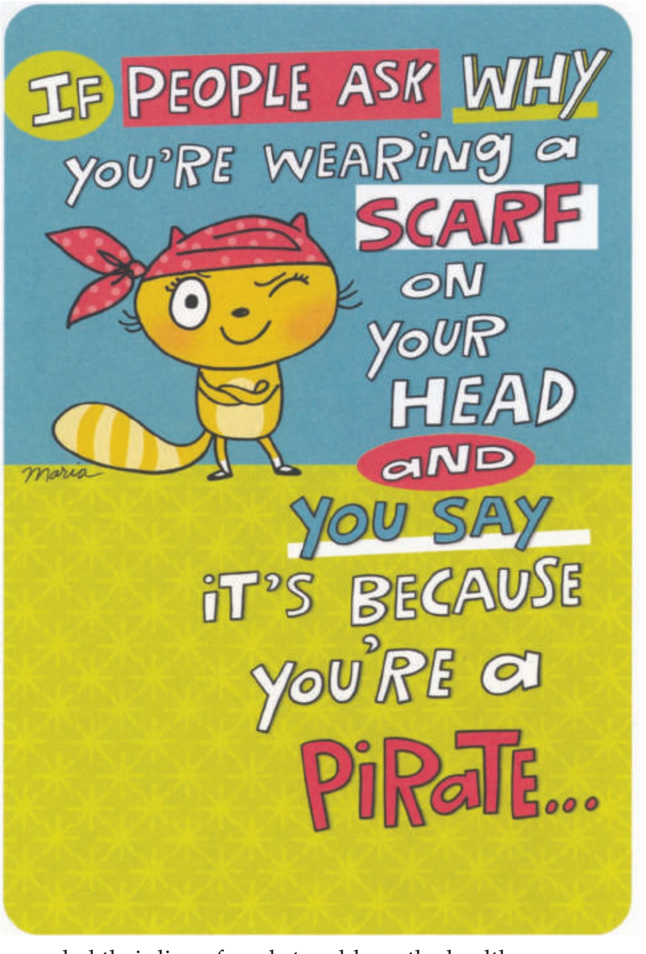
- Ask for the compensation you want.
- Be realistic. You will not get compensation for a routine delay.
- Be direct and short. Do provide flight, reservation, and frequent-flyer numbers.
- Don't threaten. Particularly don't say you will never fly with them again.
- Write to Customer Service. Your complaint will eventually end up there no matter where you send it.

Source: Scott McCartney, "What Airlines Do When You Complain," Wall Street Journal, March 20, 2007, D1.

Rejections and Refusals

When you refuse requests from people outside your organization, try to give an alternative if one is available. For example, you may not be able to replace for free an automotive water pump that no longer is on warranty. But you may be able to offer your customer a rebuilt one that is much less expensive than a new pump.

Politeness and length help. In two different studies, job applicants preferred rejection letters that said something specific about their good qualities, that



Hallmark has expanded their line of cards to address the health concerns many people are experiencing. The inside of this card says, "They'll have no follow-up questions."

phrased the refusal indirectly, that offered a clear explanation of the procedures for making a hiring decision, that offered an alternative (such as another position the applicant might be qualified for), and that were longer.[21] Furthermore, businesses that follow this pattern of organization for rejection letters will retain applicants who still view the organization favorably, who will recommend the organization to others interested in applying there, and who will not file lawsuits.[22]

Double-check the words in a refusal to be sure the reason can't backfire if it is applied to other contexts. The statement that a plant is too dangerous for a group tour could be used as evidence against the company in a worker's compensation claim. Similarly, writing resignation letters for a variety of reasons—leaving a job, opting out of a fellowship—can be a delicate practice and can have serious future implications. Many audiences will see the letter as a statement that their organization is not good enough. The best letters try to neutralize these feelings. A negative and poorly worded resignation letter can impact your chances for receiving a positive recommendation or reference in the future.

When you refuse requests within your organization, use your knowledge of the organization's culture and of the specific individual to craft your message. Some organizations share more negative information than others. Some individuals prefer a direct no; others may find a direct negative insulting. The sample problem at the end of this chapter is a refusal to someone within the company.

Disciplinary Notices and Negative Performance Appraisals

Performance appraisals, discussed in detail in Chapter 11, will be positive when they are designed to help a basically good employee improve. But when an employee violates company policy or fails to improve after repeated negative appraisals, the company may discipline the employee or build a dossier to support firing him or her.

Present disciplinary notices and negative performance appraisals directly, with no buffer. A buffer might encourage the recipient to minimize the message's importance—and might even become evidence in a court case that the employee had not been told to shape up "or else." Cite quantifiable observations of the employee's behavior, rather than generalizations or inferences based on it.

Weak: Lee is apathetic about work.

Better: Lee was absent 15 days and late by one hour 6 days in the quarter beginning January 1.

Weak: Vasu is careless with her written documents.

Better: Vasu had multiple spelling errors in her last three client letters; a fourth letter omitted the date of the mandatory federal training seminar.

Not all disciplinary notices are as formal as performance appraisals. Blanchard and Johnson, of *One Minute Manager* fame, present what they call the One Minute Reprimand. Much of the effectiveness of these reprimands comes from the fact that supervisors tell their employees from the beginning, before any reprimands are needed, that there will be explicit communication about both positive and negative performances. The reprimand itself is to come immediately after negative behavior and specify exactly what is wrong. It distinguishes between positive feelings for the employee and negative feelings for his or her performance in the specific situation.[23]

Dumpster Diving Anyone?

Northwest Airlines, which filed for bankruptcy and underwent reorganization before merging with Delta, sent out a handbook for employees who might lose their jobs. The handbook, titled "Ground Operations Restructuring Q&A and Employee Support," offered employees some useful information about retirement benefits and résumé assistance. However, the handbook also offered some unconventional assistance, such as a listing of "101 Ways to Save Money."

Here are a few of the tips: (quoted list)

- Buy spare parts for your car at the junkyard
- Get hand-me-down clothes and toys for your kids from family and friends
- Buy old furniture at yard sales and refinish it yourself
- Hang clothes out to dry
- Borrow a dress for a big night out or go to a consignment shop
- Don't be shy about pulling something you like out of a dumpster

Northwest employees were appalled by this list of outrageous suggestions. The vice president for ground operations quickly apologized, and the chief executive officer sent a letter of apology to the affected employees who received the handbook.

Adapted and quoted from Michelle Singletary, "Dumpster-Diving Advice Doesn't Fly," *Washington Post,* August 24, 2006, D2.

Effective Negative Letters

Researcher Catherine Schryer asked writers at an insurance company to evaluate the firm's letters denying claims. She found four differences between the letters judged effective and the letters judged ineffective:

- Good letters were easier to read. Poor letters contained more jargon; longer words and sentences; and stiff, awkward phrasing.
- Good letters gave fuller reasons for the rejection. Poor letters often used boilerplate and did not explain terms.
- Good letters were less likely to talk about the reader's emotions ("angry," "disappointed").
- Good letters were more likely to portray the writer and reader as active agents.

Adapted from Catherine Schryer, "Walking a Fine Line: Writing Negative Letters in an Insurance Company," *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 14 (October 2000): 445–97.

Layoffs and Firings

If a company is in financial trouble, management needs to communicate the problem clearly. Sharing information and enlisting everyone's help in finding solutions may make it possible to save jobs. Sharing information also means that layoff notices, if they become necessary, will be a formality; they should not be new information to employees.

Give the employee an honest reason for the layoff or firing. Based on guidance from your organization's human resource experts, state the reasons in a way that is clear but does not expose the organization to legal liabilities.

Show empathy for affected employees; think about how you would feel if you were losing your job. Show how the company will help them with severance pay and other aid, such as job search advice. Remember that many studies show that layoffs may temporarily help the bottom line, but they rarely provide long-term savings. They also hurt the productivity of remaining employees.[24]

Firings for unsatisfactory performance have always been a part of business. Now, however, as technology blurs the line between work and home, firings are also happening for personal reasons, even if the behavior is not tied to work and occurs off-site. The CEO of HBO was asked to resign after he was accused of assaulting his girlfriend in a parking lot. Kaiser Aluminum's CFO had to resign because of a personal relationship with another employee, as did Boeing's former president and CEO Harry Stonecipher.[25]

Information about layoffs and firings is normally delivered orally but accompanied by a written statement explaining severance pay or unemployment benefits that may be available. RadioShack made negative headlines when it fired 400 employees with a two-sentence e-mail.

SOLVING A SAMPLE PROBLEM

Solving negative problems requires careful analysis. The checklist at the end of the chapter can help you evaluate your draft.

Problem

You're Director of Employee Benefits for a Fortune 500 company. Today, you received the following memo:

> From: Michelle Jagtiani
> Subject: Getting My Retirement Benefits
>
> Next Friday will be my last day here. I am leaving [name of company] to take a position at another firm.
>
> Please process a check for my retirement benefits, including both the deductions from my salary and the company's contributions for the last six and a half years. I would like to receive the check by next Friday if possible.

You have bad news for Michelle. Although the company does contribute an amount to the retirement fund equal to the amount deducted for retirement from the employee's paycheck, employees who leave with less than seven years of employment get only their own contributions. Michelle will get back only the money that has been deducted from her own pay, plus 4½% interest compounded quarterly. Her payments and interest come to just over $17,200; the amount could be higher depending on the amount of her last paycheck, which will include compensation for any unused vacation days and sick leave. Furthermore, since the amounts deducted were not considered taxable income, she will have to pay income tax on the money she will receive.

You cannot process the check until after her resignation is effective, so you will mail it to her. You have her home address on file; if she's moving, she needs to let you know where to send the check. Processing the check may take two to three weeks.

Write a memo to Michelle.

Analysis of the Problem

Use the analysis questions in the first chapter to help you solve the problem.

1. Who is (are) your audience(s)?

   Michelle Jagtiani. Unless she's a personal friend, I probably wouldn't know why she's leaving and where she's going.

   There's a lot I don't know. She may or may not know much about taxes; she may or may not be able to take advantage of tax-reduction strategies. I can't assume the answers because I wouldn't have them in real life.

2. What are your purposes in communicating?

   To tell her that she will get only her own contributions, plus 4½% interest compounded quarterly; that the check will be mailed to her home address two to three weeks after her last day on the job; and that the money will be taxable as income.

   To build goodwill so that she feels that she has been treated fairly and consistently. To minimize negative feelings she may have.

   To close the door on this subject.

3. What information must your message include?

   When the check will come. The facts that her check will be based on her contributions, not the employer's, and that the money will be taxable income. How lump-sum retirement benefits are calculated. The fact that we have her current address on file but need a new address if she's moving.

4. How can you build support for your position? What reasons or benefits will your audience find convincing?

   Giving the amount currently in her account may make her feel that she is getting a significant sum of money. Suggesting someone who can give free tax advice (if the company offers this as a fringe benefit) reminds her of the benefits of working with the company. Wishing her luck with her new job is a nice touch.

5. What aspects of the total situation may be relevant?

   Since this is right after taxes are due, she may be particularly interested in the tax advice. With the weak economy, she may have been counting on the extra money. On the other hand, most people take another job to get more money, so maybe she is too. I don't know for sure. Since she and I don't know each other, I don't know about her special circumstances.

www.useit.com/alertbox/20000123.html

General guidelines for saying no can be applied to specific situations. Web guru Jakob Neilsen explains how to tell users that your website can't do what they want. Neilsen suggests telling users "no" upfront when your website cannot do something. Otherwise, users will spend too much time looking for the desired feature, and in the process will develop negative feelings for the site.

He also suggests if your site cannot meet a user's needs, that you direct them to another site that will. This referral builds goodwill and will make your site the starting point for the customer's next search. If an item will be available reasonably soon, you can allow customers to preorder or provide their e-mail for notification when the product or service becomes available.

Log onto Neilsen's site and read the rest of his advice for telling users no. Can you think of other ways to tell website users "no" that Neilsen hasn't suggested?

Discussion of the Sample Solutions

The solution in Figure 10.7 is not acceptable. The subject line gives a bald negative with no reason or alternative. The first sentence has a condescending tone that is particularly offensive in negative messages; it also focuses on what is being taken away rather than what remains. Paragraph 2 lacks you-attitude and is vague. The memo ends with a negative. There is nothing anywhere in the memo to build goodwill.

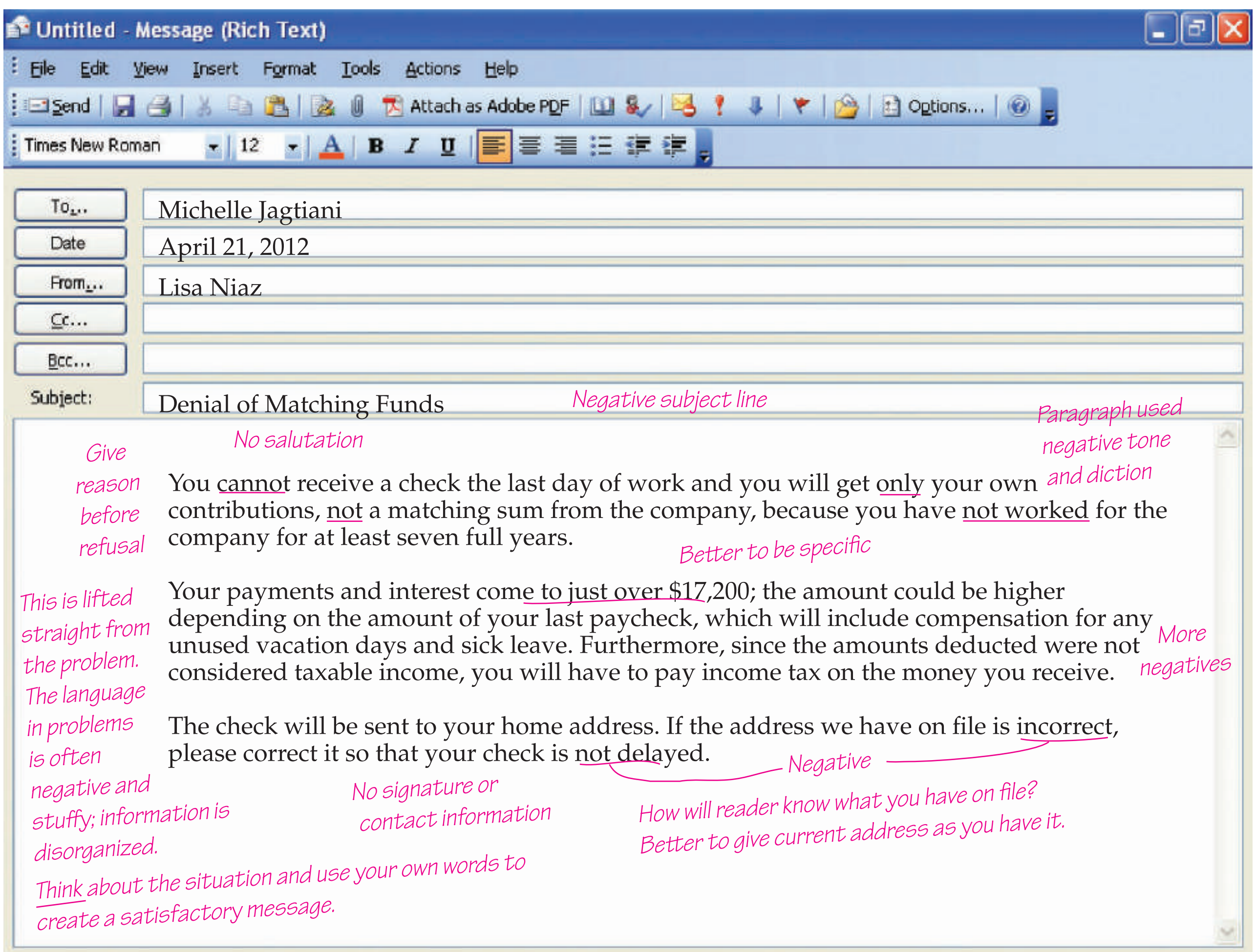
The solution in Figure 10.8, in contrast, is effective. The policy serves as a buffer and explanation. The negative is stated clearly but is buried in the paragraph to avoid overemphasizing it. Paragraph 2 emphasizes the positive by specifying the amount in the account and the fact that the sum might be even higher.

Paragraph 3 contains the additional negative information that the amount will be taxable but offers the alternative that it may be possible to reduce taxes. The writer builds goodwill by suggesting a specific person the reader could contact.

Paragraph 4 tells the reader what address is in the company files (Michelle may not know whether the files are up-to-date), asks that she update it if necessary, and ends with the reader's concern: getting her check promptly.

The final paragraph ends on a positive note. This generalized goodwill is appropriate when the writer does not know the reader well.

Figure 10.7 An Unacceptable Solution to the Sample Problem


Untitled - Message (Rich Text)

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Actions Help

Send Attach as Adobe PDF Options...

Times New Roman 12

To... Michelle Jagtiani

Date April 21, 2012

From... Lisa Niaz

Cc...

Bcc...

Subject: Denial of Matching Funds

Negative subject line

No salutation

Paragraph used negative tone and diction

Give reason before refusal

You cannot receive a check the last day of work and you will get only your own contributions, not a matching sum from the company, because you have not worked for the company for at least seven full years.

Better to be specific

This is lifted straight from the problem. The language in problems is often negative and stuffy; information is disorganized.

Your payments and interest come to just over $17,200; the amount could be higher depending on the amount of your last paycheck, which will include compensation for any unused vacation days and sick leave. Furthermore, since the amounts deducted were not considered taxable income, you will have to pay income tax on the money you receive.

More negatives

The check will be sent to your home address. If the address we have on file is incorrect, please correct it so that your check is not delayed.

Negative

No signature or contact information

How will reader know what you have on file? Better to give current address as you have it.

Think about the situation and use your own words to create a satisfactory message.

Figure 10.8 An Effective Solution to the Sample Problem

Untitled - Message (Rich Text)

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Actions Help

Send Attach as Adobe PDF Options...

Times New Roman 12

To... Michelle Jagtiani

Date April 21, 2012

From... Lisa Niaz

Cc...

Bcc...

Subject: Receiving Employee Contributions from Retirement Accounts

Dear Ms. Jagtiani:

Good to state reason in third-person to deemphasize negative.

Employees who leave the company with at least seven full years of employment are entitled both to the company contributions and the retirement benefit paycheck deductions contributed to retirement accounts. Those employees who leave the company with less than seven years of employment will receive the employee paycheck contributions made to their retirement accounts.

Good to be specific

You now have $17,240.62 in your account which includes 4.5% interest compounded quarterly. The amount you receive could be even higher since you will also receive payment for any unused leave and vacation days.

Good to show how company can help

Because you now have access to the account, the amount you receive will be considered income for tax purposes. Beth Jordan in Employee Financial Services can give you information about possible tax deductions and financial investments which can reduce or defer payment of your income taxes.

Good to be specific

The check will be sent to your home address on May 16. The address we have on file is 2724 Merriman Road, Akron, Ohio 44313. If your address changes, please let us know so you can receive your check promptly. *Positive emphasis*

Good luck with your new job!

Forward-looking ending.

Lisa Niaz
Director of Employee Benefits
760-1477 Ext. 986

✓ Checklist Negative Messages

- ☐ Is the subject line appropriate?
- ☐ Is the organization and content appropriate for the audience?
- ☐ If a buffer is used, does it avoid suggesting either a positive or a negative response?
- ☐ Is the reason, if it is given, presented before the refusal? Is the reason watertight, with no loopholes?
- ☐ Is the negative information clear?
- ☐ Is an alternative given if a good one is available? Does the message provide all the information needed to act on the alternative but leave the choice up to the audience?
- ☐ Does the last paragraph avoid repeating the negative information?
- ☐ Is tone acceptable—not defensive, but not cold, preachy, or arrogant either?

Originality in a negative message may come from

- ☐ An effective buffer, if one is appropriate.
- ☐ A clear, complete statement of the reason for the refusal.
- ☐ A good alternative, clearly presented, which shows that you're thinking about what the audience really needs.
- ☐ Adding details that show you're thinking about a specific organization and the specific people in that organization.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- In a negative message, the basic information is negative; we expect the audience to be disappointed or angry.
- A good negative message conveys the negative information clearly while maintaining as much goodwill as possible. The goal is to make the audience feel that they have been taken seriously, that the decision is fair and reasonable, and that they would have made the same decision. A secondary purpose is to reduce or eliminate future communication on the same subject.
- The best way to organize negative messages depends on the particular audiences and situations involved. Figure 10.1 suggests possible organizations.
- A **buffer** is a neutral or positive statement that allows you to delay the negative message. Buffers must put the audience in a good frame of mind, not give the bad news but not imply a positive answer either, and provide a natural transition to the body of the message. Use a buffer only when the audience values harmony or when the buffer serves a purpose in addition to simply delaying the negative.
- A good reason prepares the audience for the negative and must be watertight. Give several reasons only if all are watertight and are of comparable importance. Omit the reason for the refusal entirely if it is weak or if it makes your organization look bad. Do not hide behind company policy.
- Make the refusal crystal clear.
- Giving the audience an alternative or a compromise
  - Offers the audience another way to get what they want.
  - Suggests that you really care about the audience and about helping to meet their needs.
  - Allows you to end on a positive note and to present yourself and your organization as positive, friendly, and helpful.
- When you give an alternative, give the audience all the information they need to act on it, but don't take the necessary steps for them. Letting the audience decide whether to try the alternative allows the audience to reestablish a sense of psychological freedom.
- Many negative situations can be redefined as informative, positive, or persuasive messages.

CHAPTER 10 Exercises and Problems

**Go to www.mhhe.com/locker10e for additional Exercises and Problems.*

10.1 Reviewing the Chapter

1. What are the reasons behind the patterns of organization for negative messages in different situations (Figure 10.1)? (LO 10-1)
2. What are the parts of negative messages? How may those parts be changed for different contexts? (LO 10-2)
3. When should you not use a buffer? (LO 10-2)
4. When should you not apologize? (LO 10-2)
5. What are some ways you can maintain a caring tone in negative messages? (LO 10-3)
6. What are some different varieties of negative messages? What are some examples from the chapter text and sidebars? (LO 10-4)

10.2 Reviewing Grammar

Negative news is frequently placed in dependent clauses to help de-emphasize it. Unfortunately, some dependent clauses and phrases are dangling or misplaced modifiers. Do the exercise from Appendix B on improving modifiers (B.6) to help you learn to recognize this error.

10.3 Letters for Discussion—Credit Refusal

As director of customer service at C'est Bon, an upscale furniture store, you manage the store's credit. Today you are going to reject an application from Frank Steele. Although his income is fairly high, his last two payments on his college loans were late, and he has three bank credit cards, all charged to the upper limit, on which he's made just the minimum payment for the last three months.

The following letters are possible approaches to giving him the news. How well does each message meet the criteria in the checklist for negative messages?

1.

Dear Mr. Steele:

Your request to have a C'est Bon charge account shows that you are a discriminating shopper. C'est Bon sells the finest merchandise available.

Although your income is acceptable, records indicate that you carry the maximum allowable balances on three bank credit cards. Moreover, two recent payments on your student loans have not been made in a timely fashion. If you were given a C'est Bon charge account, and if you charged a large amount on it, you might have difficulty paying the bill, particularly if you had other unforeseen expenses (car repair, moving, medical emergency) or if your income dropped suddenly. If you were unable to repay, with your other debt you would be in serious difficulty. We would not want you to be in such a situation, nor would you yourself desire it.

Please reapply in six months.

Sincerely,

2.

Dear Frank:

No, you can't have a C'est Bon credit card—at least not right now. Get your financial house in order and try again.

Fortunately for you, there's an alternative. Put what you want on layaway. The furniture you want will be held for you, and paying a bit each week or month will be good self-discipline.

Enjoy your C'est Bon furniture!

Sincerely,

3.

Dear Mr. Steele:

Over the years, we've found that the best credit risks are people who pay their bills promptly. Since two of your student loan payments have been late, we won't extend store credit to you right now. Come back with a record of six months of on-time payments of all bills, and you'll get a different answer.

You might like to put the furniture you want on layaway. A $50 deposit holds any item you want. You have six months to pay, and you save interest charges.

You might also want to take advantage of one of our Saturday Seminars. On the first Saturday of each month at 11 AM, our associates explain one topic related to furniture and interior decorating. Upcoming topics are

How to Wallpaper a Room	February 5
Drapery Options	March 6
Persian Carpets	April 1

Sincerely,

10.4 E-Mails for Discussion—Saying *No* to a Colleague

A colleague in another state agency has e-mailed you asking if you would like to use the payroll software her agency developed. You wouldn't. Switching to a new program would take a lot of time, and what you have works well for you.

The following messages are possible approaches to giving her the news. How well does each message meet the criteria in the checklist for negative messages?

1. Subject: Re: Use Our Software?

   No.

2. Subject: Re: Use Our Software?

   Thanks for telling me about the payroll software your team developed. What we have works well for us. Like every other agency, we're operating on a bare-bones budget, and no one here wants to put time (that we really don't have) into learning a new program. So we'll say, no, thanks!

3. Subject: Re: Use Our Software?

   The payroll software your team developed sounds very good.

   I might like to use it, but the people here are computer phobic. They HATE learning new programs. So, being a good little computer support person, I soldier on with the current stuff. (And people wonder why state government is SO INEFFICIENT! Boy, the stories I could tell!)

   Anyway, thanks for the offer. Keep me posted on the next development—maybe it will be something so obviously superior that even the Neanderthals here can see its advantages!

10.5 Analyzing a Bad News Message

Today you received the following message in your mailbox:

Dear (Your Name),

Thank you for your membership with Fit4Life. We hope you are enjoying our fitness club and that you're reaching your health and wellness goals along the way. As always, we're excited to help you in any way.

We're writing to let you know about an upcoming change in your Fit4Life monthly dues. Effective June 15, the dues for your membership will increase $10 per month—plus any associated taxes.

We strive to keep dues increases as infrequent and minimal as possible. If you have questions about the increase or if there is anything else we can do to improve your experience with Fit4Life, please contact me on your next visit to the club.

Thank you again for your membership with Fit4Life. We enjoy serving you and look forward to seeing you soon!

Sincerely,

Lawrence Josel

Fit4Life General Manager

As your instructor directs,

a. Write an e-mail in which you analyze this message using the guidelines for negative messages that you learned in this chapter.

b. Rewrite this message so that it does a better job of delivering the negative news. Then, write a memo to your instructor explaining why you chose to make these revisions.

10.6 Revising a Negative Message

Rewrite the following negative message:

Dear Madam:

Unfortunately, because you have not paid your account for the last three months, we have absolutely NO CHOICE but to turn off your heat soon. We know that winter is upon us and it's a horrible time to be without heat, but you really brought this on yourself.

Next time, we recommend PAYING your bills ON TIME.

If you get us your outstanding payments soon, you can keep your heat.

As always, we appreciate your business and value you as our customer.

Sincerely,

WarmHomes Customer Service Team

10.7 Notifying Baby Boomers about Housing Rules

Erin and TJ Bouda are baby boomers who live in a 55-plus Clearwater, Florida, housing development run by WaterBlue Homeowners Association. They have lived in their current house for five years and plan to live the rest of their lives in this home.

A few months ago, the Boudas started raising their three-year-old grandson, Riley, because his mother has a substance abuse problem and his father is deceased. Unfortunately, WaterBlue Homeowners Association has a policy that prohibits children under 18 years of age as permanent residents. Two neighbors of the Boudas have already complained about Riley.

Take on the role of the homeowners association and write to the Boudas telling them that their grandson has to leave (which is not an option) or that they have to give up their home. As you write, be sure to consider the audience and the effect your letter will have on them.

Hints:

- What reasons besides "policy" can you offer the Boudas to help them understand the situation?
- What help can you offer them?
- Are there any alternatives that you can offer?

10.8 Notifying College Seniors That They May Not Graduate

State University asks students to file an application to graduate one term before they actually plan to graduate. The application lists the courses the student has already had and those he or she will take in the last term. Your office reviews the lists to see that the student will meet the requirements for total number of hours, hours in the major, and general education requirements. Some students have forgotten a requirement or not taken enough courses and cannot graduate unless they take more courses than those they have listed.

As your instructor directs,

Write form e-mail messages to the following audiences. Leave blanks for the proposed date of graduation and specific information that must be merged into the message:

a. Students who have not taken enough total hours.
b. Students who have not fulfilled all the requirements for their majors.
c. Students who are missing one or more general education courses.
d. Advisers of students who do not meet the requirements for graduation.

10.9 Correcting a Mistake

Today, as you reviewed some cost figures, you realized they didn't fit with the last monthly report you filed. You had pulled the numbers together from several sources, and you're not sure what happened. Maybe you miscopied, or didn't save the final version after you'd checked all the numbers. But whatever the cause, you've found errors in three categories. You gave your boss the following totals:

Personnel	$2,843,490
Office supplies	$43,500
Telephone	$186,240

E-mail your boss to correct the information.

As your instructor directs,

Write e-mail messages for the following situations:

a. The correct numbers are

Personnel	$2,845,490
Office supplies	$34,500
Telephone	$186,420

b. The correct numbers are

Personnel	$2,845,490
Office supplies	$84,500
Telephone	$468,240

Variations for each situation:

1. Your boss has been out of the office; you know she hasn't seen the data yet.
2. Your boss gave a report to the executive committee this morning using your data.

Hints:

- How serious is the mistake in each situation?
- In which situations, if any, should you apologize?
- Should you give the reason for the mistake? Why or why not?
- How do your options vary depending on whether your job title gives you responsibility for numbers and accounting?

10.10 Refusing to Pay an Out-of-Network Bill

Your employees' health insurance allows them to choose from one of three health maintenance organizations (HMOs). Once employees have selected an HMO, they must get all medical care (except for out-of-state emergency care) from the HMO. Employees receive a listing of the doctors and hospitals affiliated with each HMO when they join the company and pick an HMO and again each October when they have a one-month "open enrollment period" to change to another of the three HMOs if they choose.

As Director of Employee Benefits, you've received an angry e-mail from Alvin Reineke. Alvin had just received a statement from his HMO stating that it would not pay for the costs of his hernia operation two months ago at St. Catherine's Hospital in your city. Alvin is furious: one of the reasons he accepted a job with your company six months ago was its excellent health care coverage. He feels the company lied to him and should pay for his (rather large) hospital bill since the HMO refuses to do so.

The HMO which Alvin had selected uses two hospitals, but not St. Catherine's. When Alvin joined the company six months ago, he (like all new employees) received a thick booklet explaining the HMO options. Perhaps he did not take the time to read it carefully. But that's not your fault. Alvin can change plans during the next open enrollment, but even if he switched to an HMO that included St. Catherine's, that HMO wouldn't pay for surgery performed before he joined that HMO.

Write an e-mail message to Alvin giving him the bad news.

Hints:

- What tone should you use? Should you be sympathetic? Should you remind him that this is his own fault?
- Is there any help you can give Alvin (e.g., information about credit-union short-term loans or even information about negotiating payment terms with the hospital)?
- What can you do to make Alvin feel that the company has not lied to him?

10.11 Announcing a Reduction in Benefits

In years past, your company has had a generous health insurance policy, fully funded by the employer. Employees pay only a $10 copayment for doctor visits and a $6 copayment for prescriptions. However, the cost of health insurance has risen much faster than the company's other expenses and much faster than the prices your company can charge its customers. Most other companies now expect their employees to contribute part of the cost of their health insurance through payroll deductions, and management has determined that your company must begin doing the same. For a group insurance policy similar to the one employees have received in the past, they will now have to pay $50 per month, and the copayment for doctor visits will rise to $15 per visit. The coverage for prescriptions will vary, with the $6 copayment applying only to generic drugs. For brand-name drugs, employees will have to pay more.

As your instructor directs,

Write an e-mail message to the employees of

a. A large advertising agency in a big city. The agency's billings have fallen 30% in the last six months, and 10% of the staff have already been laid off.
b. A manufacturing company. The company is still making a profit, but just barely. Unless the company saves money, layoffs may be necessary.
c. A successful service business. The business is doing well, but most of the employees earn only the minimum wage. They do not own stock in the company.

10.12 Recommending a Policy on Uncivil Behavior

Assume that your small team comprises your organization's Labor-Management Committee. This e-mail arrives from the CEO:

> I read that PepsiCo created a policy to deal with unfriendly behavior on the job, and that sounds like a good idea. When someone's rude, inconsiderate, or shows bad manners, that can ruin your day and ruin your productivity. I know that we have harassment policies, but what about a rudeness policy? Put one together, and send it to me.

As a team, write a response recommending an appropriate policy for dealing with uncivil behavior in the workplace.

Hint:

Be sure to define what your organization considers unacceptable behavior, describe the roles of employees and managers in reporting such behaviors, and outline clear guidelines for dealing with violations.

Source: Adapted from Diane Bandow and Debra Hunt, " Developing Policies about Uncivil Workplace Behavior," *Business Communication Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (2008), 103–6.

10.13 Complaining about the Dead

You are traveling on a first-class flight from New Delhi to London. When you wake, you find the corpse of a woman, who died in the economy section of the airplane, sitting next to you. After flagging down the flight attendant, you're told the crew moved the woman who died so her family could have some privacy to grieve. They could not put the body in the aisle or the attendant station for safety reasons. Needless to say, you're appalled by the situation.

As your instructor directs,

- Write a complaint letter to the airline.
- Write an apology letter from the perspective of the airline who has just received your complaint.

Source: Jennifer Quinn, "Passenger Dies on International Flight, Body Moved to First-Class Cabin," *Associated Press Archive,* March 19, 2007.

10.14 E-Mailing Bad News about Lab Hours

You're the administrator of your university's computer labs. Many students have asked for longer lab hours, and you presented the request to your superiors. However, you've just been informed that, beginning next term, the hours for the computer labs are being reduced. The labs will open one hour later each morning as a cost-saving measure.

Write an e-mail message, including subject line, to all students, informing them of this change.

10.15 Telling Employees to Remove Personal Websites

You're Director of Management and Information Systems (MIS) in your organization. At your monthly briefing for management, a vice president complained that some employees have posted personal web pages on the company's web server.

"It looks really unprofessional to have stuff about cats and children and musical instruments. How can people do this?"

You took the question literally. "Well, some people have authorization to post material—price changes, job listings, marketing information. Someone who has authorization could put up anything."

Another manager said, "I don't think it's so terrible—after all, there aren't any links from our official pages to these personal pages."

A third person said, "But we're paying for what's posted—so we pay for server space and connect time. Maybe it's not much right now, but as more and more people become web-literate, the number of people putting up unauthorized pages could spread. We should put a stop to this now."

The vice president agreed. "The website is carefully designed to present an image of our organization. Personal pages are dangerous. Can you imagine the flak we'd get if someone posted links to pornography?"

You said, "I don't think that's very likely. If it did happen, as system administrator, I could remove the page."

The third speaker said, "I think we should remove all the pages. Having any at all suggests that our people have so much extra time that they're playing on the web. That suggests that our prices are too high and may make some people worry about quality. In fact, I think that we need a new policy prohibiting personal pages on the company's web server. And any pages that are already up should be removed."

A majority of the managers agreed and told you to write a message to all employees. Create an e-mail message to tell employees that you will remove the personal pages already posted and that no more will be allowed.

Hint:

- Suggest other ways that people can post personal web pages.
- Give only reasons that are watertight and make the company look good.

10.16 Refusing to Waive a Fee

As the Licensing Program Coordinator for your school, you evaluate proposals from vendors who want to make or sell merchandise with the school's name, logo, or mascot. If you find the product acceptable, the vendor pays a $250 licensing fee and then 6.5% of the wholesale cost of the merchandise manufactured (whether or not it is sold). The licensing fee helps to support the cost of your office; the 6.5% royalty goes into a student scholarship fund. At well-known universities or those with loyal students and alumni, the funds from such a program can add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

On your desk today is a proposal from a current student, Meg Winston.

I want to silk-screen and sell T-shirts printed with the name of the school, the mascot, and the words “We’re Number One!” (A copy of the design I propose is enclosed.) I ask that you waive the $250 licensing fee you normally require and limit the 6.5% royalty only to those T-shirts actually sold, not to all those made.

I am putting myself through school by using student loans and working 30 hours a week. I just don’t have $250. In my marketing class, we’ve done feasibility analyses, and I’ve determined that the shirts can be sold if the price is low enough. I hope to market these shirts in an independent study project with Professor Doulin, building on my marketing project earlier this term. However, my calculations show that I cannot price the shirts competitively if just one shirt must bear the 6.5% royalty for all the shirts produced in a batch. I will of course pay the 6.5% royalty on all shirts sold and not returned. I will produce the shirts in small batches (50–100 at a time). I am willing to donate any manufactured but unsold shirts to the athletic program so that you will know I’m not holding out on you.

By waiving this fee, you will show that this school really wants to help students get practical experience in business, as the catalog states. I will work hard to promote these shirts by getting the school president, the coaches, and campus leaders to endorse them, pointing out that the money goes to the scholarship fund. The shirts themselves will promote school loyalty, both now and later when we’re alumni who can contribute to our alma mater.

I look forward to receiving the “go-ahead” to market these shirts.

The design and product are acceptable under your guidelines. However, you’ve always enforced the fee structure across the board, and you see no reason to make an exception now. Whether the person trying to sell merchandise is a student or not doesn’t matter; your policy is designed to see that the school benefits whenever it is used to sell something. Students aren’t the only ones whose cash flow is limited; many businesses would find it easier to get into the potentially lucrative business of selling clothing, school supplies, and other items with the school name or logo if they got the same deal Meg is asking for. (The policy also lets the school control the kinds of items on which its name appears.) Just last week, your office confiscated about 400 T-shirts and shorts made by a company that had used the school name on them without permission; the company has paid the school $7,500 in damages.

Write a letter to Meg rejecting her special requests. She can get a license to produce the T-shirts, but only if she pays the $250 licensing fee and the royalty on all shirts made.

10.17 Correcting Misinformation

You’re the director of the city’s Division of Water. Your mail today contains this letter:

When we bought our pool, the salesman told us that you would give us a discount on the water bill when we fill the pool. Please start the discount immediately. I tried to call you three times and got nothing but busy signals.

Sincerely,

Larry Shadburn-Butler

Larry Shadburn-Butler

The salesperson was wrong. You don't provide discounts for pools (or anything else). At current rates, filling a pool with a garden hose costs from $8.83 (for a 1,800-gallon pool) to $124.67 (for 26,000 gallons) in the city. Filling a pool from any other water source would cost more. Rates are 30% higher in the suburbs and 50% higher in unincorporated rural areas. And you don't have enough people to answer phones. You tried a voicemail system but eliminated it when you found people didn't have time to process all the messages that were left. But the city budget doesn't allow you to hire more people.

As your instructor directs,

a. Write a letter to Mr. Shadburn-Butler.
b. Write a letter to all the stores that sell swimming pools, urging them to stop giving customers misinformation.
c. Write a notice for the one-page newsletter that you include with quarterly water bills. Assume that you can have half a page for your information.

10.18 Analyzing Job Rejection Letters

1. Here are three rejections letters to an applicant who applied for an accounting position.

Letter 1

We realize that the application process for the accounting position at AlphaBank required a substantial amount of thought, time, and effort on your part. Therefore, we would like to express our sincere appreciation for your willingness to participate in the search process.

The task of selecting a final candidate was difficult and challenging due to the quality of the applicant pool. We regret to inform you that we selected another candidate who we believe will best meet the needs of AlphaBank.

We thank your for your interest in employment at AlphaBank and extend our best wishes as you pursue your professional goals.

Letter 2

Thank you for your interest in the accounting position at AlphaBank. I'm sorry to inform you that you were not one of the finalists. The position has now been filled.

The search committee and I wish you the best in your future employment searches.

Letter 3

Thank you for your interest in the accounting position at AlphaBank.

I'm sorry to inform you that the search committee has decided to offer the position to another candidate. This was an extremely difficult decision for us to make. We were all impressed with your résumé and credentials.

Again, thank you for your interest in AlphaBank.

1. Analyze these three job rejection letters by answering the following questions:

- Do these letters use buffers? If so, how effective are they?
- What reasons do the letters give, if any?
- Does the letter attempt to build goodwill with the audience? If yes, how so?
- Do any of the letters offer an alternative?

- How do you think recipients will react to each of the letters? Which (if any) are more preferable?

As your instructor directs,

a. Discuss your findings in a small group.
b. Present your findings orally to the class.
c. Present your findings in a memo to your instructor.

2. Collect job rejection letters mailed to seniors on your campus. Analyze the letters, answering the following questions:

- Do these letters use buffers? If so, how effective are they?
- What reasons do the letters give, if any?
- Do the letters attempt to build goodwill with the audience? If yes, how so?
- Do any of the letters offer an alternative?
- How do you think recipients will react to each of the letters? Which (if any) are more preferable?

As your instructor directs,

a. Discuss your finding in a small group.
b. Present your findings orally to the class.
c. Present your findings in a memo to your instructor.
d. Join with other students to write a report based on your findings.

10.19 Creating Equal Work Distribution

You noticed recently that Clare, the woman who works next to you at a call center, takes extended lunches and makes a lot of personal phone calls. As the result of her phone calls and breaks, you and your co-workers complete more work throughout the day. After discussing the situation with a close friend, you decide you are going to tell the boss about her behavior.

As your instructor directs,

- Write a memo or e-mail to your boss in which you discuss Clare's behavior and ask for a resolution.
- Partner up with a classmate and role-play the situation of telling the boss. One of you is the employee and one of you is the boss.
- Partner up with a classmate and role-play the situation of confronting Clare. One of you is the employee and one of you is Clare.

Hints:

- How can you deliver the negative news without sounding like a tattletale?
- How can you make the situation seem severe enough so that your boss takes action?

10.20 Dumping Your Trash

With the economic downturn, organizations are looking for any possible cost-cutting measures. Today, your supervisors tell you about a new program they are starting next week to reduce costs. From now on, employees will be responsible for dumping their own trash into a common bin. Employees who work for the state of Texas, the University of Washington, and Dartmouth College already participate in this project and have saved their organizations thousands of dollars. Your supervisors believe the same savings will happen at your company.

All employees in your organization will have two cans at their desks: a large one for recyclables and smaller one for trash. In addition to the estimated money that the organization will save from custodial needs, they also hope to gain more revenue from the recycling bins.

As your instructor directs,

a. Write to everyone in your company and explain the new trash policy.
b. Write a complaint memo to your supervisors as an employee concerned about the new trash policy.
c. After the two messages are drafted, write a memo to your instructor that discusses which message was easier to create and why. You should also discuss which message you believe makes a stronger argument.

Hints:

- Pick a business, government, or nonprofit organization you know something about.
- What benefits can you stress to employees about the new policy?
- How can you complain to your supervisor so that he/she takes you seriously?
- What are the disadvantages of reducing work for the lowest-paid employees?

Based on Sudeep Reddy, "Memo to All Staff: Dump Your Trash," *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2010, A3.

10.21 Turning Down a Faithful Client

You are Midas Investment Services' specialist in estate planning. You give talks to various groups during the year about estate planning. You ask nonprofit groups (churches, etc.) just to reimburse your expenses; you charge for-profit groups a fee plus expenses. These fees augment your income nicely, and the talks also are marvelous exposure for you and your company.

Every February for the last five years, Gardner Manufacturing Company has hired you to conduct an eight-hour workshop (two hours every Monday night for four weeks) on retirement and estate planning for its employees who are over 60 or who are thinking of taking early retirement. These workshops are popular and have generated clients for your company. The session last February went smoothly, as you have come to expect.

Today, out of the blue, you got a letter from Hope Goldberger, Director of Employee Benefits at Gardner, asking you to conduct the workshops every Tuesday evening *next* month at your usual fee. She didn't say whether this is an extra series or whether this will replace next February's series.

You can't do it. Your spouse, a geneticist is giving an invited paper at an international conference in Paris next month and the two of you are taking your children, ages 13 and 9, on a three-week trip to Europe. (You've made arrangements with school authorities to have the kids miss three weeks of classes.) You've been looking forward to and planning the trip for the last eight months.

Unfortunately, Midas Investment Services is a small group, and the only other person who knows anything about estate planning is a terrible speaker. You could suggest a friend at another financial management company, but you don't want Gardner to turn to someone else permanently; you enjoy doing the workshops and find them a good way to get leads.

Write the letter to Ms. Goldberger.

10.22 Getting Information from a Co-worker

Your boss has been pressuring you because you are weeks late turning in a termination report. However, you cannot begin your section of the report until your colleague, Matt Churetta, finishes his section. Right now, he is the problem. Here is a series of e-mail exchanges between you and Matt:

7/25/2012

Matt,

The boss wants the termination report now. Send over your section as soon as you finish.

Thanks,

Matt's reply:

7/31/2012

My apologies about the report.

On another note, I'm waiting to see my oncology surgeon to see what the course of treatment will be for the esophageal cancer. I will keep you posted on the process.

Please let me know if there is anything else coming up.

Thanks,

8/15/2012

Matt,

I had no idea that you are dealing with esophageal cancer. Definitely keep me posted on your condition. Best wishes as you work through your treatment.

I need your section of the termination report as soon as you finish it. The boss has been waiting patiently for the finished version.

Thanks,

Matt's reply:

8/26/2012

Report is coming along. The last two weeks have been difficult dealing with all the tests, doctors' appointments, etc. I will beat this deal!!!

Take Care,

It is now September, and over a month has passed from the termination report's original due date. While you are sympathetic to Matt's situation, the boss is demanding the finished report.

As your instructor directs,

a. Write an e-mail to Matt telling him you have to have his portion of the report as soon as possible. You are concerned for your job security, as well as his, if this report is not finalized soon.

b. Write a memo to your boss explaining the situation.

c. Write a memo to your instructor that focuses on the ethical choices you had to make while constructing the two messages.

10.23 Sending Negative Messages to Real Audiences

As your instructor directs, write a negative letter that responds to one of the following scenarios:

- Write a letter to the owner of a restaurant where you received poor service.
- Write a letter to a company whose product unsatisfactorily met your expectations or needs.
- Identify a current political topic on which you disagree with your congressional representative. Write a letter that outlines your views for him/her and calls for change.
- Identify a television advertisement with which you disagree. Write a letter to the company explaining your position and request that the advertisement be altered or taken off the air.

Hints:

- For all of these scenarios, your main goal should be to promote change.
- Express your complaint as positively as possible.
- Remember to consider your audience's needs; how can you build support for your position?

CHAPTER 11

Crafting Persuasive Messages

Chapter Outline

Bet You Watch This Safety Video

Most airline passengers ignore the preflight safety presentation, where the flight crew details important procedures in case of emergency. Even though the information is vital, the presentation is standard and routine.

> *"New Zealand's national airline is uniquely persuading its passengers to watch the safety presentation."*

New Zealand's national airline is uniquely persuading its passengers to watch the safety presentation: the company filmed its safety video with the crew members wearing nothing but skin-painted uniforms. The saucy video uses safety equipment to protect the actors' privacy. The safety video is complemented by television commercials for the airline that feature a new slogan: "At Air New Zealand, our fares have nothing to hide."

New Zealand's approach got plenty of attention. In the first four days after its release, it had more than 1 million views on YouTube.

Source: Adapted from "New Zealand Safety Video Bares Painted Plane Crew," *Des Moines Register*, July 4, 2009, 4A.

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will know how to

LO 11-1 Analyze a persuasive situation.

LO 11-2 Identify basic persuasive strategies.

LO 11-3 Write persuasive direct requests.

LO 11-4 Write persuasive problem-solving messages.

LO 11-5 Write sales and fund-raising messages.

LO 11-6 Use rational and emotional appeals to support persuasive messages.

Persuasion is almost universal in good business communications. If you are giving people information, you are persuading them to consider it good information, or to remember it, or even to use it. If you are giving people negative news, you are trying to persuade them to accept it. If you work for a company, you are a "sales representative" for it. Your job depends on its success.

Some messages, however, seem more obviously persuasive to us than others. Employees try to persuade their supervisors to institute flex hours or casual Fridays; supervisors try to persuade workers to keep more accurate records, thus reducing time spent correcting errors; or to follow healthier lifestyles, thus reducing health benefit costs. You may find yourself persuading your colleagues to accept your ideas, your staff to work overtime on a rush project, and your boss to give you a raise.

Whether you're selling safety equipment or ideas, effective persuasion is based on accurate logic, effective emotional appeal, and credibility or trust. Reasons have to be ones the audience finds important; emotional appeal is based on values the audience cares about; credibility depends on your character and reputation.

Persuasive messages include requests, proposals and recommendations, sales and fund-raising messages, job application letters, and efforts to change people's behavior, such as collection letters, criticisms or performance appraisals where you want the subordinate to improve behavior, and public-service ads designed to reduce drunk driving, drug use, and so on. Reports are persuasive messages if they recommend action.

This chapter gives general guidelines for persuasive messages. Chapter 17 discusses proposals; reports are the subject of Chapter 18. Chapter 13 covers job application letters.

All persuasive messages have several purposes:

Primary purpose:

- To have the audience act or change beliefs.

Secondary purposes:

- To build a good image of the communicator.
- To build a good image of the communicator's organization.
- To cement a good relationship between the communicator and audience.
- To overcome any objections that might prevent or delay action.
- To reduce or eliminate future communication on the same subject so the message doesn't create more work for the communicator.

ANALYZING PERSUASIVE SITUATIONS LO 11-1

Choose a persuasive strategy based on your answers to five questions. Use these questions to analyze persuasive situations:

1. What do you want people to do?
2. What objections, if any, will the audience have?
3. How strong is your case?
4. What kind of persuasion is best for the situation?
5. What kind of persuasion is best for the organization and the culture?

1. What Do You Want People to Do?

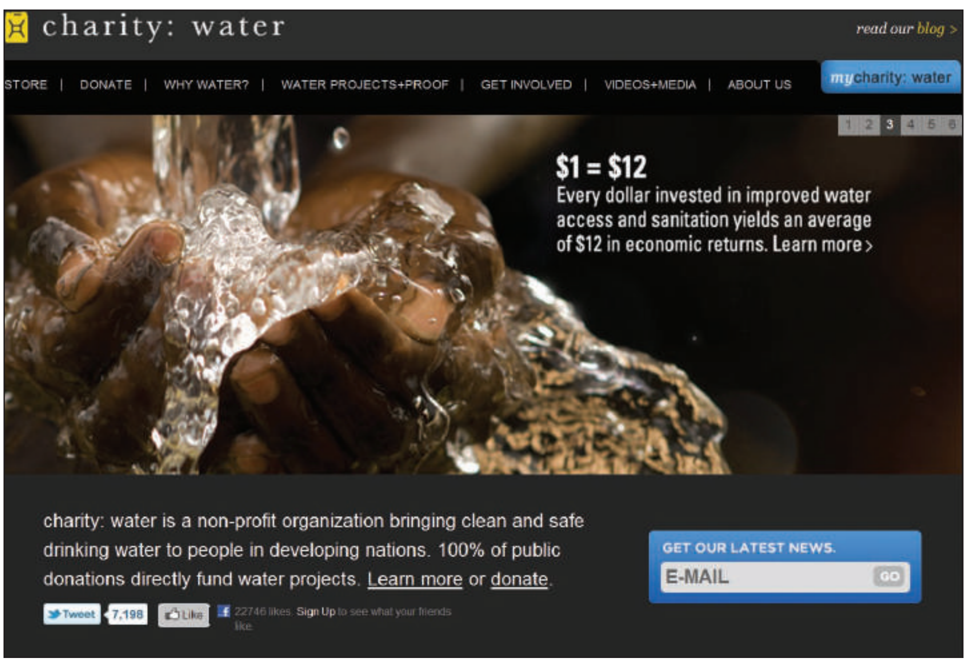
Identify the specific action you want and the person who has the power to do it. If your goal requires several steps, specify what you want your audience to do *now.* For instance, your immediate goal may be to have people come to a meeting or let you make a presentation, even though your long-term goal is a major sale or a change in policy.

2. What Objections, If Any, Will the Audience Have?

If you're asking for something that requires little time, money, or physical effort and for an action that's part of the person's regular duties, the audience is likely to have few objections.

Often, however, that is not the case, and you'll encounter some resistance. People may be busy and have what they feel are more important things to do. They may have other uses for their time and money. To be persuasive, you need to show your audience that your proposal meets their needs; you need to overcome any objections.

The easiest way to learn about objections your audience may have is to ask. Particularly when you want to persuade people in your own organization or



Charity: water's website presents a persuasive argument that clean water can be made available for millions of people.

Giving Water

Without access to clean water, many people in Africa and Asia struggle with disease and unsanitary conditions. Scott Harrison has made it his mission to provide clean water to as many people as possible. Through his organization, called charity: water, he has given access to clean water to nearly 1 million people, with the help of thousands of individual donors. The organization's success depends on its successful marketing, which is built on three principles:

1. *All money from new donors goes directly into providing water.* Harrison asks only his top supporters to cover administrative costs.
2. *Donors can track their donation's impact.* The organization lets donors name wells and see their location on Google Earth.
3. *Use social media and new media.* Harrison's organization has raised over a million dollars through Twitter and other Internet media. Entertaining web videos and creative social media campaigns garner extensive support.

So far, charity: water has raised over 10 million dollars; it is continuing to gain support from around the world.

Adapted from Nicholas D. Kristof, "Clean, Sexy Water," *New York Times,* July 11, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/12/opinion/12kristof.html.

your own town, talk to knowledgeable people. Phrase your questions nondefensively, in a way that doesn't lock people into taking a stand on an issue: "What concerns would you have about a proposal to do *x?*" "Who makes a decision about *y?*" "What do you like best about [the supplier or practice you want to change]?" Ask follow-up questions to be sure you understand: "Would you be likely to stay with your current supplier if you could get a lower price from someone else? Why?"

People are likely to be most aware of and willing to share objective concerns such as time and money. They will be less willing to tell you that their real objection is emotional. People have a **vested interest** in something if they benefit directly from keeping things as they are. People who are in power have a vested interest in retaining the system that gives them their power. Someone who designed a system has a vested interest in protecting that system from criticism. To admit that the system has faults is to admit that the designer made mistakes. In such cases, you'll need to probe to find out what the real reasons are.

Whether your audience is inside or outside your organization, they will find it easier to say *yes* when you ask for something that is consistent with the person's self-image.

3. How Strong Is Your Case?

The strength of your case is based on three aspects of persuasion: argument, credibility, and emotional appeal.

Argument refers to the reasons or logic you offer. Sometimes you may be able to prove conclusively that your solution is best. Sometimes your reasons may not be as strong, the benefits may not be as certain, and obstacles may be difficult or impossible to overcome. For example, suppose that you wanted to persuade your organization to offer a tuition reimbursement plan for employees. You'd have a strong argument if you could show that tuition reimbursement would improve the performance of marginal workers or that reimbursement would be an attractive recruiting tool in a tight job market. However, if dozens of fully qualified workers apply for every opening you have, your argument would be weaker. The program might be nice for workers, but you'd have a hard job proving that it would help the company.

Some arguments are weakened by common errors known as logical **fallacies.** These are some common types of logical fallacies:[1]

- *Hasty generalization.* Making general assumptions based on limited evidence. "Most of my friends agree that the new law is a bad idea. Americans do not support this law."
- *False cause.* Assuming that because one event follows another, the first event caused the second. "In the 1990s farmers increased their production of corn for ethanol. Soon after, more Americans began using ethanol fuel in their cars."
- *Weak analogy.* Making comparisons that don't work. "Outlawing guns because they kill people is like outlawing cars because they kill people."
- *Appeal to authority.* Quoting from a famous person who is not really an expert. "Hollywood actor Joe Gardner says this hand mixer is the best on the market today."
- *Appeal to popularity.* Arguing that because many people believe something, it is true. "Thousands of Americans doubt the reality of climate change, so climate change must not be happening."

Men's Health

Real men don't ask for directions and they certainly don't go to the doctor. These old stereotypes may have some truth in them. One study found that only 57% of men have visited the doctor in the past year, while 74% of women have. The federal government's Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality is trying to persuade more men to get health care with a series of humorous newspaper and television ads.

The ads, which can be viewed online at www.ahrq.gov/healthymen/, use dark humor to show how timely medical care can prevent serious diseases and early death. In one ad, a real estate broker tells a family they will have many happy years in their new home, but then turns to the father and tells him that he will die in three years from a preventable disease. She adds that it could have been detected early with a simple test, but he didn't get the test.

Other ads in the series feature men participating in weddings, graduations, and other family activities wearing hospital gowns. The messages, entitled "Real Men Wear Gowns," encourage men to get regular checkups and testing to benefit them and their families.

Adapted from Laura Landro, "New Ads Try to Shock Men into Going to See the Doctor," *Wall Street Journal,* June 15, 2010, D3.

As the recession affected professionals, even dentists increased their sales messages—using e-mails, phone calls, and tweets in addition to their postcard reminders—to persuade their patients to keep coming for dental appointments.

Source: Maureen Scarpelli, "Dentists Step Up Marketing as Patients Skip Their Visits," *Wall Street Journal,* August 11, 2009, B5.

- *Appeal to ignorance.* Using lack of evidence to support the conclusion. "There's nothing wrong in the plant; all the monitors are in the safety zone."
- *False dichotomy.* Setting up the situation to look like there are only two choices. "If you are not with us, you are against us."

Credibility is the audience's response to you as the source of the message. Credibility in the workplace has three sources: expertise, image, and relationships.[2] Citing experts can make your argument more credible. In some organizations, workers build credibility by getting assigned to high-profile teams. You build credibility by your track record. The more reliable you've been in the past, the more likely people are to trust you now.

We are also more likely to trust people we know. That's one reason that new CEOs make a point of visiting as many branch offices as they can. Building a relationship with someone—even if the relationship is based on an outside interest, like sports or children—makes it easier for that person to see you as an individual and to trust you.

When you don't yet have the credibility that comes from being an expert or being powerful, build credibility by the language and strategy you use:

- **Be factual.** Don't exaggerate. If you can test your idea ahead of time, do so, and report the results. Facts about your test are more convincing than opinions about your idea.
- **Be specific.** If you say "X is better," show in detail *how* it is better. Show the audience exactly where the savings or other benefits come from so that it's clear that the proposal really is as good as you say it is.
- **Be reliable.** If you suspect that a project will take longer to complete, cost more money, or be less effective than you originally thought, tell your audience *immediately.* Negotiate a new schedule that you can meet.

Emotional appeal means making the audience *want* to do what you ask. People don't make decisions—even business decisions—based on logic alone. As John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber, authors of the popular business book *Our Iceberg Is Melting,* found, "feelings often trump thinking."[3] Jonah Lehrer, author of *How We Decide,* goes a step further. He offers research that shows people make better decisions—ones that satisfy them better—about large purchases such as a couch when they followed their emotions: "The process of thinking requires feeling, for feelings are what let us understand all the information that we can't directly comprehend. Reason without emotion is impotent."[4]

De Tijd, a Belgian business newspaper, won a European Marketing Council award for its emotional appeal to get human resource managers to use its pension brochure. Every manager who published a job ad in the newspaper received a handwritten letter from Cyriel, age 84, applying for the position. The message on the last page of Cyriel's application read, "Save your employees from having to do like Cyriel: to look for a job when they retire. Offer your employees our brochure." Sales of the brochure increased 24%.[5]

4. What Kind of Persuasion Is Best for the Situation?

Different kinds of people require different kinds of persuasion. What works for your boss may not work for your colleague. But even the same person may require different kinds of persuasion in different situations. Many people who make rational decisions at work do not do so at home, where they may decide to smoke and overeat even though they know smoking and obesity contribute to many deaths.

For years, companies have based their persuasion techniques on the idea that money is most people's primary motivator. And sometimes it is, of course. How many people buy an extra item to reach the $25 amount for free shipping at Amazon? But research in the last decade has shown that people are also motivated by other factors, including competition and community perceptions. Utility companies, for example, have found that people are more likely to conserve energy if they see how their use compares to their neighbors' use. And patients are more likely to take their medications regularly if there is a system to notify doctors or family members when they do. These factors, derived from behavioral economics, open up new ways to persuade people to act.[6]

Even when money is the motivator, companies are beginning to use it differently, especially when trying to persuade their employees to lead healthier lives. Many of these new techniques stem from **behavioral economics,** a branch of economics that uses insights from sociology and psychology. It finds that people often behave irrationally, although still predictably, and not in their own best interests. Techniques include lotteries and short-term financial incentives. Employees who enroll in weight-loss or smoking-cessation programs and stick with them might be eligible for a daily lottery (people tend to give greater weight to the small probability of a lottery than to the much larger probability of long-term health improvements from a healthier lifestyle) or a regular series of payments (people tend to value short-term benefits over long-term health improvements). Capitalizing on the well-known aversion to loss, companies are also asking employees in such programs to put a dollar or two each day into the program. Employees who meet their goals get their money back plus matching funds.[7]

In *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us,* Daniel Pink summarizes decades of research that shows many businesses are using the wrong kinds of persuasion on their employees who do knowledge work,

work that demands sophisticated understanding, flexible problem solving, and creativity. According to this research, once basic levels of financial fairness are reached, "carrot" motivators, such as financial ones, do not work for employees who are expected to be innovative. In fact, carrot motivators will actually decrease innovation; they turn creative work into drudgery.

"Stick" motivators, in the form of ill-chosen goals, are also harmful and can lead to unethical and illegal behavior. Managers hit short-term goals to get performance bonuses, even when they know the short-term goals will cause long-term problems. Sears set sales quotas on its auto repair personnel, who then made national news by overcharging and performing unnecessary repairs. Mortgage issuers offered financial incentives for new mortgages, which got offered to people who could not afford them, leading to a worldwide recession.

So what does motivate knowledge workers? Pink says it is three drives: "our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to expend and expand our abilities, and to live a life of purpose."[8]

5. What Kind of Persuasion Is Best for the Organization and the Culture?

A strategy that works in one organization may not work somewhere else. One **corporate culture** may value no-holds-barred aggressiveness. In another organization with different cultural values, an employee who used a hard-sell strategy for a request would antagonize people.

Organizational culture (see Chapter 2) isn't written down; it's learned by imitation and observation. What style do high-level people in your organization use to persuade? When you show a draft to your boss, are you told to tone down your statements or to make them stronger? Role models and advice are two ways organizations communicate their culture to newcomers.

Different kinds of persuasion also work for different **social cultures.** In North Carolina, police are using a new combination to persuade drug dealers to shut down. The combination includes iron-clad cases against the dealers, but also pressure from loved ones—mothers, grandmothers, mentors—along with a second chance. Texas used a famous antilitter campaign based on the slogan "Don't Mess with Texas." Research showed the typical Texas litterer was 18–35, male, a pickup driver, and a lover of sports and country music. He did not respond to authority (Don't litter) or cute owls (Give a hoot; don't pollute). Instead, the campaign aimed to convince this target audience that people like him did not pollute. Ads featured Texan athletes and musicians making the point that Texans don't litter. The campaign was enormously successful: during its first five years, Texas roadside litter decreased 72% and roadside cans 81%.[9] The campaign is still going 25 years later.[10]

What counts for "evidence" also varies by culture. In general, people count a scientist as an expert only when that scientist agrees with a position held by most of those who share their cultural values. This remains true even if the scientist got a degree from a major university, is on the faculty at another major university, and is a member of the National Academy of Sciences.[11]

Different **native cultures** also have different preferences for gaining compliance. In one study, students who were native speakers of American English judged direct statements ("Do this"; "I want you to do this") clearer and more effective than questions ("Could you do this?") or hints ("This is needed"). Students who were native speakers of Korean, in contrast, judged direct statements to be *least* effective. In the Korean culture, the clearer a request is, the

Parrot Persuasion

The tiny island of St. Lucia in the Caribbean is the only home of the St. Lucia Parrot, a beautiful blue, green, and red bird which was on the brink of extinction; only 100 of the parrots remained in the wild.

St. Lucia's forestry department hired Paul Butler, a new college grad, to head an effort to preserve the parrot. Butler faced an enormous task. The St. Lucia Parrot had few legal protections, and the citizens of the island didn't seem to care.

Armed with a tiny budget and a passion for the project, Butler embarked on a public relations campaign to convince St. Lucians that their parrot was special and should be protected. He arranged for puppet shows, T-shirts, and bumper stickers. He had volunteers in parrot costumes visit local schools. He even convinced a phone company to make calling cards with the lovely parrot next to the not-so-lovely bald eagle.

St. Lucia's forestry department was happy with his campaign: the St. Lucia Parrot population has improved to between 600 and 700 birds.

Adapted from Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), 149–51.

Selling Education

At the end of every year, college football teams in the United States participate in highly anticipated title contests and bowl games. As part of each televised event, the two universities whose teams are playing in the games are given 30-second advertising spots during halftime.

What do the universities do with their time? A *Wall Street Journal* study of 112 university commercials found that most are an odd mixture of messages: academics, the arts, athletics, and scientific achievements, all trying to appeal to high school students, their parents, alumni, and taxpayers. The study found that with so many audiences and confused messages, most of the ads were unsuccessful. A few, however, stood out.

- Some ads used famous alumni, like Jon Hamm (Missouri) or Tom Brokaw (Iowa), to talk about their schools.
- Rice University used historical footage of John F. Kennedy delivering his famous speech at the Rice campus about putting a man on the moon.
- Minnesota delivered an ad focused on the research of professor Massoud Amin, who is developing a better power grid.

The most successful ads showed an understanding of their audience and focused on a single, clear message.

Adapted from Darren Everson, "Those Halftime College Ads: A Review," *Wall Street Journal,* November 19, 2010, D12.

ruder and therefore less effective it is.[12] Another study notes that communicators from countries such as China, Japan, and Korea prefer to establish personal relationships before they address business issues. They also show modesty and humility, debasing their egos in favor of collective relationships and disdaining personal profit.[13]

Researchers are studying the sale of counterfeit drugs, which is a huge business, both in the United States and abroad. They have found that the quality of the fakes matters only in the United States; people in other countries are willing to accept a price–quality trade-off. United States citizens harbor ill will toward big drug companies; people in other countries do not. United States citizens consider the consumption of counterfeit drugs unethical; people in China and Russia do not.

So what should drug companies do? In countries placing a low priority on drug quality, companies can highlight the dangers of such drugs, including the contaminants that are common in them. In cultures lacking ethical concerns, drug companies can stress social concerns. Diluted malaria drugs, for instance, can help the parasite causing the disease to develop drug resistance.[14]

CHOOSING A PERSUASIVE STRATEGY LO 11-2

If your organization prefers a specific approach, use it. If your organization has no preference, or if you do not know your audience's preference, use the following guidelines to help you choose a strategy. These guidelines work in many cases but not all.

- Use the **direct request pattern** when
  - The audience will do as you ask without any resistance.
  - You need responses only from people who will find it easy to do as you ask.
  - The audience may not read all of the message.
- Use the **problem-solving pattern** when the audience may resist doing as you ask and you expect logic to be more important than emotion in the decision.
- Use the **sales pattern** when the audience may resist doing as you ask and you expect emotion to be more important than logic in the decision.

WARNING: You always need to consider your audience and situation before choosing your persuasive strategy.

WHY THREATS ARE LESS EFFECTIVE THAN PERSUASION

Sometimes people think they will be able to mandate change by ordering or threatening subordinates. Real managers disagree. Research shows that managers use threats only for obligatory duties such as coming to work on time. For more creative duties—like being part of a team or thinking of ways to save the company money—good managers persuade. Persuasion not only keeps the lines of communication open, it fosters better working relationships and makes future discussions go more smoothly.[15]

Threats are even less effective in trying to persuade people whose salaries you don't pay.

A **threat** is a statement—explicit or implied—that someone will be punished if he or she does (or doesn't do) something. Various reasons explain why threats don't work:

1. **Threats don't produce permanent change.** Many people obey the speed limit only when a marked police car is in sight.
2. **Threats won't necessarily produce the action you want.** If you punish whistleblowers, you may stop hearing about problems you could be solving—hardly the response you'd want!
3. **Threats may make people abandon an action—even in situations where it would be appropriate.** Criticizing workers for chatting with each other may reduce their overall collaboration.
4. **Threats produce tension.** People who feel threatened put their energies into ego defense rather than into productive work.
5. **People dislike and avoid anyone who threatens them.** A supervisor who is disliked will find it harder to enlist cooperation and support on the next issue that arises.
6. **Threats can provoke counteraggression.** Getting back at a boss can run the gamut from complaints to work slowdowns to sabotage.

In *The Tipping Point,* Malcolm Gladwell describes classic fear experiments conducted at Yale University. The point of the experiments was to get students to go to the health center for tetanus shots. Students were given high-fear or low-fear versions of booklets explaining why they should get the shots. The high-fear booklet included gruesome pictures and text; the low-fear booklet did not. As you might predict, more of the students reading the high-fear booklet said they would get the shots than those reading the low-fear version. But only 3% of students in either group actually did so. However, one small change upped the percentage to 28% (evenly spread across both groups). That change was including a campus map with the health center circled and the times shots were available listed. The map shifted the persuasion from abstract material about the dangers of tetanus to practical, personal advice.[16]

MAKING PERSUASIVE DIRECT REQUESTS LO 11-3

When you expect quick agreement, you can generally save your audience's time by presenting the request directly (see Figure 11.1). Also use the direct request pattern for busy people who do not read all the messages they receive and in organizations whose cultures favor putting the request first.

This pattern is also frequently used to persuade in dire situations. In 2008, at the height of the United States' financial crisis, Ben Bernanke and Henry Paulson, then treasury secretary, bluntly asked Congress for $700 billion to rescue the banks and prevent a deep, prolonged recession.[17]

Figure 11.1 How to Organize a Persuasive Direct Request

1. **Consider asking immediately for the information or service you want.** Delay the request if it seems too abrupt or if you have several purposes in the message.
2. **Give your audience all the information they will need to act on your request.** Number your questions or set them off with bullets so readers can check to see that all have been answered.
3. **Ask for the action you want.** Do you want a check? A replacement? A catalog? Answers to your questions? If you need an answer by a certain time, say so. If possible, show why the time limit is necessary.

Making Ethics Training Fun

BearingPoint, a management and technology consulting firm, has taken a different approach to its ethics training.

Russ Berland, BearingPoint's chief compliance officer, faced the problem of reworking the company's ethics and compliance program from a rarely used legal manual into a regularly consulted solution to ethics problems. After interviewing associates from around the country, he found that many of them had experienced ethical dilemmas, and their stories were interesting and compelling.

Berland and his associates then came up with a brilliant idea: instead of simply reworking the manual, they decided to put the drama of real-life situations on television. They hired a director and filmed 10 episodes in a weekend, with the plan to release one episode each Monday. Using the format of NBC's hit sitcom *The Office*, the episodes talked about sticky ethics subjects with comic exaggeration.

The series was an instant hit. Employees not only watched the videos, they responded to them, talked about them, and searched for the next episodes before they were released. With humor and heart, BearingPoint helped persuade employees to "take" their ethics training.

Adapted from Dan Heath and Chip Heath, "The Power of Razzle-Dazzle," *Fast Company,* December 2009/January 2010, 69–70; BearingPoint's ethics videos are online at http://fastcompany.com/aggrieva.

In written direct requests, put the request, the topic of the request, or a question in the subject line.

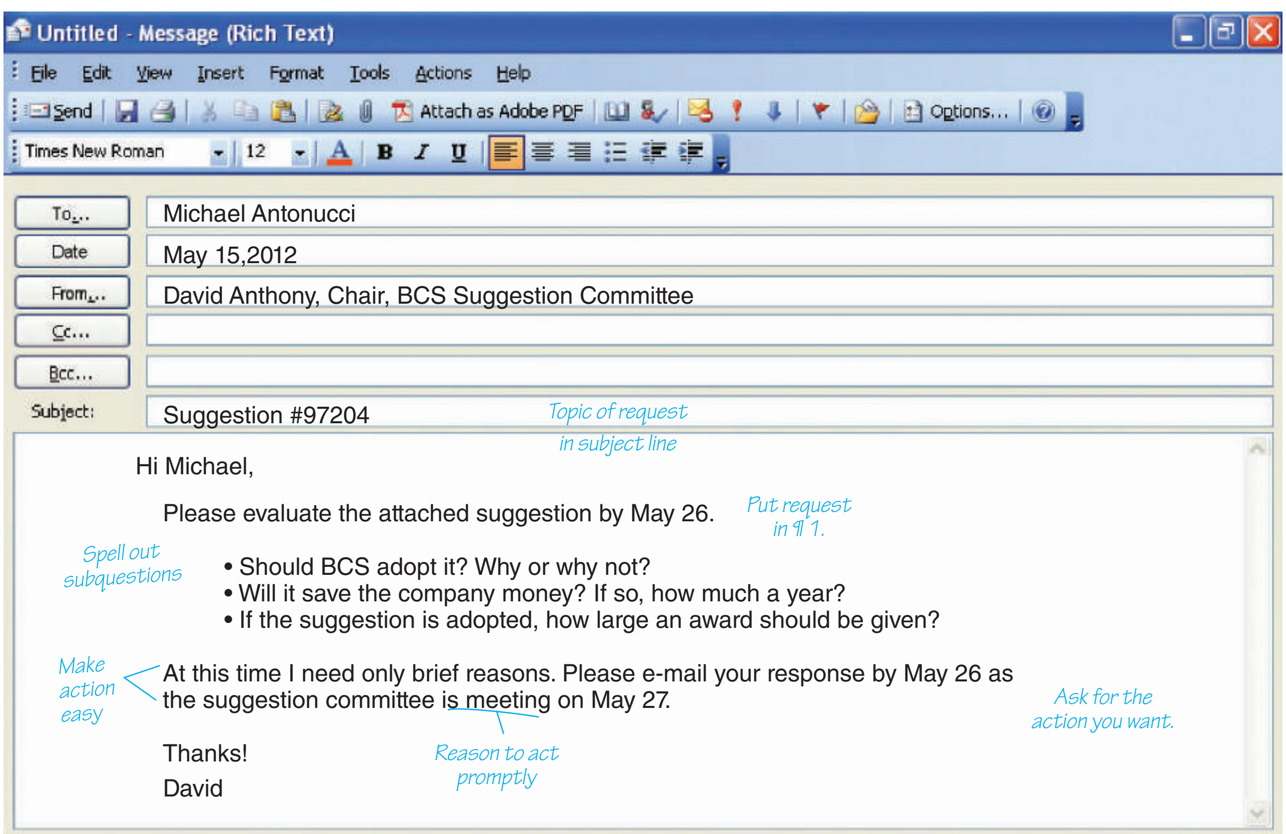
> Subject: Request for Updated Software
>
> My copy of HomeNet does not accept the nicknames for Gmail accounts.

> Subject: Status of Account #3548-003
>
> Please get me the following information about account #3548-003.

> Subject: Do We Need an Additional Training Session in October?
>
> The two training sessions scheduled for October will each accommodate 20 people. Last month, you said that 57 new staff accountants had been hired. Should we schedule an additional training session in October? Or can the new hires wait until the next regularly scheduled session in February?

Figure 11.2 illustrates a direct request. Note that a direct request does not contain benefits and does not need to overcome objections: it simply asks for what is needed.

Figure 11.2 A Direct Request



Untitled - Message (Rich Text)

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Actions Help

To...: Michael Antonucci
Date: May 15,2012
From...: David Anthony, Chair, BCS Suggestion Committee
Cc...:
Bcc...:
Subject: Suggestion #97204

Hi Michael,

Please evaluate the attached suggestion by May 26.

- Should BCS adopt it? Why or why not?
- Will it save the company money? If so, how much a year?
- If the suggestion is adopted, how large an award should be given?

At this time I need only brief reasons. Please e-mail your response by May 26 as the suggestion committee is meeting on May 27.

Thanks!

David

Direct requests should be clear. Don't make people guess what you want.

Indirect request:	Is there a newer version of the 2003 *Chicago Manual of Style?*
Direct request:	If there is a newer version of the 2003 *Chicago Manual of Style,* please send it to me.

In a claim, a message asking for correction or compensation for goods or services, explain the circumstances so that the reader knows what happened. Be sure to include all the relevant details: date of purchase, model or invoice number, and so on.

In more complicated direct requests, anticipate possible responses. Suppose you're asking for information about equipment meeting certain specifications. Explain which criteria are most important so that the reader can recommend an alternative if no single product meets all your needs. You may also want to tell the reader what your price constraints are and ask whether the item is in stock or must be special-ordered.

During the recession, the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood urged parents to write to toy manufacturers asking them to suspend advertising toys to children during the holiday season. The CCFC offered parents a sample letter, one which put the request in the first sentence. Anticipating strong reactions from toy manufacturers, the CCFC pointed out that it is wrong to make children expect toys that their parents cannot afford. The letter offered the alternative of advertising the toys to parents, who of course buy the toys, rather than to children. (See Exercise 11.26 for more details and the text of the sample letter.)[18]

WRITING PERSUASIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING MESSAGES LO 11-4

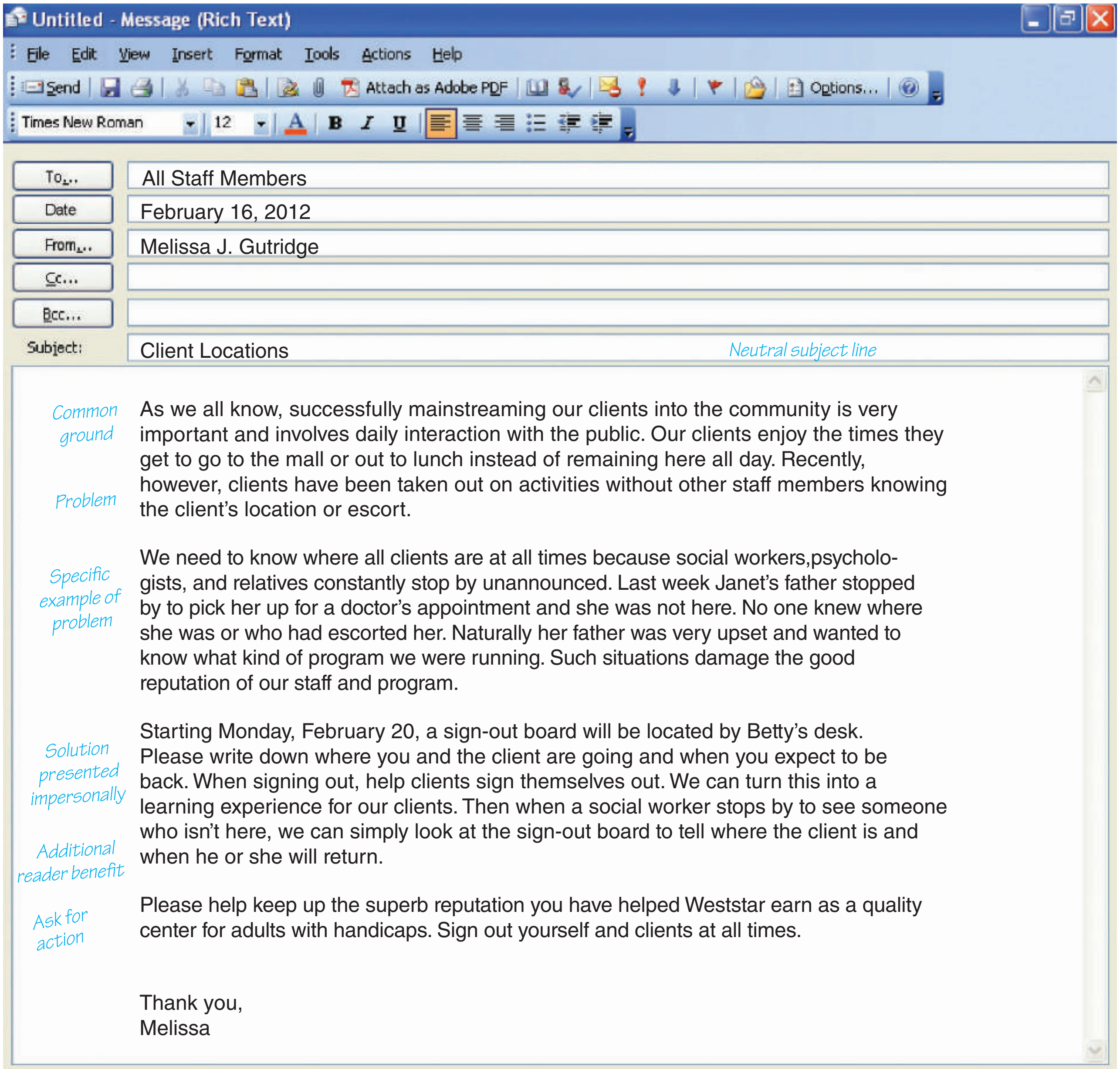
Generally, you will use an indirect approach and the problem-solving pattern of organization (see Figure 11.3) when you expect resistance from your audience but can show that doing what you want will solve a problem you and your audience share. This pattern allows you to disarm opposition by showing all the reasons in favor of your position before you give your audience a chance to say *no.* As always, you need to analyze your audience and situation before you choose this approach to ensure it is a good one for the occasion.

Figure 11.3 How to Organize a Persuasive Problem-Solving Message

1. **Catch the audience's interest by mentioning a common ground.** Show that your message will be interesting or beneficial. You may want to catch attention with a negative (which you will go on to show can be solved).
2. **Define the problem you both share (which your request will solve).** Present the problem objectively: don't assign blame or mention personalities. Be specific about the cost in money, time, lost goodwill, and so on. You have to convince people that *something* has to be done before you can convince them that your solution is the best one.
3. **Explain the solution to the problem.** If you know that the audience will favor another solution, start with that solution and show why it won't work before you present your solution.

   Present your solution without using the words *I* or *my*. Don't let personalities enter the picture; don't let the audience think they should say *no* just because you've had other requests accepted recently.
4. **Show that any negative elements (cost, time, etc.) are outweighed by the advantages.**
5. **Summarize any additional benefits of the solution.** The main benefit—solving the problem—can be presented briefly since you described the problem in detail. However, if there are any additional benefits, mention them.
6. **Ask for the action you want.** Often your audience will authorize or approve something; other people will implement the action. Give your audience a reason to act promptly, perhaps offering a new benefit. ("By buying now, we can avoid the next quarter's price hikes.")

Figure 11.4 A Problem-Solving Persuasive Message



To... All Staff Members
Date February 16, 2012
From... Melissa J. Gutridge
Cc...
Bcc...
Subject: Client Locations

As we all know, successfully mainstreaming our clients into the community is very important and involves daily interaction with the public. Our clients enjoy the times they get to go to the mall or out to lunch instead of remaining here all day. Recently, however, clients have been taken out on activities without other staff members knowing the client's location or escort.

We need to know where all clients are at all times because social workers,psycholo-gists, and relatives constantly stop by unannounced. Last week Janet's father stopped by to pick her up for a doctor's appointment and she was not here. No one knew where she was or who had escorted her. Naturally her father was very upset and wanted to know what kind of program we were running. Such situations damage the good reputation of our staff and program.

Starting Monday, February 20, a sign-out board will be located by Betty's desk. Please write down where you and the client are going and when you expect to be back. When signing out, help clients sign themselves out. We can turn this into a learning experience for our clients. Then when a social worker stops by to see someone who isn't here, we can simply look at the sign-out board to tell where the client is and when he or she will return.

Please help keep up the superb reputation you have helped Weststar earn as a quality center for adults with handicaps. Sign out yourself and clients at all times.

Thank you,
Melissa

The message in Figure 11.4 uses the problem-solving pattern of organization. Benefits can be brief in this kind of message since the biggest benefit comes from solving the problem.

Subject Lines for Problem-Solving Messages

When you have a reluctant audience, putting the request in the subject line just gets a quick *no* before you've had a chance to give all your arguments. One option is to use a neutral subject line. In the following example, the first is the most neutral. The remaining two increasingly reveal the writer's preference.

Subject: A Proposal to Change the Formula for Calculating Retirees' Benefits

Subject: Arguments for Expanding the Marysville Plant

Subject: Why Cassano's Should Close Its West Side Store

Another option is to use common ground or a benefit—something that shows the audience that this message will help them.

> Subject: Reducing Energy Costs in the Louisville Office
>
> Energy costs in our Louisville office have risen 12% in the last three years, even though the cost of gas has remained constant and the cost of electricity has risen only 5%.

Although your first paragraph may be negative in a problem-solving message, your subject line should be neutral or positive.

Developing a Common Ground

A common ground avoids the me-against-you of some persuasive situations and suggests that both you and your audience have a mutual interest in solving the problems you face. To find a common ground, we analyze the audience; understand their biases, objections, and needs; and identify with them to find common goals. This analysis could be carried out in a cold, manipulative way. It should, however, be based on a respect for and sensitivity to the audience's position.

Audiences are highly sensitive to manipulation. No matter how much you disagree with your audience, respect their intelligence. Try to understand why they believe or do something and why they may object to your position. If you can understand your audiences' initial positions, you'll be more effective—and you won't alienate your audience by talking down to them.

The best common grounds are specific. Often a negative—a problem the audience will want to solve—makes a good common ground.

Vague common ground:	We all want this plant to be profitable.
Improved specific common ground:	We forfeited a possible $1,860,000 in profits last month due to a 17% drop in productivity.

In your common ground, emphasize the parts of your proposal that fit with what your audience already does or believes. Some HMOs are trying to improve patients' health (and cut the costs of providing care for them) by reaching out to individual patients and persuading them to take medications, get needed tests, and manage chronic conditions. Often, they first have to overcome patients' belief that HMOs want to limit their access to care. They do so by emphasizing the patients' needs and health.

Use audience analysis to evaluate possible common grounds. Suppose you want to install a system to play background music in a factory. To persuade management to pay for the system, a possible common ground would be increasing productivity. However, to persuade the union to pay for the system, you'd need a different common ground. Workers would see productivity as a way to get them to do more work for the same pay. A better common ground would be that the music would make the factory environment more pleasant.

Dealing with Objections

If you know that your audience will hear other points of view, or if your audience's initial position is negative, you have to deal with their objections to persuade them. The stronger the objection is, the earlier in your message you should deal with it.

That Personal Touch

Selling a home in a crowded market can be difficult. Real estate brokers and homeowners often need to turn to unconventional methods to help their homes stand out. One Atlanta broker, Rhonda Duffy, asks her clients to include a personal touch in selling their homes: Each homeowner writes a personal letter to potential buyers.

While the letters do review the important facts about the home, they accomplish much more. Through the letters, homeowners can paint a picture of the best features and intangible benefits of the home. The letters show that real people have lived in the home and have been happy there. These personal letters can make a big impact on buyers, most of whom are not just investing in property, but are looking for a lifestyle. The letters also make the homes memorable. Duffy explains, "It's 'the letter house' instead of 'the green carpet house.'"

Adapted from Amy Hoak, "Desperate Times, Desperate Measures," *Wall Street Journal*, December 13, 2010, R10.

It Came from Where?

New companies face an uphill battle to persuade people to trust them and their products. The problem is even worse if the new companies are located in a country not usually associated with the product they are selling. Take chocolate, for example. Although the cocoa beans used to produce the world's best chocolate come from South America and Africa, consumers associate fine chocolate with European companies.

Companies from emerging markets employ several different strategies to deal with consumer perceptions. Some try actively to change perceptions, by playing up their countries on product labeling. Others hide their countries of origin or use companies in the United States or Europe as their primary labels.

The most successful, however, work for years to establish their brand by producing quality products and offering excellent service. Carmakers like Toyota, Nissan, and Honda established themselves through years of investment and quality to become some of the most trusted brands in the auto business.

Adapted from Rohit Deshpandé, "Why You Aren't Buying Venezuelan Chocolate," *Harvard Business Review* 88, no. 12 (December 2010): 25–27.

The best way to deal with an objection is to eliminate it. When hail damaged mail-order apples just before harvest, the orchard owner inserted a note in each crate being shipped:

> Note the hail marks which have caused minor skin blemishes in some of these apples. They are proof of their growth at a high mountain altitude where the sudden chills from hailstorms help firm the flesh, develop the natural sugars, and give these apples their incomparable flavor.

No one asked for a refund; in fact, some customers requested the hail-marked apples the next year.[19]

If an objection is false and is based on misinformation, give the response to the objection without naming the objection. (Repeating the objection gives it extra emphasis.) In a brochure, you can present responses with a "question/answer" format.

When objections have already been voiced, you may want to name the objection so that your audience realizes that you are responding to that specific objection. However, to avoid solidifying the opposition, don't attribute the objection to your audience. Instead, use a less personal attribution: "Some people wonder . . ."; "Some citizens are afraid that. . . ."

If real objections remain, try one or more of the following strategies to counter objections:

1. Specify how much time and/or money is required—it may not be as much as the audience fears.

> Distributing flyers to each house or apartment in your neighborhood will probably take two afternoons.

2. Put the time and/or money in the context of the benefits they bring.

> The additional $252,500 will (1) allow the Essex Shelter to remain open 24 rather than 16 hours a day, (2) pay for three social workers to help men find work and homes, and (3) keep the Neighborhood Bank open, so that men don't have to cash Social Security checks in bars and so that they can save for the $800 deposit they need to rent an apartment.

3. Show that money spent now will save money in the long run.

> By buying a $1,000 safety product, we can avoid $5,000 in OSHA fines.

4. Show that doing as you ask will benefit some group or cause the audience supports, even though the action may not help the audience directly. This is the strategy used in fund-raising letters.

> By being a Big Brother or a Big Sister, you'll give a child the adult attention he or she needs to become a well-adjusted, productive adult.

5. Show the audience that the sacrifice is necessary to achieve a larger, more important goal to which they are committed.

> These changes will mean more work for all of us. But we've got to cut our costs 25% to keep the plant open and to keep our jobs.

The Central Asia Institute uses positive images and language to show how financial contributions help promote world peace by building schools in Asian countries. See https://www.ikat.org/

6. Show that the advantages as a group outnumber or outweigh the disadvantages as a group.

> None of the locations is perfect. But the Backbay location gives us the most advantages and the fewest disadvantages.

Use the following steps when you face major objections:

1. **Find out why your audience members resist what you want them to do.** Sit down one-on-one with people and listen. Don't try to persuade them; just try to understand.
2. **Try to find a win–win solution.** People will be much more readily persuaded if they see benefits for themselves. Sometimes your original proposal may have benefits that the audience had not thought of, and explaining the benefits will help. Sometimes you'll need to modify your original proposal to find a solution that solves the real problem and meets everyone's needs.
3. **Let your audience save face.** Don't ask people to admit that they have been wrong all along. If possible, admit that the behavior may have been appropriate in the past. Whether you can do that or not, always show how changed circumstances or new data call for new action.
4. **Ask for something small.** When you face great resistance, you won't get everything at once. Ask for a month's trial. Ask for one step that will move toward your larger goal. For example, if your ultimate goal is to eliminate prejudice in your organization, a step toward that goal might be to convince managers to make a special effort for one month to recognize the contributions of women or members of minorities in group meetings.
5. **Present your arguments from your audience's point of view.** Offer benefits that help the audience, not just you. Take special care to avoid words that attack or belittle your audience. Present yourself as someone helping your audience achieve their goals, not someone criticizing or giving orders from above.

Hard Tests for Persuasion

How do you get your employees to agree to be tested for AIDS? This was a huge concern for SABMiller, a South African brewer who faced losing about 15% of its workforce within three years. Their first step was to hire an outside testing firm to allay fears that a positive HIV test would become company gossip or hurt careers. Participants also joined raffles for free radios and TVs. The company paid for antiretroviral treatment for infected employees.

How do you get employees to leave their jobs? France Telecom's need for a major workforce reduction inspired them to be creative. In addition to traditional means such as early retirement plans and retirement bonuses, they developed a program to shift people to public sector jobs at other institutions. They also helped employees start their own businesses, offering assistance with writing business plans, applying for loans, and purchasing equipment. They paid for consultations with business people and new educational courses.

What other hard tests for businesses can you identify? What persuasive solutions can you imagine?

Adapted from William Echikson and Adam Coher, "SABMiller's AIDS Test Program Gets Results: Effort Benefits Business, Saves Employee Lives; Building Confidence Is Key," *Wall Street Journal,* August 18, 2006, A7; and Leila Abboud, "At France Telecom, Battle to Cut Jobs Breeds Odd Tactics: Company Offers Money, Advice on Starting New Business if Employees Will Leave," *Wall Street Journal,* August 14, 2006, A1.

Organizational changes work best when the audience buys into the solution. And that happens most easily when they themselves find it. Management can encourage employees to identify problems and possible solutions. If that is not possible because of time, sensitive information, or organizational cultural constraints, a good second alternative is to fully explain to employees how the decision for organizational change was made, the reasons behind the change, what alternatives were considered, and why they were rejected. A study of over 100 employers found that workers who received such explanations were more than twice as likely to support the decision as those workers who did not.[20]

Offering a Reason for the Audience to Act Promptly

The longer people delay, the less likely they are to carry through with the action they had decided to take. In addition, you want a fast response so you can go ahead with your own plans.

Request action by a specific date. Try to give people at least a week or two: they have other things to do besides respond to your requests. Set deadlines in the middle of the month, if possible. If you say, "Please return this by March 1," people will think, "I don't need to do this till March." Ask for the response by February 28 instead. Similarly, a deadline of Friday, 5 pm, will frequently be seen as Monday morning. If such a shift causes you problems, if you were going to work over the weekend, set a Thursday deadline. If you can use a response even after the deadline, say so. Otherwise, people who can't make the deadline may not respond at all.

Your audience may ignore deadlines that seem arbitrary. Show why you need a quick response:

- **Show that the time limit is real.** Perhaps you need information quickly to use it in a report that has a due date. Perhaps a decision must be made by a certain date to catch the start of the school year, the Christmas selling season, or an election campaign. Perhaps you need to be ready for a visit from out-of-town or international colleagues.
- **Show that acting now will save time or money.** If business is slow and your industry isn't doing well, then your company needs to act now (to economize, to better serve customers) in order to be competitive. If business is booming and everyone is making a profit, then your company needs to act now to get its fair share of the available profits.
- **Show the cost of delaying action.** Will labor or material costs be higher in the future? Will delay mean more money spent on repairing something that will still need to be replaced?

Building Emotional Appeal

Emotional appeal helps make people care. Stories and psychological description are effective ways of building emotional appeal.

Even when you need to provide statistics or numbers to convince the careful reader that your anecdote is a representative example, **telling a story** first makes your message more persuasive. In *Made to Stick*, Chip and Dan Heath report on research done at Carnegie Mellon supporting the value of stories. After a survey (completing the survey for money ensured all participants had cash for the real experiment), participants received an envelope with a letter requesting they donate to Save the Children. Researchers tested two letters: one was full of grim statistics about starving Africans. The other letter told the story of seven-year-old Rokia. Participants receiving the Rokia letter gave more

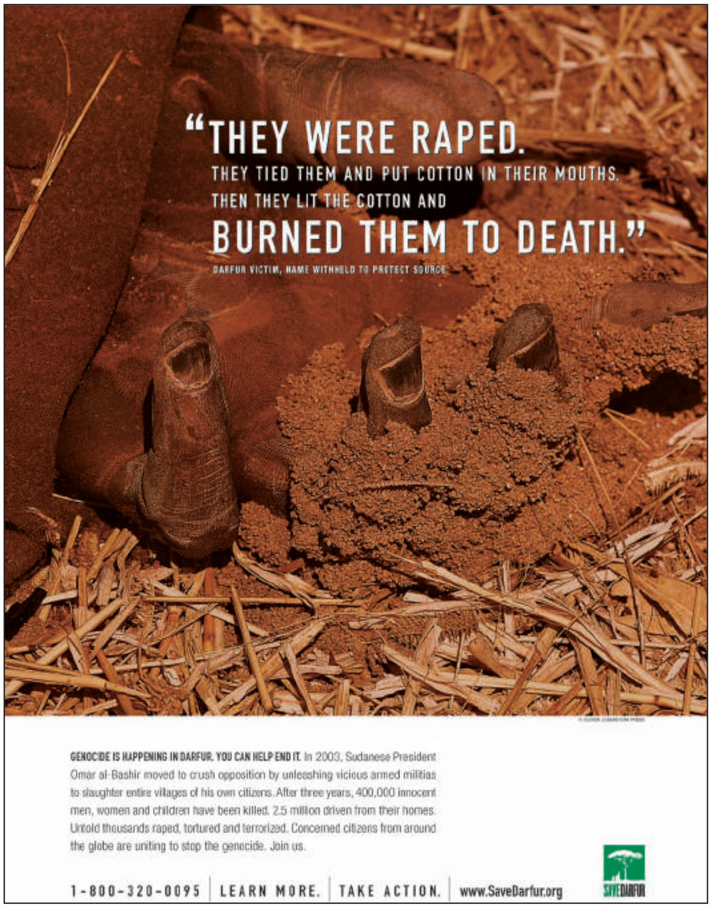
From Full Time to Part Time

Many employees dream about working fewer hours or even cutting back to part-time work. But managers agree that most employees ask their boss the wrong way. Too often employees focus on why *they* want part-time work; managers want to hear about advantages and disadvantages for the company.

You might use these persuasive arguments to convince your employer to let you work fewer hours:

- Demonstrate that you understand and appreciate corporate policies on part-time work.
- Stress that your dedication to your work won't fade when you start working fewer hours.
- Agree to be reached outside the office if your colleagues need you.
- Present a plan detailing how the rest of your work will get done.
- Suggest a trial period to show your plan will work.
- Above all, treat the situation as a persuasive message: develop a common ground with your employer, anticipate objections, and suggest solutions.

Adapted from Erin White, "Build a Case before Asking to Work Less," *Wall Street Journal*, October 24, 2006, B7.



Emotional appeals can be intense. The Save Darfur campaign used this ad to raise awareness of horrifying brutality and genocide. Do you think this graphic of a half-buried hand works to solicit support for this cause? Or is the emotional appeal too intense?

than twice as much money as those receiving the statistics letter. A third group received a letter with both sets of information: the story and the statistics. This group gave a little more than the statistics group, but far less than the group that had the story alone. The researchers theorized that the statistics put people in an analytical frame of mind which canceled the emotional effect of the story.[21]

As with other appeals, the **emotional appeal** should focus on the audience. To customers who had fallen behind with their payments, a credit card company sent not the expected stern collection notice but a hand-addressed, hand-signed greeting card. The front of the card pictured a stream running through a forest. The text inside noted that sometimes life takes unexpected turns and asked people to call the company to find a collaborative solution. When people called the 800 number, they got credit counseling and help in creating a payment plan. Instead of having to write off bad debts, the company received payments—and created goodwill.[22]

In his marketing book *Buyology,* marketing guru Martin Lindstrom points out that advertisers deliberately create somatic markers, icons that associate the advertised goods with some value you admire. Car tires pretty much look the same, but if you head for Michelin instead of Goodyear, you may be responding to carefully crafted somatic markers. The cute baby once used in their ads translates into safety for your child. The plump Michelin man suggests the protective padding of good tires and thus sturdy durability. The high-end Michelin travel and food guides bring an association of top-of-the line quality.[23]

Persuasion at Davos

The Davos economic forum had something new in 2009: a simulation of a refugee camp. Crossroads Foundation staged the simulations, which were cosponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees and the Global Risk Forum.

The one-hour simulations were held 4–5 times a day for 15–30 participants. Everyone was given a specific role to play. The idea was to give Davos attendees a taste of what life is like for the 32.9 million refugees in the world.

The "refugee camp" came complete with muddy tent floors, barbed wire, and sadistic guards. Sound effects included exploding bombs, screaming women, and wailing children. One of the actresses involved even stepped on a pretend land mine and was carried away with artificial blood streaming.

What do you think this simulation was trying to persuade executives to do? How effective do you think it was?

Adapted from Alessandra Galloni and Bob Davis, "Sign of the Times: CEOs Play 'Refugees' at Forum," *Wall Street Journal,* January 30, 2009, A6.

Short but Persuasive

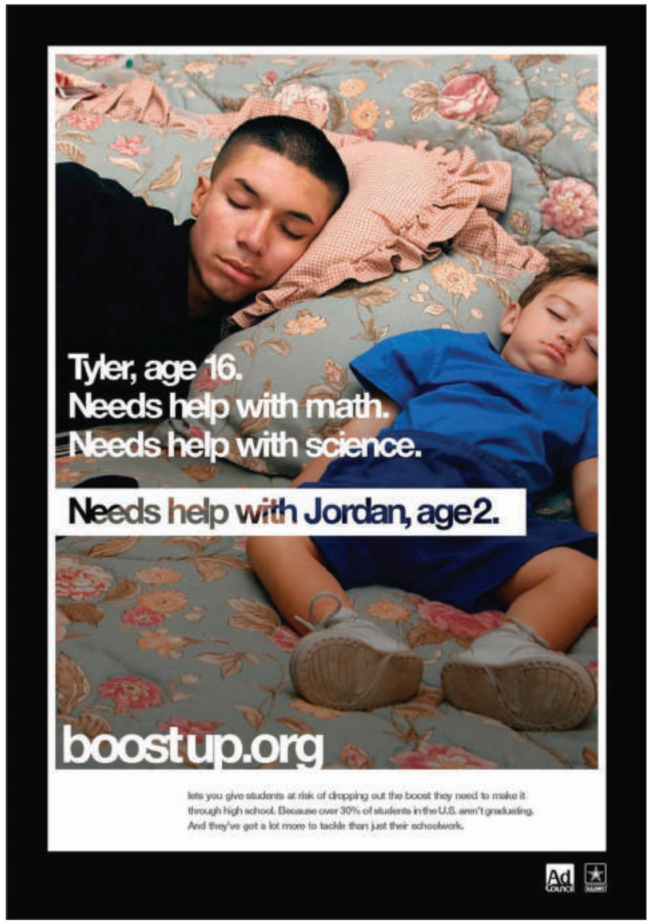
A horse breeder had a problem with city folk feeding his horses. People would try to feed the horses, who are vegetarians, items like hot dogs and hamburgers. The horses would drop the food in the field, and the breeder had to continually police the fields to keep the spoiling food from attracting flies and vermin.

So the breeder put up a sign: "Do Not Feed the Horses." The problem got worse, because the sign put the idea into the minds of new people.

The breeder put up another sign: "Please Do Not Feed the Horses." The problem got still worse. (This guy is so polite, he won't mind.)

Finally, the breeder put up this sign: "We Eat Only Apples and Carrots." His problem was solved.

Adapted from Nicholas Boothman, *Convince Them in 90 Seconds *or Less* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2010), 267.



Emotional appeal is often used in public service announcements. Here the AdCouncil uses the emotional appeal of the young child to underscore Tyler's need for help.

Sometimes emotional appeals go too far and alienate audiences. Germany's Federal Constitutional Court ruled that a PETA ad campaign was an offense against human dignity and not protected by freedom of speech laws. The campaign compared factory farms and animal slaughterhouses to Jewish concentration camps and the Holocaust.[24]

Sense impressions—what the reader sees, hears, smells, tastes, feels—evoke a strong emotional response. **Psychological description** means creating a scenario rich with sense impressions so readers can picture themselves using your product or service and enjoying its benefits. The flyer for a university's food services in Figure 11.5 gets your gastric juices flowing.

You can also use psychological description to describe the problem your product, service, or solution will ease. Psychological description works best early in the message to catch readers' attention.

> Because our smokers take their breaks on the front patio, clients visiting our office frequently pass through a haze of acrid smoke—as well as through a group of employees who are obviously not working.

Putting It All Together

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood sent a letter to toy manufacturers direct from the CCFC, in addition to the letters from parents discussed in the Making Persuasive Direct Requests section earlier in this chapter. The

Figure 11.5 Using Psychological Description to Develop Benefits

You-attitude psychological description

The Colonial Room

When you dine in the Illini Union Colonial Room, it's easy to imagine yourself a guest in a fine Virginian mansion. Light from the gleaming chandeliers reflects from a hand-carved mirror hanging over the dark, polished buffet. Here you can dine in quiet elegance amid furnishings adapted from 18th century Williamsburg and the Georgian homes of the James River Valley in Virginia.

Visual details

Perhaps you'd like a dinner of stuffed rainbow trout. Or the pork fricassee. The menu features a variety of complete meals which are changed daily, as well as the regular a la carte service. Whatever your choice, you'll enjoy an evening of fine dining at very reasonable prices.

The Illini Union Colonial Room is located on the northeast corner of the first floor. Dinners are served Monday through Friday from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Please call 333-0690 for reservations, and enjoy the flavor of the Colonies tonight.

Details appeal to sight, taste, smell

Emphasis on reader's choice–Not every reader will want the same thing

The Cafeteria

In the Illini Union Cafeteria, you start out with an empty tray and silverware. Then comes the food, several yards of it, all yours for the choosing. By the time you've finished, your empty tray has become a delicious meal.

In the morning, the warm aroma of breakfast fills the air. Feast your eyes and then your appetite on the array of eggs, bacon, pancakes, toast, sausage, rolls, juices, and coffee . . . They're all waiting to wake you up with good taste. Have a hearty breakfast or make it quick and tasty. The warm, freshly baked sweet rolls and coffeecakes practically beg to be smothered in butter and savored with a cup of hot coffee.

By 11 a.m. the breakfast menu has made way for lunch. Here come the plump Reuben sandwiches and the toasty grilled cheese. Soups and salads make their appearance. A variety of vegetables are dressed up to entice you and several main dishes lead the luncheon parade. Any number of complete meals can take shape as you move along.

What? Back for dinner? Well, no wonder! The Cafeteria sets out a wide selection of entrees and side dishes. Veal parmigiana steams for your attention but the roast beef right next to it is rough competition. Tomorrow the fried chicken might be up for selection. Choose the dinner combination that best fits your appetite and your pocket.

The newly remodeled Cafeteria is on the ground floor and is open for breakfast from 7 to 11 a.m. Monday through Saturday and 8 to 11 a.m. on Sunday. Lunch is served from 11 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sunday. Dinner is served from 4:45 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday.

A meal in a restaurant is expensive. A meal at home is a chore. But a meal at the Cafeteria combines good food and reasonable prices to make dining a pleasure.

organization's letter, which was two pages, used most of the elements discussed in this section of the chapter in its quest to stop holiday toy advertising to children.

Although major secondary purposes of the CCFC's letter were avoiding either disappointing children at the holidays or forcing parents to buy toys they could ill afford, the CCFC could not use these purposes as common grounds with toy manufacturers, who might see their own sales as a much greater goal. Therefore they highlighted a different way to sell toys:

> We understand the need to create awareness of your products. We urge you to do that by advertising directly to parents.

The letter anticipated many objections from toy manufacturers. To counter claims that parents did not need to cut back on toy buying, the CCFC cited information gathered by the Associated Press. To counter claims that advertising directly to children does not lead to toy requests and hence family stress, the CCFC referred to a review of research in the academic journal *Applied Developmental Psychology*. To counter claims that the toy industry was cutting back on ads to children, they referred to media figures.

The letter also used emotional appeals:

> As you know, children are more vulnerable to advertising than adults. Seductive advertising designed explicitly to exploit their vulnerabilities will create unrealistic expectations in kids too young to understand the economic crises and will make parenting in these uncertain times even more difficult.

The fast approach of the holiday sales push provided the reason for prompt action. For more details about this campaign, including the full text of CCFC's letter and some responses from toy manufacturers, see Exercise 11.26.[25]

TONE IN PERSUASIVE MESSAGES

The best phrasing for tone depends on your relationship to the your audience. When you ask for action from people who report directly to you, polite orders ("Please get me the Ervin file") and questions ("Do we have the third-quarter numbers yet?") will work. When you need action from co-workers, superiors, or people outside the organization, you need to be more polite.

How you ask for action affects whether you build or destroy positive relationships with other employees, customers, and suppliers. Avoiding messages that sound parental or preachy is often a matter of tone. Adding "Please" is a nice touch. Tone will also be better when you give reasons for your request or reasons to act promptly.

Parental: Everyone is expected to comply with these regulations. I'm sure you can see that they are commonsense rules needed for our business.

Better: Even on casual days, visitors expect us to be professional. So please leave the gym clothes at home!

Writing to superiors is trickier. You may want to tone down your request by using subjunctive verbs and explicit disclaimers that show you aren't taking a *yes* for granted.

Arrogant: Based on this evidence, I expect you to give me a new computer.

Better: If department funds permit, I would like a new computer.

Passive verbs and jargon sound stuffy. Use active imperatives—perhaps with "Please" to create a friendlier tone.

Stuffy: It is requested that you approve the above-mentioned action.

Better: Please authorize us to create a new subscription letter.

It can be particularly tricky to control tone in e-mail messages, which tend to sound less friendly than paper documents or conversations. For important requests, compose your message offline and revise it carefully before you send it.

Major requests that require great effort or changes in values, culture, or lifestyles should not be made in e-mail messages.

Undercutting Persuasion to Be Ethical

Companies and executives spend time and money to persuade employees to be ethical in their actions. But even the best managers may not see unethical behavior. The *Harvard Business Review* listed five reasons why:

1. Ill-Conceived Goals: If goals are expressed in the wrong way (like a goal for a number of billable hours), they may encourage employees to lie or cheat in order to achieve them.
2. Motivated Blindness: Managers may overlook their employees' unethical choices if those choices benefit the managers' interests.
3. Indirect Blindness: Managers may not hold their employees accountable for unethical behavior by contractors or other third parties.
4. The Slippery Slope: Managers may miss unethical behavior when it develops slowly over time.
5. Overvaluing Outcomes: If the employees are meeting the right outcomes, managers may ignore the unethical behavior.

To ensure ethical practice, companies and executives must find ways around these barriers.

Adapted from Max H. Bazerman and Ann E. Tenbrusel, "Ethical Breakdowns," *Harvard Business Review* 89, no.4 (April 2011): 58–65.

VARIETIES OF PERSUASIVE MESSAGES

Performance appraisals and letters of recommendation are two important kinds of persuasive messages.

Performance Appraisals

Good supervisors give their employees regular feedback on their performances. The feedback may range from a brief "Good job!" to a hefty bonus. Blanchard and Johnson's *One Minute Manager* is a popular business guide for brief but effective performance feedback.

Performance appraisals have a tarnished reputation. Employees may not want to be honest with their supervisor about their need for improvement or training. A supervisor who praises an employee may need to reward that person. On the other hand, a supervisor who criticizes a poor performance may then need to explain why this person wasn't managed more effectively. Supervisors of Army Major Nidal Hasan, who killed 13 at Fort Hood, praised him in performance appraisals, even though they knew he was often late for work, disappeared when on call, saw few patients, and pushed his religious views on those around him.[26]

Critics also complain about vague criteria and feedback, or stock phrases. They note that "not a team player" is being used to eliminate the need to give high achievers well-deserved promotions. Even widely touted techniques such as 360-degree feedback (anonymous input from supervisors, peers, and subordinates) have their critics. Some companies are suspending this form of appraisal because of conflicting input with vague support.[27]

Companies are recognizing the need to lavish more praise on their workers, especially younger ones. Land's End and Bank of America hired consultants to teach their supervisors how to compliment workers. The Scooter Store Inc. hired a "celebrations assistant," whose duties included handing out 100–500 celebration balloons and tossing 25 pounds of confetti—per week. (The celebrations assistant became averse to confetti, so her praise came in the form of text messaging.) Such companies see the praise as a way to maintain work quality and keep good workers.[28]

Performance appraisal documents are more formal ways by which supervisors evaluate, or appraise, the performance of their subordinates. In most organizations, employees have access to their appraisals; sometimes they must sign the document to show that they've read it. The superior normally meets with the subordinate to discuss the appraisal.

As a subordinate, you should prepare for the appraisal interview by listing your achievements and goals. What have you accomplished during the appraisal period? What supporting details will you need? Where do you want to be in a year or five years? What training and experience do you need to reach your goals? If you need training, advice, or support from the organization to improve, the appraisal interview is a good time to ask for this help. As you prepare, choose the persuasive strategy that will best present your work.

Appraisals need to both protect the organization and motivate the employee. Sometimes these two purposes conflict. Most of us will see a candid appraisal as negative; we need praise and reassurance to believe that we're valued and can do better. But the praise that motivates someone to improve can come back to haunt the company if the person does not eventually do acceptable work. An organization is in trouble if it tries to fire someone whose evaluations never mention mistakes.

Put Positive Emphasis in Performance Appraisals

Positive emotional appeal is a great tool for performance reviews and other "management moments" where you need to give motivating feedback to a co-worker, teammate, or employee.

Julia Stewart, the chair and CEO of the restaurant company DineEquity, describes how she uses positive emotional appeals when she gives feedback to employees. "I'd go behind the counter, get on the food prep line, and catch an employee doing something right. I'd say, 'Great job—that's the perfect way to portion that taco' and then turn to the next person down the line and ask, 'Did you see how well this was done?' Or I'd stand in the middle of the kitchen and half-shout, 'Who did the walk-in here today?' There would be silence, and then someone would confess, 'I did.' And I'd compliment him on the job and ask the people in the kitchen to gather around so they could see what had gone right and what could be done even better the next time."

This type of positive emphasis is a great persuasive tool: your audience associates your feedback with the positive emotional feeling of being praised, which makes them more likely to view your recommendations as positive and act on them.

Adapted from Daisy Wademan Dowling, "DineEquity Chairman and CEO Julia A. Stewart on Leaders as Teachers," *Harvard Business Review* 87, no. 3 (March 2009): 29.

When you are writing performance appraisals that need to document areas for improvement, avoid labels (*wrong, bad*) and inferences. Instead, cite specific observations that describe behavior.

Inference:	Sam is an alcoholic.
Vague observation:	Sam calls in sick a lot. Subordinates complain about his behavior.
Specific observation:	Sam called in sick a total of 12 days in the last two months. After a business lunch with a customer last week, Sam was walking unsteadily. Two of his subordinates have said that they would prefer not to make sales trips with him because they find his behavior embarrassing.

Sam might be an alcoholic. He might also be having a reaction to a physician-prescribed drug; he might have a mental illness; he might be showing symptoms of a physical illness other than alcoholism. A supervisor who jumps to conclusions creates ill will, closes the door to solving the problem, and may provide grounds for legal action against the organization.

Be specific in an appraisal.

Too vague:	Sue does not manage her time as well as she could.
Specific:	Sue's first three weekly sales reports have been three, two, and four days late, respectively; the last weekly sales report for the month is not yet in.

Without specifics, Sue won't know that her boss objects to late reports. She may think that she is being criticized for spending too much time on sales calls or for not working 80 hours a week. Without specifics, she might change the wrong things in a futile effort to please her boss.

It is also important that specifics be included in performance appraisals for good employees to help them continue to shine and also to receive their well-deserved raises and promotions.

Appraisals are more useful to subordinates if they make clear which areas are most important and contain specific recommendations for improvement. No one can improve 17 weaknesses at once. Which two should the employee work on this month? Is getting in reports on time more important than increasing sales?

Phrase goals in specific, concrete terms. The subordinate may think that "considerable progress toward completing" a report may mean that the project should be 15% finished. The boss may think that "considerable progress" means 50% or 85% of the total work.

Sometimes a performance appraisal reflects mostly the month or week right before the appraisal, even though it is supposed to cover six months or a year. Many managers record specific observations of subordinates' behavior two or three times a month. These notes jog the memory so that the appraisal doesn't focus unduly on recent behavior.

A recent trend in performance appraisals is attempting to make them objective. Instead of being subjectively evaluated on intangible qualities like "works well with others," employees are monitored on how well they meet quantifiable goals. Nurses might be ranked on items such as low infection rates and high patient-satisfaction scores. Technical support personnel might be ranked on number of projects completed on time and customer-satisfaction scores.[29] If you will be evaluated by the numbers, try to have a say in setting your goals so you are not judged on items to which you only indirectly contribute. Make sure your goals stay updated so you are not judged on goals which are no longer a priority for your position or your efforts on new goals are not being measured.

Figure 11.6 shows a performance appraisal for a member of a collaborative business communication student group.

Figure 11.6 A Performance Appraisal

February 13, 2012

To: Barbara Buchanan

From: Brittany Papper BAP

Subject: Your Performance Thus Far in Our Collaborative Group

Subject line indicates that memo is a performance appraisal

Overall evaluation

You have been a big asset to our group. Overall, our communications group has been one of the best groups I have ever worked with, and I think that only minor improvements are needed to make our group even better.

These headings would need to be changed in a negative performance appraisal.

Strengths

Specific observations provide dates, details of performance

You demonstrated flexibility and compatibility at our last meeting before we turned in our proposal on February 9 by offering to type the proposal since I had to study for an exam in one of my other classes. I really appreciated this because I definitely did not have the time to do it. I will definitely remember this if you are ever too busy with your other classes and cannot type the final report.

Another positive critical incident occurred February 2. We had discussed researching the topic of sexual discrimination in hiring and promotion at Midstate Insurance. As we read more about what we had to do, we became uneasy about reporting the information from our source who works at Midstate. I called you later that evening to talk about changing our topic to a less personal one. You were very understanding and said that you agreed that the original topic was a touchy one. You offered suggestions for other topics and had a positive attitude about the adjustment. Your suggestions ended my worries and made me realize that you are a positive and supportive person.

Other strengths

Your ideas are a strength that you definitely contribute to our group. You're good at brainstorming ideas, yet you're willing to go with whatever the group decides. That's a nice combination of creativity and flexibility.

Areas for Improvement

Two minor improvements could make you an even better member.

The first improvement is to be more punctual to meetings. On February 2 and February 5 you were about 10 minutes late. This makes the meetings last longer. Your ideas are valuable to the group, and the sooner you arrive the sooner we can share in your suggestions.

Specific recommendations for improvement

Positive cast to suggestion

Specific behavior to be changed

The second suggestion is one we all need to work on. We need to keep our meetings positive and productive. I think that our negative attitudes were worst at our first group meeting February 3. We spent about half an hour complaining about all the work we had to do and about our busy schedules in other classes. In the future if this happens, maybe you could offer some positive things about the assignment to get the group motivated again.

Overall Compatibility

Positive, forward-looking ending

I feel that this group has gotten along very well together. You have been very flexible in finding times to meet and have always been willing to do your share of the work. I have never had this kind of luck with a group in the past and you have been a welcome breath of fresh air. I don't hate doing group projects any more!

Letters of Recommendation

You may write letters of recommendation when you want to recommend someone for an award or for a job. Letters of recommendation must be specific. General positives that are not backed up with specific examples and evidence are seen as weak recommendations. Letters of recommendation that focus on minor points also suggest that the person is weak.

Either in the first or the last paragraph, summarize your overall evaluation of the person. Early in the letter, perhaps in the first paragraph, show how well and how long you've known the person. In the middle of the letter, offer specific details about the person's performance. At the end of the letter, indicate whether you would be willing to rehire the person and repeat your overall evaluation. Figure A.3 in Appendix A shows a sample letter of recommendation.

Although experts are divided on whether you should include negatives, the trend is moving away from doing so. Negatives can create legal liabilities, and many readers feel that any negative weakens the letter. Other people feel that presenting but not emphasizing honest negatives makes the letter more convincing. In either case, you must ensure that your recommendation is honest and accurate.

In many discourse communities, the words "Call me if you need more information" in a letter of recommendation mean "I have negative information that I am unwilling to put on paper. Call me and I'll tell you what I really think."

In an effort to protect themselves against lawsuits, some companies state only how long they employed someone and the position that person held. Such bare-bones letters have themselves been the target of lawsuits when employers did not reveal relevant negatives.

SALES AND FUND-RAISING MESSAGES LO 11-5

Sales and fund-raising messages are a special category of persuasive messages. They are known as **direct marketing** because they ask for an order, inquiry, or contribution directly from the audience. Direct marketing which includes printed (direct mail), verbal (telemarketing), and electronic (e-mails, social media, websites, infomercials) channels, is a $300 billion industry.[30]

This section focuses on two common channels of direct marketing: sales and fund-raising letters. Large organizations hire professionals to write their direct marketing materials. If you own your own business, you can save money by doing your firm's own direct marketing. If you are active in a local group that needs to raise money, writing the fund-raising letter yourself is likely to be the only way your group can afford to use direct mail. If you can write an equally effective e-mail message, you can significantly cut the costs of a marketing campaign or supplement the success of your direct mail with direct e-mail.

The principles in this chapter will help you write solid, serviceable letters and e-mails that will build your business and help fund your group.

Sales, fund-raising, and promotional messages have multiple purposes:

Primary purpose:

To have the reader act (order the product, send a donation).

Secondary purpose:

To build a good image of the writer's organization (to strengthen the commitment of readers who act, and make readers who do not act more likely to respond positively next time).

Super (Bowl) Persuasion

Each year, companies pay millions of dollars to feature 30-second ads in the biggest television event of the year: the Super Bowl. Many companies use the game spots to launch promotions or to set the tone for their annual advertising campaigns. For some, the Super Bowl is a jackpot. For many others, however, the expensive ads fail to connect with consumers. So what makes the difference?

The Super Bowl ads have become almost as much an event as the game itself. Consumers are looking for something new, clever, and most often, funny. In 2011, Volkswagen received the most positive reviews with its ad featuring a boy dressed as Darth Vader discovering that the Force can control his father's new car. Other ads, however, particularly ones that did not offer any surprises or anything new, failed to impress consumers.

High-profile advertising in events like the Super Bowl is a risky venture. Companies must use careful persuasion techniques to succeed.

Adapted from Emily Steel, "At Super Bowl, Many Ads Fail to Score," *Wall Street Journal,* February 7, 2011, B1.

Organizing a Sales or Fund-Raising Message

Use the sales persuasion pattern to organize your message (see Figure 11.7).

Opener The opener of your message gives you a chance to motivate your audience to read the rest of the message.

A good opener will make readers want to read the message and provide a reasonable transition to the body of the message. A very successful subscription letter for *Psychology Today* started out,

> Do you still close the bathroom door when there's no one in the house?

The question was both intriguing in itself and a good transition into the content of *Psychology Today:* practical psychology applied to the quirks and questions we come across in everyday life.

It's essential that the opener not only get attention but also be something that can be linked logically to the body of the message. A sales letter started,

> Can You Use $50 This Week?

Certainly that gets attention. But the letter only offered the reader the chance to save $50 on a product. Readers may feel disappointed or even cheated when they learn that instead of getting $50, they have to spend money to save $50.

To brainstorm possible openers, use the four basic modes: questions, narration, startling statements, and quotations.

1. Questions

> Dear Subscriber,
>
> **ARE YOU NUTS?** Your subscription to PC Gamer is about to expire!
> **No reviews. No strategies. No tips.**
> *No PC Gamer. Are you willing to suffer the consequences?*

This letter urging the reader to renew *PC Gamer* is written under a large banner question: Do you want to get eaten alive? The letter goes on to remind its audience, mostly young males, of the magazine's gaming reviews, early previews, exclusive demo discs, and "awesome array of new cheats for the latest games"—all hot buttons for computer gaming fans.

Good questions are interesting enough that the audience want the answers, so they read the letter.

Poor question: Do you want to make extra money?

Better question: How *much* extra money do you want to make next year?

A series of questions can be an effective opener. Answer the questions in the body of the letter.

Figure 11.7 How to Organize a Sales or Fund-Raising Message

1. Open by catching the audience's attention.
2. In the body, provide reasons and details.
3. End by telling the audience what to do and providing a reason to act promptly.

Persuading to Save

In the past several decades, the percentage of income Americans save has decreased dramatically. Until the early 1980s, Americans saved nearly 10% of their income. In 2009, however, we saved a paltry 0.9%. Some banks are trying to encourage their customers to save regularly by some unusual methods.

Eight credit unions in Michigan started a program called "Save to Win." This strange cross between a savings program and a lottery taps into many Americans' love of gambling. Customers who put at least $25 into a one-year CD receive an entry into a monthly drawing for $400 and an annual jackpot for $100,000. The CDs are insured, but pay slightly less than the conventional rate. The program is working, and some of the winners are putting their winnings directly into savings accounts.

Adapted from Jason Zweig, "Using the Lottery Effect to Make People Save," *Wall Street Journal,* July 18, 2009, B1.

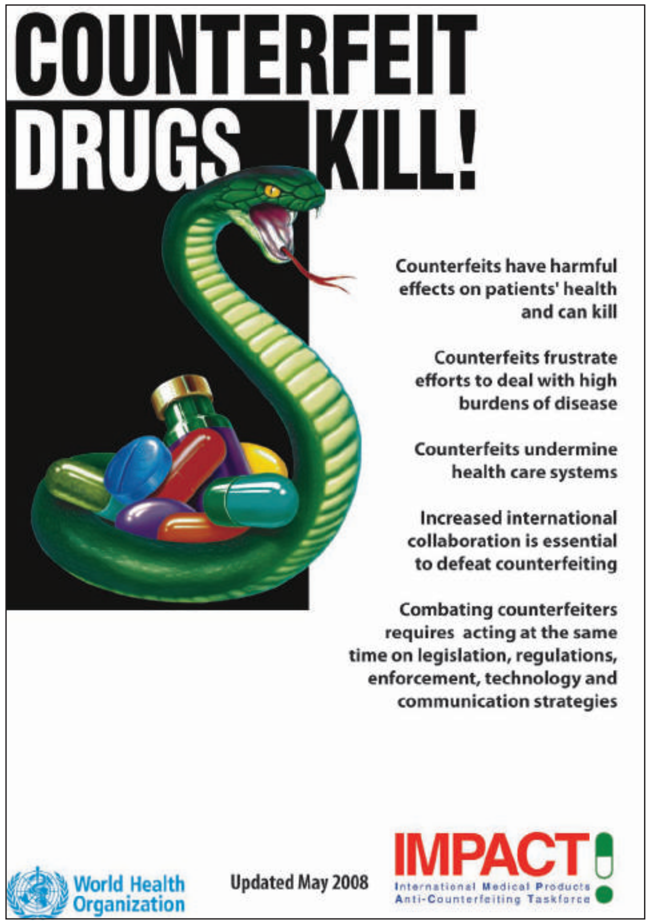
Unethical Sales Pitches

Here is a list of questionable tactics that some salespeople use to tailor their persuasive messages to you:

- Ask you to tell them about yourself, and pretend to be interested in the same things you are.
- Look for your weak spots: emotional appeals that you're less likely to resist.
- Tell you that they're offering a one-of-a-kind deal.
- Tell you that if you don't take their offer, someone else will.
- Give you a "free" gift for listening to their pitch, hoping that you'll feel obligated to buy their product.

What about these tactics makes them unethical? How can you craft persuasive messages using similar techniques—good psychological descriptions, for example—without being unethical?

Adapted from Jonathan Clements, "Don't Get Hit by the Pitch: How Advisers Manipulate You," *Wall Street Journal,* January 3, 2007, D1.



This World Health Organization poster juxtaposes lifesaving medicines with a deadly cobra in a visual "startling statement."

2. Narration, stories, anecdotes

Dear Reader:

She hoisted herself up noiselessly so as not to disturb the rattlesnakes snoozing there in the sun.

To her left, the high desert of New Mexico. Indian country. To her right, the rock carvings she had photographed the day before. Stick people. Primitive animals.

Up ahead, three sandstone slabs stood stacked against the face of the cliff. In their shadow, another carving. A spiral consisting of rings. Curious, the young woman drew closer. Instinctively, she glanced at her watch. It was almost noon. Then just at that moment, a most unusual thing happened.

Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, an eerie dagger of light appeared to stab at the topmost ring of the spiral. It next began to plunge downward—shimmering, laser-like.

It pierced the eighth ring. The seventh. The sixth. It punctured the innermost and last. Then just as suddenly as it had appeared, the dagger of light was gone. The young woman glanced at her watch again. Exactly twelve minutes had elapsed.

Coincidence? Accident? Fluke? No. What she may have stumbled across that midsummer morning three years ago is an ancient solar calendar. . . .

This subscription letter for *Science84* argues that it reports interesting and significant discoveries in all fields of science—all in far more detail than do other media. The opener both builds suspense so that the reader reads the subscription letter and suggests that the magazine will be as interesting as the letter and as easy to read.

3. Startling statements

> Dear Membership Candidate:
>
> I'm writing to offer you a job.
>
> It's not a permanent job, understand. You'll be working for only as much time as you find it rewarding and fun.
>
> It's not even a paying job. On the contrary, it will cost *you* money.

This fund-raising letter from Earthwatch invites readers to participate in its expeditions, subscribe to its journal, and donate to its programs. Earthwatch's volunteers help scientists and scholars dig for ruins, count bighorns, and monitor changes in water; they can work as long as they like; they pay their own (tax-deductible) expenses.

Variations of this mode include special opportunities, twists, and challenges.

4. Quotations

> "I never tell my partner that my ankle is sore or my back hurts. You can't give in to pain and still perform."
>
> —Jill Murphy
> Soloist

The series of which this letter is a part sells season tickets to the Atlanta Ballet by focusing on the people who work to create the season. Each letter quotes a different member of the company. The opening quote is used on the envelope over a picture of the ballerina and as an opener for the letter. The letters encourage readers to see the artists as individuals, to appreciate their hard work, and to share their excitement about each performance.

Body The body of the message provides the logical and emotional links that move the audience from their first flicker of interest to the action that is wanted. A good body answers the audience's questions, overcomes their objections, and involves them emotionally.

All this takes space. One of the industry truisms is "The more you tell, the more you sell." Tests show that longer letters bring in more new customers or new donors than do shorter letters. A four-page letter is considered ideal for mailings to new customers or donors.

Can short letters work? Yes, when you're writing to old customers or when the mailing is supported by other media. E-mail direct mail is also short—generally just one screen. The Direct Marketing Association says a postcard is the mailing most likely to be read.[31] The shortest message on record may be the two-word postcard that a fishing lake resort sent its customers: "They're biting!"

Fraud Victims

Financial scams and fraud cost Americans billions of dollars each year. According to studies of scammers, the victims of fraud aren't the uneducated or naïve. Most victims are well-educated, middle-aged men who have an excellent understanding of finances. So why are they falling prey to scammers? The studies offer these reasons:

- **Overconfidence.** Because of their education and experience in investing, most victims trust their own judgment without consulting experts for advice.
- **Pure motives.** Many victims are taken in because they want to provide an inheritance for their children or grandchildren. The motivation to help may encourage the victims to make unwise decisions.
- **Emotional reactions.** In one experiment during the Christmas season, the Better Business Bureau and a local television station in Idaho set up a fake bell ringer with a plastic Halloween bucket. Even though he had no identifying signs, shoppers automatically gave him money while he rang his bell.
- **Pro/con lists.** Research has shown that when people attempt to make lists of positives and negatives about a decision, whichever side they focus on first has the greatest impact on their choice.

Adapted from Karen Blumenthal, "Fraud Doesn't Always Happen to Someone Else," *Wall Street Journal,* August 12, 2009, D1.

Content for the body of the message can include

- Information the audience will find useful even if they do not buy or give.
- Stories about how the product was developed or what the organization has done.
- Stories about people who have used the product or who need the organization's help.
- Word pictures of people enjoying the benefits offered.

Because consumers are more likely to choose or favor the familiar, linking your sales message to the things people do or use every day is a good way to increase your message's perceived importance. Of course, that requires that you do a good job of audience analysis up front. Stanford University researchers showed that children given chicken nuggets and French fries preferred the taste of the food in McDonald's packaging, even though all the food came from the same source. The familiarity effect works on adults, too. In another study, adults tasting the same peanut butter from three different jars preferred the spread from the jar with a name brand label.[32]

Costs are generally mentioned near the end of the body and are connected to specific benefits. Sometimes costs are broken down to monthly, weekly, or daily amounts: "For less than the cost of a cup of coffee a day, you can help see that Eren is no longer hungry."

Action Close The action close in the message must do four things:

1. **Tell the audience what to do:** Specify the action you want. Avoid *if* ("If you'd like to try . . .") and *why not* ("Why not send in a check?"). They lack positive emphasis and encourage your audience to say *no.*
2. **Make the action sound easy:** "Fill in the information on the reply card and mail it today." If you provide an envelope and pay postage, say so.
3. **Offer a reason for acting promptly.** People who think they are convinced but wait to act are less likely to buy or contribute. Reasons for acting promptly are easy to identify when a product is seasonal or there is a genuine limit on the offer—time limit, price rise scheduled, limited supply, and so on. Sometimes you can offer a premium or a discount if your audience acts quickly. When these conditions do not exist, remind readers that the sooner they get the product, the sooner they can benefit from it; the sooner they contribute funds, the sooner their dollars can go to work to solve the problem.
4. **End with a positive picture** of the audience enjoying the product (in a sales message) or of the audience's money working to solve the problem (in a fund-raising message). The last sentence should never be a selfish request for money.

The action close can also remind people of central selling points, and mention when the customer will get the product.

Using a P.S. In a direct mail letter or e-mail, the postscript, or P.S., occupies a position of emphasis by being the final part of the message. Direct mail often uses a deliberate P.S. after the signature block. It may restate the central selling point or some other point the letter makes, preferably in different words so that it won't sound repetitive when the reader reads the letter through from start to finish.

The Master Salesman

Dale Carnegie was an unsuccessful businessman, a failed actor, and an undistinguished author of western novels when he began teaching public speaking at a Harlem YMCA in 1912. His course in public speaking eventually turned into a self-help business empire, built on his still-popular book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People,* published in 1936.

Carnegie's *How to Win Friends* remains one of the most influential business books of all time. Warren Buffett has based his career on the principles in the book, and Lee Iacocca says it changed his life.

What is it about the book that makes it so powerful? In 30 simple principles, Carnegie lays out a course of self-improvement, based on self-confidence and powerful public speaking, that ties directly into business success. His ideas weren't new when he wrote the book, and they are certainly not new now. Carnegie once said, however, "I present, reiterate, and glorify the obvious—because the obvious is what people need to be told."

Adapted from Dan Winters, "The Best Salesman in Business," *Fortune,* May 3, 2010, 202–4.

Here are four of the many kinds of effective P.S.'s.

Reason to act promptly:

> P.S. Once I finish the limited harvest, that's it! I do not store any SpringSweet Onions for late orders. I will ship all orders on a first-come, first-served basis and when they are gone they are gone. Drop your order in the mail today . . . or give me a call toll free at 800-531-7470! (In Texas: 800-292-5437)

Sales letter for Frank Lewis Alamo Fruit

Description of a premium the reader receives for giving:

> P.S. And . . . we'll be pleased to send you—as a new member—the exquisite, full-color Sierra Club Wilderness Calendar. It's our gift . . . absolutely FREE to you . . . to show our thanks for your membership at this critical time.

Fund-raising letter for Sierra Club

Reference to another part of the package:

> P.S. Photographs may be better than words, but they still don't do justice to this model. Please keep in mind as you review the enclosed brochure that your SSJ will look even better when you can see it firsthand in your own home.

Sales letter for the Danbury Mint's model of the Duesenberg SSJ

Restatement of central selling point:

> P.S. It is not easy to be a hungry child in the Third World. If your parents' crops fail or if your parents cannot find work, there are no food stamps . . . no free government-provided cafeteria lunches.
>
> Millions of hungry schoolchildren will be depending on CARE this fall. Your gift today will ensure that we will be there—that CARE won't let them down.

Fund-raising letter for CARE

Strategy in Sales Messages and Fund-Raising Appeals

In both sales messages and fund-raising appeals, the basic strategy is to help your audience see themselves using your products/services or participating in the goals of your charity. Too often, communicators stress the new features of their gadgets, rather than picturing the audience using it, or the statistics about their cause, rather than stories about people helping that cause.

Sales Messages The basic strategy in sales messages is satisfying a need. Your message must remind people of the need your product meets, prove that the product will satisfy that need, show why your product is better than similar products, and make people *want* to have the product. Use psychological description (p. 330) to show people how the product will help them. Details about how the product is made can carry the message of quality. Testimonials from other buyers can help persuade people that the product works. In fact, sales trainer and best-seller business author Jeffrey Gitomer cites customer testimonials as one of the best ways to overcome price resistance.[33]

Generally, the price is not mentioned until the last fourth of the message, after the content makes the audience *want* the product.

Tempest in a Water Glass

Everyone needs water, so how much persuasion does it take to sell it? As the *Wall Street Journal* reported, there's a lot of persuasion involved in the water business—and some controversy as well.

Bottled water is big business in France: French citizens consume 145 liters per person per year, compared to 85 liters a year for Americans. When the public water companies that serve Paris ran advertisements promoting tap water over bottled with the slogan "Which brand delivers excellent water to your house all year round?" the major bottled water companies responded in kind. Their ad featured a toilet bowl and the catchphrase "I don't drink the water I use to flush."

Think about the persuasive techniques involved in the two ad campaigns. What psychological descriptions of their target audience do the ads employ? How do you think the Parisian Water Works ought to respond to the bottled water ads?

Adapted from David Gauthier-Villars, "Water Fight in France Takes a Dirty Turn," *Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2007, B7.

Combining Charity with Marketing

When Crate & Barrel, the upscale furniture retailer, set out to support education with donations, they didn't just give money to needy schools. Instead, they sent out coupons in their mailers, inviting their customers to use the DonorsChoose website to decide how and where Crate & Barrel would donate its money.

The response? Customers loved the program. Not only did the coupons inspire a higher rate of customer involvement—11% of the coupons were redeemed, compared to 2% in a normal mass mailing—but the coupons also improved customers' perceptions of the company: 75% of the customers who used the DonorsChoose coupons said they now considered Crate & Barrel a company with a positive attitude toward the community, while 82% said they'd be more likely to buy the company's products in the future.

Think about the nonprofit organizations that you support: how might they convince local businesses to try the same approach?

Adapted from Emily Steel, "Novel Program Blends Charity and Marketing," *Wall Street Journal,* December 20, 2006, B1, B5.

You can make the price more palatable with the following techniques:

- **Link the price to the benefit the product provides.** "Your piece of history is just $39.95."
- **Link the price to benefits your company offers.** "You can reach our customer service agents 24/7."
- **Show how much the product costs each day, each week, or each month.** "You can have all this for less than the cost of a cup of coffee a day." Make sure that the amount seems small and that you've convinced people that they'll use this product sufficiently.
- **Allow customers to charge sales or pay in installments.** Your bookkeeping costs will rise, and some sales may be uncollectible, but the total number of sales will increase.

Fund-Raising Appeals In a fund-raising appeal, the basic emotional strategy is **vicarious participation**. By donating money, people participate vicariously in work they are not able to do personally. This strategy affects the pronouns you use. Throughout the appeal, use *we* to talk about your group. However, at the end, talk about what *you* the audience will be doing. End positively, with a picture of the audience's dollars helping to solve the problem.

Fund-raising appeals require some extra strategy. To achieve both your primary and secondary purposes, you must give a great deal of information. This information (1) helps to persuade people; (2) gives supporters evidence to use in conversations with others; and (3) gives people who are not yet supporters evidence that may make them see the group as worthwhile, even if they do not give money now.

In your close, in addition to asking for money, suggest other ways people can help: doing volunteer work, scheduling a meeting on the subject, writing letters to Congress or the leaders of other countries, and so on. By suggesting other ways to participate, you not only involve your audience but also avoid one of the traps of fund-raising appeals: sounding as though you are interested in your audience only for the money they can give.

Deciding How Much to Ask For Most messages to new donors suggest a range of amounts, from $50 or $100 (for employed people) up to perhaps double what you *really* expect to get from a single donor. A second strategy is to ask for a small, set amount that nearly everyone can afford ($15 or $25).

One of the several reasons people give for not contributing is that a gift of $25 or $100 seems too small to matter. It's not. Small gifts are important both in themselves and to establish a habit of giving. The American Heart Association recently determined that first-time donors responding to direct mail give an average of $21.84 and give $40.62 over a lifetime. But multiplied by the 7.6 million donors who respond to the AHA's mailings, the total giving is large. Also, over $20 million of the money that the AHA receives from estate settlements after a person's death comes from people who have a relationship as direct-mail donors.[34]

You can increase the size of gifts by using the following techniques:

- **Link the gift to what it will buy.** Tell how much money it costs to buy a brick, a hymnal, or a stained glass window for a church; a book or journal subscription for a college library; a meal for a hungry child. Linking amounts to specific gifts helps the audience feel involved and often motivates them to give more: instead of saying, "I'll write a check for $25," the person may say, "I'd like to give a ———" and write a check to cover it.

- **Offer a premium for giving.** Public TV and radio stations have used this ploy with great success, offering books, CDs, DVDs, umbrellas, and carryall bags for gifts at a certain level. The best premiums are things that people both want and will use or display, so that the organization will get further publicity when other people see the premium.
- **Ask for a monthly pledge.** People on modest budgets could give $15 or $25 a month; more prosperous people could give $100 a month or more. These repeat gifts not only bring in more money than the donors could give in a single check but also become part of the base of loyal supporters, which is essential to the continued success of any organization that raises funds.

Annual appeals to past donors often use the amount of the last donation as the lowest suggested gift, with other gifts 25%, 50%, or even 100% higher.

Always send a thank-you message to people who respond to your appeal, whatever the size of their gifts. By telling about the group's recent work, a thank-you message can help reinforce donors' commitment to your cause.

Logical Proof in Fund-Raising Messages The body of a fund-raising message must prove that (1) the problem deserves attention, (2) the problem can be solved or at least alleviated, (3) your organization is helping to solve or alleviate it, (4) private funds are needed, and (5) your organization will use the funds wisely.

1. The problem deserves attention. No one can support every cause. Show why your audience should care about solving this problem.

If your problem is life-threatening, give some statistics: Tell how many people are killed in the United States every year by drunk drivers, or how many children in the world go to bed hungry every night. Also tell about one individual who is affected.

If your problem is not life-threatening, show that the problem threatens some goal or principle your audience find important. For example, a fund-raising letter to boosters of a high school swim team showed that team members' chances of setting records were reduced because timers relied on stopwatches. The letter showed that automatic timing equipment was accurate and produced faster times, since the timer's reaction time was no longer included in the time recorded.

2. The problem can be solved or alleviated. People will not give money if they see the problem as hopeless—why throw money away? Sometimes you can reason by analogy. Cures have been found for other deadly diseases, so it's reasonable to hope that research can find a cure for cancer and AIDS. Sometimes you can show that short-term or partial solutions exist. For example, UNICEF shows how simple changes—oral rehydration, immunization, and breast feeding—could save the lives of millions of children. These solutions don't affect the underlying causes of poverty, but they do keep children alive while we work on long-term solutions.

3. Your organization is helping to solve or alleviate the problem. Prove that your organization is effective. Be specific. Talk about your successes in the past. Your past success helps readers believe that you can accomplish your goals.

Donating to Operating Expenses?

Wouldn't you want to make sure that your charitable donations went to support worthwhile causes, rather than overhead expenses within a nonprofit organization? Many people do, and so look for nonprofits that either limit their spending on overhead or can guarantee that gifts will go toward specific programs, not overhead.

However, even nonprofit organizations have bills to pay. As the *Wall Street Journal* reports, some nonprofits are challenged with the tasks of soliciting donations while convincing donors that money spent on overhead is still money well spent. One solution? Some nonprofits ask for donations specifically to cover their operating expenses by asking for money to support their teams or their business plans.

Philanthropy advisers suggest that donors also consider how effectively the charity uses its money. Some organizations that spend 70% of their funds on their core mission do a better job than those who spend 80%.

The very best way to judge a charity? Be one of their volunteers.

How would asking for a donation to pay for a nonprofit's overhead be different than asking for donations to support a worthy cause? What persuasive strategies could you use to make that request?

Adapted from Rachel Emma Silverman and Sally Beatty, "Save the Children (but Pay the Bills, Too)," *Wall Street Journal,* December 26, 2006, D1, D2.

www.habitat.org

Habitat for Humanity's website provides information for potential and current donors, volunteers, and clients.

Enclosures In Fund-Raising Letters

Fund-raising letters sometimes use inexpensive enclosures to add interest and help carry the message.

Brochures are inexpensive, particularly if you photocopy them. Mailings to alumni have included "Why I Teach at Earlham" (featuring three professors) and letters from students who have received scholarships.

Seeds don't cost much. Mailings from both Care and the New Forests Fund include four or five seeds of the leucaena, a subtropical tree that can grow 20 feet in a year. Its leaves feed cattle; its wood provides firewood or building materials; its roots reduce soil erosion. (Indeed, the enclosure easily becomes the theme for the letter.)

Reprints of newspaper or magazine articles about the organization or the problem it is working to solve add interest and credibility. Pictures of people the organization is helping build emotional appeal.

Major campaigns may budget for enclosures: pictures of buildings, CDs of oral history interviews, and maps of areas served.

These are some of the specifics that the charity:water website gives about its efforts:

> Our Progress So Far: 3,962 projects funded. 1,794,983 people will get clean water. 19 countries, 25 local partners.[35]

4. Private funds are needed to accomplish your group's goals. We all have the tendency to think that taxes, or foundations, or church collections yield enough to pay for medical research or basic human aid. If your group does get some tax or foundation money, show why more money is needed. If the organization helps people who might be expected to pay for the service, show why they cannot pay, or why they cannot pay enough to cover the full cost. If some of the funds have been raised by the people who will benefit, make that clear.

5. Your organization will use the funds wisely. Prove that the money goes to the cause, not just to the cost of fund-raising. This point is becoming increasingly important as stories become more common of "charities" that give little money to their mission. One study of 80 professional fund-raisers serving over 500 charities found the median percentage of proceeds going to the charity was 24%; only five charities received more than 75%. In fact, one fund-raising company charged charities more money than the company raised.[36]

Emotional Appeal in Fund-Raising Messages Emotional appeal is needed to make people pull out their checkbooks. How strong should emotional appeal be? A mild appeal is unlikely to sway anyone who is not already committed, but your audience will feel manipulated by appeals they find too strong and reject them. Audience analysis may help you decide how much emotional appeal to use. If you don't know your audience well, use the strongest emotional appeal *you* feel comfortable with.

Emotional appeal is created by specifics. It is hard to care about, or even to imagine, a million people; it is easier to care about one specific person. Details and quotes help us see that person as real. Sensory details also help people connect to a cause. Covenant House, an organization that takes in homeless youth, does both. They provide vivid pictures both of children arriving at their door and of individuals who have turned their lives around. They also use relevant sensory details: a child crawling into bed on a cold night, feeling warm and safe under soft blankets, versus a girl crawling into a cardboard box on the street to try to stay warm on a cold night.[37]

Sample Fund-Raising Letter The letter from UNICEF (Figure 11.8) seeks aid for people in Darfur. It stresses the enormity of the problem—"4.7 million people," "millions of families," "millions of children"—and what UNICEF has already done to help them. It moves on to the specific need for "additional emergency supplies of therapeutic nutritional supplements," and shows them to be life-saving aids. It applies specifics to donations: $25 will buy 49 packets. The close continues the sense of urgency, while the P.S. reemphasizes the good that has already been done with the nutritional packets.

Writing Style

Direct mail is the one kind of business writing where elegance and beauty of language matter; in every other kind, elegance is welcome but efficiency is all that finally counts. Direct mail imitates the word choice and rhythm of conversation. The best sales, fund-raising, and promotional writing is closer to the language of poetry than to that of academia: it shimmers with images, it echoes with sound, it vibrates with energy.

Figure 11.8 A Fund-Raising Letter

unicef
united states fund

CHILDREN ARE STARVING IN DARFUR

Emotional appeal in headline

Will you help rush 49 packets of ready-to-eat therapeutic nutritional supplement to save malnourished children in Darfur?

Dear Dr. Kienzler,

In spite of intense world pressure and the sustained work of UNICEF, the humanitarian crisis in Darfur continues to worsen. Continued violence has affected 4.7 million people - half of them children - with refugee camps filled to capacity.

Letter opens with startling statement about enormity of problem

Hundreds of thousand of lives have been lost, and the exodus of millions of families has torn this country apart. UNICEF has been coordinating relief for the world's largest refugee relocation effort, establishing and maintaining emergency shipments of food, clean water, and medical supplies.

Pragraph shows what UNICEF has been doing

The recent suspension of humanitarian aid organizations by the government of Sudan has left UNICEF as the only remaining major source of emergency support for millions of children struggling to survive in Darfur. Today, UNICEF supports 260 primary health facilities and mobile clinics . . . has trained and deployed nearly 1,000 community healthy workers . . . and has been the primary source of vaccines, cold chain equipment, and operational staff for polio and measles immunization campaigns.

Fund raising letters may use format features such as underlining and ellipses

UNICEF also directly maintains over 100 therapeutic and supplementary feeding centers. But with millions of children and no readily available source of food, and tens of thousands of children already suffering from severe malnutrition, UNICEF needs to provide additional emergency supplies of therapeutic nutritional supplements.

Sentence shows situation is not hopeless

The specially formulated high-protein, high-energy paste revives children with remarkable results and can reverse the most severe effects of malnutrition. Your gift today of $25 can supply 49 packets - and just three of these packets daily can help a malnourished child recover with minimal adverse health effects.

Shows impact of reasonable individual gift

Every minute counts. Please act now.

Need for immediate action

Sincerely,
Caryl M. Stren

Caryl M. Stren
President & CEO

P. S. By providing nutritional supplies and other assistance, UNICEF successfully treated over 53,000 malnourished children in Darfur last year, saving them from almost-certain death. Please send a generous gift today to continue these vital efforts.

Reiteration of successful effort

Source: Reprinted with permission from the U.S. Fund for UNICEF.

The Changing Role of Catalogs

If sales from mass-mailer catalogs have been declining in recent years, replaced by e-commerce sales through websites, isn't it time to retire paper catalogs? Not necessarily: catalogs are still one way for companies to build customer interest and persuade customers to make purchases—even if those purchases are online.

Catalogs can be an integral part of a company's marketing plan:

- Instead of showing a company's entire stock, a good catalog will save space (and costs!) by listing a representative sampling. The idea is to attract the widest possible range of customers, with the widest possible interests.
- Good catalogs increase customer involvement with the products, either by providing them with a shopping experience "in hand" or by directing them to an interactive website.

Think about the catalogs that you receive in the mail. How do you use them? What would you need to see in a catalog to convince you to visit its website or a physical store?

Adapted from Louise Lee, "Catalogs, Catalogs, Everywhere," *BusinessWeek,* December 4, 2006, 32–34.

Catalogs are still an excellent way for companies to build customer interest and persuade customers to buy—even if the sales are made at the company's website.

Many of the things that make writing vivid and entertaining *add* words because they add specifics or evoke an emotional response. Individual sentences should flow smoothly. The passage as a whole may be fun to read precisely because of the details and images that "could have been left out."

Make Your Writing Interesting If the style is long-winded and boring, the reader will stop reading. Eliminating wordiness is crucial. You've already seen ways to tighten your writing in Chapter 5. Direct mail goes further, breaking some of the rules of grammar. In the following examples, note how sentence fragments and ellipses (spaced dots) are used in parallel structure to move the reader along:

> Dear Member-elect:
>
> If you still believe that there are nine planets in our solar system . . . that wine doesn't breathe . . . and that you'd recognize a Neanderthal man on sight if one sat next to you on the bus . . . check your score. There aren't. It does. You wouldn't.

Subscription letter for *Natural History*

Use Psychological Description Psychological description (p. 330) means describing your product or service with vivid sensory details. In a sales letter, you can use psychological description to create a scenario so readers can picture themselves using your product or service and enjoying its benefits. You can also use psychological description to describe the problem your product or service will solve.

A *Bon Appétit* subscription letter used psychological description in its opener and in the P.S., creating a frame for the sales letter:

> Dear Reader:
>
> First, fill a pitcher with ice.
>
> Now pour in a bottle of ordinary red wine, a quarter cup of brandy, and a small bottle of Club soda.
>
> Sweeten to taste with a quarter to half cup of sugar, garnish with slices of apple, lemon, and orange. . . .

> . . . then *move your chair to a warm, sunny spot.* You've just made yourself Sangria—one of the great glories of Spain, and the perfect thing to sit back with and sip while you consider this invitation. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> P.S. One more thing before you finish your Sangria. . . .

It's hard to imagine any reader really stopping to follow the recipe before finishing the letter, but the scenario is so vivid that one can imagine the sunshine even on a cold, gray day.

Make Your Letter Sound Like a Letter, Not an Ad Maintain the image of one person writing to one other person that is the foundation of all letters. Use an informal style with short words and sentences, and even slang.

You can also create a **persona**—the character who allegedly writes the letter—to make the letter interesting and keep us reading. Use the rhythms of speech, vivid images, and conversational words to create the effect that the author is a "character."

The following opening creates a persona who fits the product:

> Dear Friend:
>
> There's no use trying. I've tried and tried to tell people about my fish. But I wasn't rigged out to be a letter writer, and I can't do it. I can close-haul a sail with the best of them. I know how to pick out the best fish of the catch, I know just which fish will make the tastiest mouthfuls, but I'll never learn the knack of writing a letter that will tell people why my kind of fish—fresh-caught prime-grades, right off the fishing boats with the deep-sea tang still in it—is lots better than the ordinary store kind.

Sales letter, Frank Davis Fish Company

This letter, with its "Aw, shucks, I can't sell" persona, with language designed to make you see an unassuming fisherman ("rigged out," "close-haul"), was written by a professional advertiser.[38]

SOLVING A SAMPLE PROBLEM

Little things add up to big issues, especially where workplace quality of life is at stake.

Problem

FirstWest Insurance's regional office has 300 employees, all working the same 8-to-5 shift. Many of them schedule their lunch break during the noon hour, and that's where the problem started: there was only one microwave in the canteen. People had to wait up to 30 minutes to heat their lunches. As Director of Human Resources, you implemented lunch shifts to break the gridlock. That program failed: people were used to their schedules and resisted the change. In your second attempt, you convinced FirstWest's Operations Vice President to approve a purchase order for a second microwave oven.

Now there's a new problem: fish. FirstWest recently recruited five new employees. They're from the Philippines, and fish is a prominent part of their diet. Each afternoon, they take lunch together and reheat their meals—often containing fish—and each afternoon, the air conditioning system in your closed-air building sends the aroma of spiced fish wafting through the whole office.

Humiliation for Debt Collection

Humiliation is becoming a major persuader in Spain, a country with an overwhelmed legal system. Since the courts can't help, many companies believe the only way to collect debt is to shame debtors in front of their neighbors. It is particularly persuasive in this country where one's honor and public image are so important.

Debt collection companies are becoming ingenious in creating humiliation. Collectors arrive at homes dressed as bull fighters, Zorro, Franciscan friars, or even the Pink Panther. The Scottish Collector threatens to send a Scottish bagpipe player to debtors' homes. Sometimes they phone the neighbors.

One collection agency acquired the guest list for a lavish but unpaid wedding reception. They began calling guests and charging them for the food they ate. Needless to say, the debtors paid their bill.

What do you think about this collection method? Do you agree with U.S. law which prohibits it?

Adapted from Thomas Catan, "Spain's Showy Debt Collectors Wear a Tux, Collect the Bucks: Their Goal: Publicly Humiliate Non-Payers; Seeing the Pink Panther at the Door," *Wall Street Journal,* October 11, 2008, A1.

Other employees have complained bitterly about the "foul odor." You've spoken to the new employees, and while they're embarrassed by the complaints, they see no reason to change. After all, they're just as disgusted by the smell of cooking beef: why haven't you asked the American employees not to reheat hamburger? And having just purchased a second oven, you know that management won't pay $1,000 for a new microwave with a filter system that will eliminate the odors. It's time to set a microwave-use policy.

Analysis of the Problem

Use the problem analysis questions in the first chapter to think through the problem.

1. Who is (are) your audience(s)?

   You'll be addressing all of the employees at this location. That's a broad audience, but they have certain characteristics in common, at least regarding this topic. They're all on a similar lunch schedule, and many of them use the canteen and the microwaves. They've also responded poorly to a previous attempt to change their lunch habits.

   Many members of your audience won't see this as their problem: only the new employees are doing something objectionable. The new employees will react poorly to being singled out.
2. What are your purposes in writing?

   To help eliminate cooking odors. To solve a minor issue before it begins to impact morale.
3. What information must your message include?

   The effects of the present situation. The available options and their costs (in money, and also in time, effort, and responsibility).
4. How can you build support for your position? What reasons or benefits will your audience find convincing?

   Improving the workplace environment—and eliminating a minor but persistent irritation—should improve morale. While expensive solutions exist, this is a matter that can, and should, be solved with cooperative behaviors.
5. What aspects of the total situation may be relevant?

   This issue is a minor one, and it may be difficult to get people to take it seriously. The easy solution—mandating what the new employees are allowed to bring for lunch—is discriminatory. For budgetary reasons, company management will not invest in a third (and much more expensive) microwave for the canteen.

Discussion of the Sample Solutions

The solution shown in Figure 11.9 is unacceptable. By formatting the communication as a notice designed to be posted in the canteen, the author invites the audience to publicly embarrass their co-workers: a form of threat. The subject line displays the author's biases in a way that discourages further discussion on the topic and eliminates the possibility of a broader consensus for any solution to the problem. The author uses emotional appeals to place blame on a small segment of the audience, but the lack of logical observations or arguments (and the presence of clip art and emoticons) undermines the author's seriousness. The demand to stop cooking food with strong smells is vague: does this include pizza? popcorn? The author concludes with a threat, again eliminating the possibility of consensus-based actions.

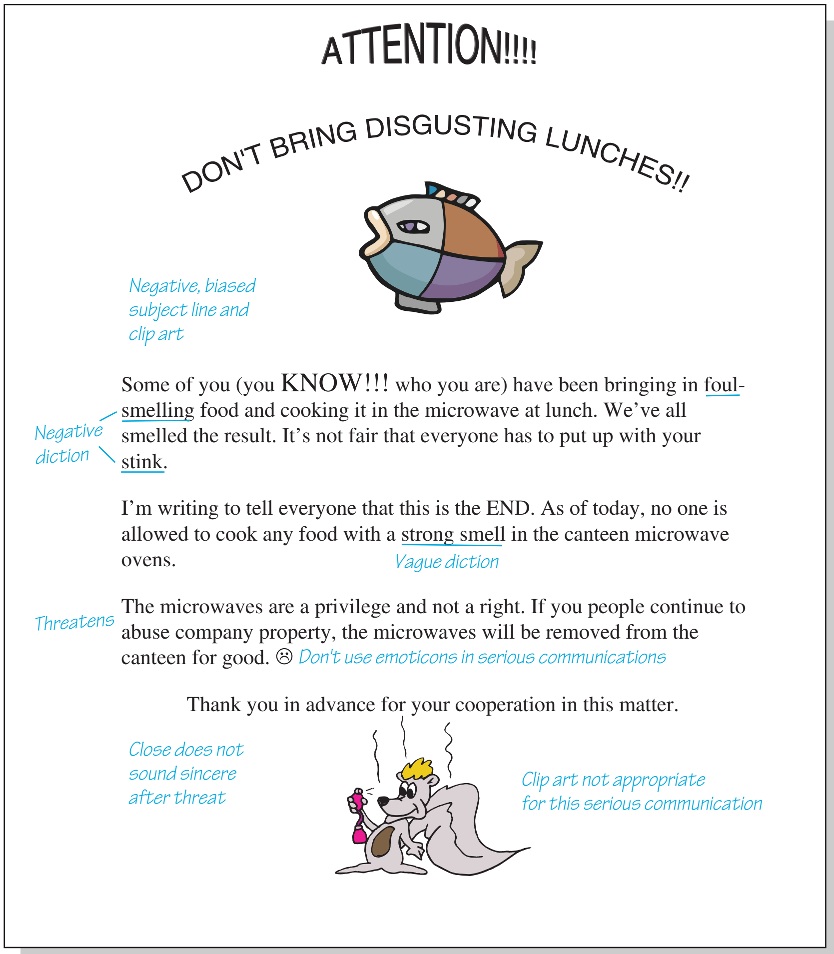
Face-to-face Persuasion

When you present your persuasive messages in a spoken, face-to-face format, remember that your interpersonal interactions are an important part of your message. A recent study of successful retail salespeople identified some strong techniques you can use when you're speaking persuasively:

- Use their name. People respond well when you show that you care enough about them to use their name.
- Show your interest. Build goodwill and rapport by asking about, noticing, and remembering details about your audience's history and preferences.
- Identify mutual interests. Turn your persuasive pitch into a conversation by inviting stories from your audience and sharing your own in return.
- Be polite and honest. Many people react to persuasive messages by being on guard against potential dishonesty. Demonstrate your respect for your audience by backing up your claims with evidence: show them, don't tell them, and invite them to judge for themselves.
- Give—and seek—information. Take the pressure off your persuasive message by changing it into an informative message instead of sales. Build rapport by inviting your audience to share their knowledge with you.

Adapted from Dwayne D. Gremler and Kevin P. Gwinner, "Rapport-Building Behaviors Used by Retail Employees," *Journal of Retailing* 84, no. 3 (2008): 308–24.

Figure 11.9 An Unacceptable Solution to the Sample Problem



ATTENTION!!!!

DON'T BRING DISGUSTING LUNCHES!!

Negative, biased subject line and clip art

Some of you (you KNOW!!! who you are) have been bringing in foul-smelling food and cooking it in the microwave at lunch. We've all smelled the result. It's not fair that everyone has to put up with your stink.

Negative diction

I'm writing to tell everyone that this is the END. As of today, no one is allowed to cook any food with a strong smell in the canteen microwave ovens.

Vague diction

The microwaves are a privilege and not a right. If you people continue to abuse company property, the microwaves will be removed from the canteen for good. ☹ *Don't use emoticons in serious communications*

Threatens

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this matter.

Close does not sound sincere after threat

Clip art not appropriate for this serious communication

Checklist: Checklist for Direct Requests

- ☐ If the message is a memo, does the subject line indicate the request? Is the subject line specific enough to differentiate this message from others on the same subject?
- ☐ Does the first paragraph summarize the request or the specific topic of the message?
- ☐ Does the message give all of the relevant information? Is there enough detail?
- ☐ Does the message answer questions or overcome objections that readers may have without introducing unnecessary negatives?
- ☐ Does the closing tell the reader exactly what to do? Does it give a deadline if one exists and a reason for acting promptly?

Originality in a direct request may come from

- ☐ Good lists and visual impact.
- ☐ Thinking about readers and giving details that answer their questions, overcome any objections, and make it easier for them to do as you ask.
- ☐ Adding details that show you're thinking about a specific organization and the specific people in that organization.

The second solution, shown in Figure 11.10, is a more effective persuasive message. The author recognizes that this persuasive situation centers on goodwill, and begins with a neutral subject line (as a more directed subject could

The "Default" Choice Is Yes

Have you ever been presented with an online form that had response boxes prechecked for you? One way to sidestep your customers' objections is to provide them with default responses: choices they can make that encourage an easy, objection-free response. Here are some common types of defaults:

- **Benign** default choices give customers a range of responses that you've chosen for them: you present a sample of the best or most likely responses ("Press one for English, para Espanol oprima numero dos").
- **Persistent** default choices use the customer's last response to the same situation as their current response (such as a billing form which assumes that your billing address is the same as your mailing address).
- **Smart** default choices use what you know about past customer behavior to suggest current choices that they're likely to agree with (such as retailer websites that offer a list of other products you may be interested in based on what you've selected already).
- **Forced** defaults are selections your customers must make in order to access a product or service (such as the licensing agreement for most software packages).

These defaults offer quick, convenient ways to encourage customers to respond in predictable ways. They can also allow you to constrain your customers' choices. What ethical concerns do you need to consider before you use defaults in your persuasive messages?

Adapted from Daniel G. Goldstein et al., "Nudge Your Customers toward Better Choices," *Harvard Business Review* 86, no. 12 (December 2008): 99–105.

Figure 11.10 A Good Solution to the Sample Problem

Date: November 15, 2012

To: FirstWest Grand Harbor Co-Workers

From: Arnold M. Morgan, Human Resources Director AMM

Subject: Canteen Microwave Policies *Neutral subject line*

Creates common ground

We all notice when someone uses the microwaves in the first-floor canteen to reheat strong-smelling food. These odors are distracting—whether they're the scent of burned popcorn, a fish lunch, or fresh-baked brownies—and none of us need any extra distractions in our busy days! Let's work together to "clear the air."

Cause of problem

How is it that we all smell food cooking in the first-floor canteen? Our building has a closed-air ventilation system: it's good for the environment and it saves on heating and cooling costs by recirculating air throughout the building. It also circulates any odors in the air. That's why we can smell food from the first-floor canteen down in the basement archives and up in the third-floor conference rooms: we're all sharing the same air.

We're all sharing the same microwaves, too. Due to popular demand, we recently purchased a second microwave to relieve crowding at lunchtime. We've looked into purchasing a third microwave—an odor-eliminating, air-filtration microwave—but that would cost $1,000, plus $20/month for filters. That seems expensive, especially since there are simple things each of us can do to reduce problems with odors.

Easy solutions to problem

- **Use containers with lids** when you heat up your food. Not only will this help contain any odors, it will reduce the mess in the microwaves.
- **Clean up any mess you make** when you cook. If you cook something with a strong odor—or something that spatters!—take a minute when you're done and wipe the oven down with a damp paper towel.
- **Stay with your food** while it's cooking. When food overcooks or burns, it smells more strongly, so watching your food and removing it from the oven before it overcooks is the easiest way to avoid creating a distracting smell.

We work together as a team every day to serve our customers and succeed as an organization. Please take a little time to use the microwaves responsibly, and help us make sure that the only smell in our workplace is success!

ends on positive note

detract from goodwill). The opening paragraph creates common ground by describing the problem in terms of group experience, rather than by assigning blame. It includes fish odors in with pleasant odors (brownies) and suggests that the memo's purpose is to propose a consensus-based solution.

The problem is spelled out in detail, balancing the emotional, goodwill-centered problem with rational arguments based on process and cost. The solution is presented as small, easily accommodated, changes. The memo ends by linking cooperation with the audience benefit of group participation and identity.

Checklist — Checklist for Problem-Solving Persusive Messages

- ☐ If the message is a memo, does the subject line indicate the writer's purpose or offer a benefit? Does the subject line avoid making the request?
- ☐ Does the first sentence interest the audience?
- ☐ Is the problem presented as a joint problem both communicator and audience have an interest in solving, rather than as something the audience is being asked to do for the communicator?
- ☐ Does the message give all of the relevant information? Is there enough detail?
- ☐ Does the message overcome objections that the audience may have?
- ☐ Does the message avoid phrases that sound dictatorial, condescending, or arrogant?
- ☐ Does the closing tell the audience exactly what to do? Does it give a deadline if one exists and a reason for acting promptly?

Originality in a problem-solving persuasive message may come from

- ☐ A good subject line and common ground.
- ☐ A clear and convincing description of the problem.
- ☐ Thinking about the audience and giving details that answer their questions, overcome objections, and make it easier for them to do as you ask.
- ☐ Adding details that show you're thinking about a specific organization and the specific people in that organization.

Ethics and Direct Mail

Deception in direct mail is all too easy to find.

Some mailers have sent "checks" to readers. But the "check" can only be applied toward the purchase of the item the letter is selling.

Some mailings now have yellow Post-it notes with "handwritten" notes signed with initials or a first name only—to suggest that the mailing is from a personal friend.

One letter offers a "free" membership "valued at $675" (note the passive—who's doing the valuing?) but charges—up front—$157 for "maintenance fees."

Such deception has no place in well-written direct mail.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The primary purpose in a persuasive message is to have the audience act or change beliefs. Secondary purposes are to overcome any objections that might prevent or delay action, to build a good image of the communicator and the communicator's organization, to cement a good relationship between the communicator and audience, and to reduce or eliminate future communication on the same subject.
- **Credibility** is the audience's response to you as the source of the message. You can build credibility by being factual, specific, and reliable.
- You always need to consider your audience and situation before choosing your persuasive strategy. In general,
  - Use the **direct request pattern** when the audience will do as you ask without any resistance. Also use the direct request pattern for busy readers in your own organization who do not read all the messages they receive. See Figure 11.1.
  - Use the **problem-solving pattern** when the audience may resist doing what you ask and you expect logic to be more important than emotion in the decision. See Figure 11.3.
  - Use the **sales pattern** when the audience may resist doing as you ask and you expect emotion to be more important than logic in the decision. See Figure 11.10.
- Use one or more of the following strategies to counter objections that you cannot eliminate:
  - Specify how much time and/or money is required.
  - Put the time and/or money in the context of the benefits they bring.
  - Show that money spent now will save money in the long run.
  - Show that doing as you ask will benefit some group the audience identifies with or some cause the audience supports.

Get Involved

Getting involved with nonprofit work is a great opportunity to give back to your community while developing your professional and communication skills. Here are some online resources to get you started:

- http://www1.networkforgood.org/
- http://www.change.org/
- http://www.dosomething.org/
- http://firstgiving.org/
- http://www.donorschoose.org/
- http://www.kiva.org/
- http://www.opportunity.org/
- http://www.accion.org/
- http://www.jumo.com/

- Show the audience that the sacrifice is necessary to achieve a larger, more important goal to which they are committed.
- Show that the advantages as a group outnumber or outweigh the disadvantages as a group.
- Turn the disadvantage into an opportunity.

- Threats don't produce permanent change. They won't necessarily produce the action you want, they may make people abandon an action entirely (even in situations where abandoning would not be appropriate), and they produce tension. People dislike and avoid anyone who threatens them. Threats can provoke counteraggression.
- To encourage people to act promptly, set a deadline. Show that the time limit is real, that acting now will save time or money, or that delaying action will cost more.
- Build emotional appeal with stories and psychological description.
- Performance appraisals should cite specific observations, not inferences. They should contain specific suggestions for improvement and identify the two or three areas that the worker should emphasize in the next month or quarter.
- Letters of recommendation must be specific and tell how well and how long you've known the person.
- A good opener makes readers want to read persuasion messages and provides a reasonable transition to the body of the message. Four modes for openers are questions, narration, startling statements, and quotations. A good body answers the audience's questions, overcomes their objections, and involves them emotionally. A good action close tells people what to do, makes the action sound easy, gives them a reason for acting promptly, and ends with a benefit or a picture of their contribution helping to solve the problem.
- In a fund-raising appeal, the basic strategy is vicarious participation. By donating money, people participate vicariously in work they are not able to do personally.
- The primary purpose in a fund-raising appeal is to get money. An important secondary purpose is to build support for the cause so that people who are not persuaded to give will still have favorable attitudes toward the group and will be sympathetic when they hear about it again.

CHAPTER 11 Exercises and Problems

*Go to www.mhhe.com/locker10e for additional Exercises and Problems.

11.1 Reviewing the Chapter

1. What are four questions you should answer when analyzing persuasive situations? Which question do you think is the most important? Why? (LO 11-1)
2. What are three basic persuasive strategies? In what kinds of situations is each preferred? (LO 11-2)
3. Why aren't threats effective persuasion tools? (LO 11-2)
4. How do you start the body of persuasive direct requests? Why? (LO 11-3)
5. How do you organize persuasive problem-solving messages? (LO 11-4)
6. How do you develop a common ground with your audience? (LO 11-4)
7. What are 10 ways to deal with objections? (LO 11-4 and LO 11-6)
8. What are ways to build emotional appeal? (LO 11-4 and LO 11-6)
9. What are four good beginnings for sales and fund-raising messages? (LO 11-5)
10. What are ways to de-emphasize costs or donation requests? (LO 11-5)
11. What kinds of rational evidence should you use to support your persuasion? (LO 11-6)
12. What kinds of emotional appeals should you use to support your persuasion? (LO 11-6)

11.2 Reviewing Grammar

Persuasion uses lots of pronouns. Correct the sentences in Exercise B.4, Appendix B, to practice making pronouns agree with their nouns, as well as practicing subject–verb agreement.

11.3 Writing Psychological Description

For one or more of the following groups, write two or three paragraphs of psychological description that could be used in a brochure, news release, or direct mail message directed to members of that group.

1. Having a personal trainer.

   Audiences: Professional athletes
   Busy managers
   Someone trying to lose weight
   Someone making a major lifestyle change after a heart attack

2. Volunteering time to a local charity event (you pick the charity) as part of a team from your workplace.

   Audiences: Your workplace colleagues
   Your boss
   Finance department
   PR department

3. Using vending machines newly installed in school cafeterias and stocked with healthful snacks, such as yogurt, raisins, carrots with dip, and all-natural juices.

   Audiences: High school students
   Parents
   High school faculty

4. Attending a fantasy sports camp (you pick the sport), playing with and against retired players who provide coaching and advice.
5. Attending a health spa where clients get low-fat and low-carb meals, massages, beauty treatments, and guidance in nutrition and exercise.

Hints:

- For this assignment, you can combine benefits or programs as if a single source offered them all.
- Add specific details about particular sports, activities, and so on, as material for your description.
- Be sure to use vivid details and sense impressions.
- Phrase your benefits with you-attitude.

11.4 Evaluating Subject Lines

Evaluate the following subject lines. Is one subject line in each group clearly best? Or does the "best" line depend on company culture, whether the message is a paper memo or an e-mail message, or on some other factor?

1. Subject: Request
   Subject: Why I Need a New Computer
   Subject: Increasing My Productivity
2. Subject: Who Wants Extra Hours?
   Subject: Holiday Work Schedule
   Subject: Working Extra Hours During the Holiday Season
3. Subject: Student Mentors
   Subject: Can You Be an E-Mail Mentor?
   Subject: Volunteers Needed
4. Subject: More Wine and Cheese
   Subject: Today's Reception for Japanese Visitors
   Subject: Reminder
5. Subject: Reducing Absenteeism
   Subject: Opening a Day Care Center for Sick Children of Employees
   Subject: Why We Need Expanded Day Care Facilities

11.5 Evaluating P.S.'s

Evaluate the following P.S.'s. Will they motivate readers to read the whole messages if readers turn to them first? Do they create a strong ending for those who have already read the message?

1. P.S. It only takes <u>one</u> night's stay in a hotel you read about here, <u>one</u> discounted flight, <u>one</u> budget-priced cruise, or <u>one</u> low-cost car rental to make mailing back your Subscription Certificate well worth it.

   P.P.S. About your free gift! Your risk-free subscription to CONSUMER REPORTS TRAVEL LETTER comes with a remarkable 314-page book as a FREE GIFT.

2. P.S. Help spread the tolerance message by using your personalized address labels on all your correspondence. And remember, you will receive a free *Teaching Tolerance* magazine right after your tax-deductible contribution arrives.

3. P.S. Every day brings more requests like that of Mr. Agyrey-Kwakey—for our "miracle seeds." And it's urgent that we respond to the emergency in Malaysia and Indonesia by replanting those forests destroyed by fire. Please send your gift today and become a partner with us in these innovative projects around the world.
4. P.S. Even as you read this letter, a donated load of food waits for the ticket that will move it to America's hungry. Please give today!

11.6 Choosing a Persuasive Approach

For each of the following situations requiring a persuasive message, choose the persuasive approach that you feel would work best. Explain your reasoning; then give a short list of the types of information you'd use to persuade your audience.

1. Asking for an extension on a project.
2. Requesting a job interview.
3. Requesting a free trial of a service.
4. Inviting customers to a store opening.
5. Reporting a co-worker's poor work performance.
6. Asking your supervisor to reconsider a poor performance review.
7. Requesting a new office computer.
8. Requesting time off during your company's busy season.

As your instructor directs,

a. Write a memo, letter, or e-mail that addresses one of the situations in this exercise, drawing on details from your personal experiences. (You might address a real problem that you've faced.)
b. Write a memo to your instructor listing the choices you've made and justifying your approach.

11.7 Identifying Observations

Susan has taken the following notes about her group's meetings. Which of the following are specific observations that she could use in a performance appraisal of group members? If she had it to do over again, what kinds of details would turn the inferences into observations?

1. Feb. 22: Today was very frustrating. Sam was totally out of it—I wonder if he's on something. Jim was dictatorial. I argued, but nobody backed me up. Masayo might just as well have stayed home. We didn't get anything done. Two hours, totally wasted.
2. February 24: Jim seems to be making a real effort to be less domineering. Today he asked Sam and me for our opinions before proposing his own. And he noticed that Masayo wasn't talking much and brought her into the conversation. She suggested some good ideas.
3. February 28: Today's meeting was OK. I thought Masayo wasn't really focusing on the work at hand. She needs to work on communicating her ideas to others. Sam was doing some active listening, but he needs to work at being on time. Jim was involved in the project. He has strong leadership skills. There were some tense moments, but we got a lot done, and we all contributed. I got to say what I wanted to say, and the group decided to use my idea for the report.
4. March 5: This week most of us had midterms, and Masayo had an out-of-town gymnastics trip. We couldn't find a time to meet. So we did stuff by e-mail. Sam and Jim found some great stuff at the library and on the web. Jim created a tentative schedule that he sent to all of us and then revised. I wrote up a draft of the description of the problem. Then Masayo and I put everything together. I sent my draft to her; she suggested revisions (in full caps so I could find them in the e-mail message). Then I sent the message to everyone. Masayo and Jim both suggested changes, which I made before we handed the draft in.
5. March 15: We were revising the proposal, using Prof. Jones's comments. When we thought we were basically done, Masayo noticed that we had not responded to all of the specific comments about our introductory paragraph. We then went back and thought of some examples to use. This made our proposal better and more complete.

As your instructor directs,

a. Based on Susan's notes, write a performance appraisal memo addressed to Prof. Jones. For each group member, including Susan, note specific areas of good performance and make specific suggestions for improvement.
b. Write a memo to your instructor describing the process you used to make your recommendations. Be sure to identify each of the observations you used to provide specific details, and each of the inferences that needed more information.

11.8 Revising a Form Memo

You've been hired as a staff accountant; one of your major duties will be processing expense reimbursements. Going through the files, you find this form memo:

> Subject: Reimbursements
>
> Enclosed are either receipts that we could not match with the items in your request for reimbursement or a list of items for which we found no receipts or both. Please be advised that the Accounting Department issues reimbursement checks only with full documentation. You cannot be reimbursed until you give us a receipt for each item for which you desire reimbursement. We must ask that you provide this information. This process may be easier if you use the Expense Report Form, which is available online.
>
> Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions.

You know this memo is horrible. Employees have to use the Expense Report Form; it is not optional. In addition to wordiness, a total lack of positive emphasis and you-attitude, and a vague subject line, the document design and organization of information bury the request.

Create a new memo that could be sent to people who do not provide all the documentation they need in order to be reimbursed.

11.9 Creating Persuasive Videos

As they try to undo the harm from YouTube drinking videos starring their institutions, school officials are making their own YouTube videos. Some, such as deans lecturing on course offerings, are ludicrously bad. Other videos are slick promotional films. Still others, such as videos of classes, are somewhere in between.

Some schools are sponsoring contests to persuade students to create videos showing what they like about the school. One humorous one showed a student in a three-piece suit dancing across campus to "It's Raining Men." The student creator said he wanted a school where people dance around and have a good time.

What would you put in a video to convince students—and parents who foot the bills—to consider your school? Share your ideas in small groups.

Source: Susan Kinzie, "Colleges Putting Their Own Spin on YouTube," *Washington Post*, May 12, 2008, A01.

11.10 Creating Alternative Activities

You are residence director at Expensive Private University. Enrollment at your school has been declining because of repeated publicity about excessive drinking among the students. Last year 23 were treated for alcohol poisoning at the local hospital, and one died.

You have been ordered by the president of EPU to develop alcohol-free activities for the campus and ways to persuade students to participate. She wants your plans by the end of June so EPU can work on implementing them for the next academic year. Write the memo to her detailing your plans. Write a second memo to your instructor explaining your persuasive strategies.

Hints:

- Who are your audiences?
- Do they share any common ground?
- What objections will your audiences have?
- What are some ways you can deal with those objections?
- What pitfalls do you need to avoid?

11.11 Evaluating Persuasion Strategies

In June 2009, the Lorillard Tobacco Company responded to new legislation regulating the tobacco industry with a full-page ad in the *Wall Street Journal.* With a classmate or in a small group, evaluate the ad to pick out its persuasion strategies. Use the following questions in your evaluation:

- What audience is this message intended to reach?
- What strategies does the message use in its introduction and conclusion?
- What persuasion strategies does the message use?
- Which phrases are designed to create emotion in readers?
- How does the corporate author of the message affect how you perceive the persuasive arguments? How would your perceptions change if this same message were written by a government watchdog group? an antitobacco group?

Write a memo to your instructor with your evaluation of the ad.

FDA—Tobacco Regulation: Truth and Consequences

As the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (H.R.1256/S.982)—which mandates that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulate the tobacco industry—moves through the U.S. Senate, this is a critical time for lawmakers and all Americans to take a closer look at the major flaws in this legislation, and consider the serious consequences that could result.

The FDA Is the Wrong Agency

Putting the FDA in charge of an inherently dangerous product is inconsistent with the agency's mission to ensure the safety and efficacy of our nation's food, drugs, biologics, and medical devices. With the legacy of recent food and drug contaminations still reverberating, the FDA is an agency that is already overwhelmed in its mission to protect Americans. A March 2009 poll by the American Society for Quality (ASQ) reveals that Americans are losing confidence in the FDA's "Gold Standard" ability to protect the nation's food and drug supply. The survey found 61 percent of U.S. adults feel the food recall process in only fair or poor, while 73 percent of adults say they are as equally concerned about food safety as the war on terror.

A Boost to the Black Market

History clearly demonstrates that when consumer choice is thwarted by government policy, whether through exorbitant taxes, regulatory burdens, or outright bans, black markets arise to take advantage of the situation. This legislation will increase the price of tobacco products in order to pay for FDA regulation, which will only make it more lucrative and attractive for those who want to illegally profit (and likely deprive the federal and state governments of billions of dollars in taxes as a result) from this regulatory effort. And with huge profits—and low penalties for arrest and conviction—illicit cigarette trafficking now has begun to rival drug trafficking as a funding choice for terrorist groups. A congressional investigation led by Rep. Peter King (R-NY), ranking member of the House Homeland Security Committee, in April 2008 found that cigarette smugglers with ties to terrorist groups are acquiring millions of dollars from illegal cigarette sales and funneling the cash to organizations such as al Qaeda and Hezbollah.

Prohibition in Disguise

We believe the proponents of these new regulations would like nothing more than to outlaw smoking completely in our society. This bill is but a first big step in that direction, allowing the FDA to mandate changes to cigarettes as we know them and prevent new, potentially safer products from entering the marketplace. Should we let the FDA prohibit smoking or demand that the American people and those they elect to make such important decisions be the final arbiter of this issue?

A Blow to Safer Products

The regulations in this legislation would also require that the FDA approve any new tobacco product that claims to lessen the risk from smoking before it can be marketed. However, the standard that such new product must meet—that it is appropriate for the protection of the public health, determined with respect to the risks and benefits to the population as a whole, including users and non-users of the tobacco product—may well be impossible to meet, thereby assuring that no safer products ever come to market. Indeed, this bill will stifle the innovation that may provide promising hope for safer, less harmful tobacco products.

With respect to these specific issues, we urge the Senate to thoroughly review the current legislation and find an effective and different regulatory solution.

Lorillard Tobacco Company

Source: Lorillard Tobacco Company, "FDA-Tobacco Regulation: Truth and Consequences," advertisement, *Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 2009, A7.

11.12 Asking for More Time and/or Resources

Today, this message from your boss shows up in your e-mail inbox:

Subject: Want Climate Report

This request has come down from the CEO. I'm delegating it to you. See me a couple of days before the board meeting—the 4th of next month—so we can go over your presentation.

I want a report on the climate for underrepresented groups in our organization. A presentation at the last board of directors' meeting showed that while we do a good job of hiring women and minorities, few of them rise to the top. The directors suspect that our climate may not be supportive and want information on it. Please prepare a presentation for the next meeting. You'll have 15 minutes.

Making a presentation to the company's board of directors can really help your career. But preparing a good presentation and report will take time. You can look at exit reports filed by Human Resources when people leave the company, but you'll also need to interview people—lots of people. And you're already working 60 hours a week on three major projects, one of which is behind schedule. Can one of the projects wait? Can someone else take one of the projects? Can you get some help? Should you do just enough to get by? Ask your boss for advice—in a way that makes you look like a committed employee, not a shirker.

11.13 Persuading Employees Not to Share Files

Your computer network has been experiencing slowdowns, and an investigation has uncovered the reason. A number of employees have been using the system to download and share songs and vacation photos. You are concerned because the bulky files clog the network, and downloading files opens the network to computer viruses and worms. In addition, management does not want employees to spend work time and resources on personal matters. Finally, free downloads of songs are often illegal, and management is worried that a recording firm might sue the company for failing to prevent employees from violating its copyrights.

As director of Management Information Systems (MIS), you want to persuade employees to stop sharing files unrelated to work. You are launching a policy of regularly scanning the system for violations, but you prefer that employees voluntarily use the system properly. Violations are hard to detect, and increasing scanning in an effort to achieve system security is likely to cause resentment as an intrusion into employees' privacy.

Write an e-mail message to all employees, urging them to refrain from downloading and sharing personal files.

11.14 Not Doing What the Boss Asked

Today, you get this e-mail message:

> To: All Unit Managers
>
> Subject: Cutting Costs
>
> Please submit five ideas for cutting costs in your unit. I will choose the best ideas and implement them immediately.

You think your boss's strategy is wrong. Cutting costs will be easier if people buy into the decision rather than being handed orders. Instead of gathering ideas by e-mail, the boss should call a meeting so that people can brainstorm, teaching each other why specific strategies will or won't be easy for their units to implement.

Reply to your boss's e-mail request. Instead of suggesting specific ways to cut costs, persuade the boss to have a meeting where everyone can have input and be part of the decision.

11.15 Handling a Sticky Recommendation

As a supervisor in a state agency, you have a dilemma.
You received this e-mail message today:

> From: John Inoye, Director of Personnel, Department of Taxation
>
> Subject: Need Recommendation for Peggy Chafez
>
> Peggy Chafez has applied for a position in the Department of Taxation. On the basis of her application and interview, she is the leading candidate. However, before I offer the job to her, I need a letter of recommendation from her current supervisor.
>
> Could you please let me have your evaluation within a week? We want to fill the position as quickly as possible.

Peggy has worked in your office for 10 years. She designed, writes, and edits a monthly statewide newsletter that your office puts out; she designed and maintains the department website. Her designs are creative; she's a very hard worker; she seems to know a lot about computers.

However, Peggy is in many ways an unsatisfactory staff member. Her standards are so high that most people find her intimidating. Some find her abrasive. People have complained to you that she's only interested in her own work; she seems to resent requests to help other people with projects. And yet both the newsletter and the web page are projects that need frequent interaction. She's out of the office a lot. Some of that is required by her job (she takes the newsletters to the post office, for example), but some people don't like the fact that she's out of the office so much. They also complain that she doesn't return voice-mail and e-mail messages.

You think managing your office would be a lot smoother if Peggy weren't there. You can't fire her: state employees' jobs are secure once they get past the initial six-month probationary period. Because of budget constraints, you can hire new employees only if vacancies are created by resignations. You feel that it would be pretty easy to find someone better.

If you recommend that John Inoye hire Peggy, you will be able to hire someone you want. If you recommend that John hire someone else, you may be stuck with Peggy for a long time.

As your instructor directs,

a. Write an e-mail message to John Inoye.
b. Write a memo to your instructor listing the choices you've made and justifying your approach.

Hints:

- Polarization may make this dilemma more difficult than it needs to be. What are your options? Consciously look for more than two.
- Is it possible to select facts or to use connotations so that you are truthful but still encourage John to hire Peggy? Is it ethical? Is it certain that John would find Peggy's work as unsatisfactory as you do? If you write a strong recommendation and Peggy doesn't do well at the new job, will your credibility suffer? Why is your credibility important?

11.16 Persuading Tenants to Follow the Rules

As resident manager of a large apartment complex, you receive free rent in return for collecting rents, doing simple maintenance, and enforcing the complex's rules. You find the following notice in the files:

> Some of you are failing to keep any kind of standard of sanitation code, resulting in the unnecessary cost on our part to hire exterminators to rid the building of roaches.
>
> Our leases state breach of contract in the event that you are not observing your responsibility to keep your apartment clean.
>
> We are in the process of making arrangements for an extermination company to rid those apartments that are experiencing problems. Get in touch with the manager no later than 10 pm Monday to make arrangements for your apartment to be sprayed. It is a fast, odorless operation. You are also required to put your garbage in plastic bags. Do not put loose garbage or garbage in paper bags in the dumpster, as this leads to rodent or roach problems.
>
> Should we in the course of providing extermination service to the building find that your apartment is a source of roaches, then you will be held liable for the cost incurred to rid your apartment of them.

The message is horrible. The notice lacks you-attitude, and it seems to threaten anyone who asks to have his or her apartment sprayed.

The annual spraying scheduled for your complex is coming up. Under the lease, you have the right to enter apartments once a year to spray. However, for spraying to be fully effective, residents must empty the cabinets, remove kitchen drawers, and put all food in the refrigerator. People and pets need to leave the apartment for about 15 minutes while the exterminator sprays.

Tell residents about the spraying. Persuade them to prepare their apartments to get the most benefit from it, and persuade them to dispose of food waste quickly and properly so that the bugs don't come back.

Hints:

- What objections may people have to having their apartments sprayed for bugs?
- Why don't people already take garbage out promptly and wrap it in plastic? How can you persuade them to change their behavior?
- Analyze your audience. Are most tenants students, working people, or retirees? What tone would be most effective for this group?

11.17 Asking an Instructor for a Letter of Recommendation

You're ready for the job market, transfer to a four-year college, or graduate school, and you need letters of recommendation.

As your instructor directs,

a. Assume that you've orally asked an instructor for a recommendation, and he or she has agreed to write one, but asks, "Why don't you write up something to remind me of what you've done in the class? Tell me what else you've done, too. And tell me what they're looking for. Be sure to tell me when the letter needs to be in and to whom it goes." Write the e-mail.
b. Assume that you've been unable to talk with the instructor whose recommendation you want. When you call, no one answers the phone; you stopped by once and no one was in. Write asking for a letter of recommendation.
c. Assume that the instructor is no longer on campus. Write him or her asking for a recommendation.

Hints:

- Be detailed about what the organization is seeking and the points you'd like the instructor to mention.
- How well will this instructor remember you? How much detail about your performance in his or her class do you need to provide?
- Specify the name and address of the person to whom the letter should be written; specify when the letter is due.

11.18 Writing a Performance Appraisal for a Member of a Collaborative Group

During your collaborative writing group meetings, keep a log of events. Record specific observations of both effective and ineffective things that group members do. Then evaluate the performance of the other members of your group. (If there are two or more other people, write a separate appraisal for each of them.)

In your first paragraph, summarize your evaluation. Then in the body of your memo, give the specific details that led to your evaluation by answering the following questions:

- What specifically did the person do in terms of the task? Brainstorm ideas? Analyze the information? Draft the text? Suggest revisions in parts drafted by others? Format the document or create visuals? Revise? Edit? Proofread? (In most cases, several people will have done each of these activities together. Don't overstate what any one person did.) What was the quality of the person's work?
- What did the person contribute to the group process? Did he or she help schedule the work? Raise or resolve conflicts? Make other group members feel valued and included? Promote group cohesion? What roles did the person play in the group?

Support your generalizations with specific observations. The more observations you have and the more detailed they are, the better your appraisal will be.

As your instructor directs,

a. Write a midterm performance appraisal for one or more members of your collaborative group. In each appraisal, identify the two or three things the person should try to improve during the second half of the term.
b. Write a performance appraisal for one or more members of your collaborative group at the end of the term. Identify and justify the grade you think each person should receive for the portion of the grade based on group process.
c. Give a copy of your appraisal to the person about whom it is written.

11.19 Writing a Self-Assessment for a Performance Review

Your company privileges good communication skills. In fact, during their second year, all employees are sent to a four-month communication course. As part of your annual review, you must prepare a self-assessment that includes your assessment of your progress in the communication course. Assume that your business communication course is the company's communication course and prepare the communications part of your self-assessment. The company expects this portion to be a page long.

11.20 Evaluating Sales and Fund-Raising Messages

Collect the sales and fund-raising messages that come to you, your co-workers, landlord, neighbors, or family. Use the following questions to evaluate each message:

- What mode does the opener use? Is it related to the rest of the message? How good is the opener?
- What central selling point or common ground does the message use?
- What kinds of proof does the message use? Is the logic valid? What questions or objections are not answered?
- How does the message create emotional appeal?
- Is the style effective?
- Does the close tell people what to do, make action easy, give a reason for acting promptly, and end with a positive picture?
- Does the message use a P.S.? How good is it?
- Is the message visually attractive? Why or why not?
- What other items besides the letter or e-mail are in the package?

As your instructor directs,

a. Share your analysis of one or more messages with a small group of your classmates.

b. Analyze one message in a presentation to the class. Make a copy of the message to use as a visual aid in your presentation.
c. Analyze one message in a memo to your instructor. Provide a copy of the message along with your memo.
d. With several other students, write a group memo or report analyzing one part of the message (e.g., openers) or one kind of letter (e.g., political messages, organizations fighting hunger, etc.). Use at least 10 messages for your analysis if you look at only one part; use at least 6 messages if you analyze one kind of message. Provide copies as an appendix to your report.

11.21 Writing a Fund-Raising Appeal

Write a 2½- to 4-page letter to raise money from *new donors* for an organization you support. You must use a real organization, but it does not actually have to be conducting a fund-raising drive now. Assume that your letter would have a reply card and postage-paid envelope. You do NOT have to write these, but DO refer to them in your letter.

Options for organizations include

- Tax-deductible charitable organizations—religious organizations; hospitals; groups working to feed, clothe, and house poor people.
- Lobbying groups—Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the National Abortion Rights Action League, the National Rifle Association, groups working against nuclear weapons, etc.
- Groups raising money to fight a disease or fund research.
- Colleges trying to raise money for endowments, buildings, scholarships, faculty salaries.

For this assignment, you may also use groups which do not regularly have fund-raising drives but which may have special needs. Perhaps a school needs new uniforms for its band. Perhaps a sorority or fraternity house needs repairs, remodeling, or expansion.

11.22 Asking to Telecommute

You need to relocate to another city, where the company you work for does not have a branch office. You would prefer to remain working at this company, so telecommuting would be an ideal situation. Write a proposal in memo format to persuade your employer to allow you to work from a remote location.

Hints:

- Establish common ground: you want to stay, and many firms would rather allow an employee to telecommute than risk losing a valued team member.
- Point out potential benefits to your employer: you may save the company money on office resources, extend their usual business hours, or provide customer service to a remote location.
- Provide for oversight: outline a framework for evaluating your performance and participating on team projects, and perhaps offer a trial period.

11.23 Calling in a Favor

Last month, your co-worker Mike asked you for a favor: he needed to take an afternoon off to look after one of his children, but he didn't have any vacation or leave time left. Your supervisor had authorized him to take the time off as long as he could get someone else to cover his client meetings for him. You agreed, and spent the day covering for him.

Now you're in the same position: you need to take a morning off, and your supervisor wants you to convince someone to cover for you. You'll be missing a conference call with a client that cannot be rescheduled, and which will take an hour. Mike is the obvious choice—he knows the client, and he owes you a favor—but you know that he's very busy and might object to taking on more work.

Write a short memo or e-mail to Mike asking him to return the favor and cover for you.

Hints:

- Your informal relationship with Mike allows you to exchange favors. It also means that you can use more informal language and tone in your e-mail. (Not too informal, though: any e-mail can be forwarded.)
- Be sure to build common ground and goodwill as part of your opening.
- Mike may object to taking on more work. What other objections might he raise? Be sure to address those objections in your e-mail.

11.24 Creating a Healthy Snackfood Counter

You work in a friendly environment where people like to bring in treats to share with their co-workers. They do it so often that there's an area in your workplace that people jokingly call "Snackfood Counter," lined with donuts, candy, chips, pretzels, soda, and other not-too-healthy fare.

Write a memo, suitable for distributing to a wide audience at your workplace, to convince your co-workers to make the switch to healthy snacks. Build common ground, offset any negatives with benefits, and provide concrete suggestions for future actions. Be sure to build and maintain goodwill: people contribute to Snackfood Counter to be friendly, and may interpret your request as a complaint.

11.25 Recostuming Happy Halloween

Your team has been put in charge of organizing your company's Halloween event. Employees may come to work dressed in a costume. During the lunch hour, you'll hold a costume contest with prizes for the most original costumes (and a prize for the department or team with the highest rate of participation), followed by a party for your staff members. Last year's party was a big hit: about 30% of your employees dressed up, and you anticipate that the number will be higher this year.

However, last year there were a number of (moderately) racy and (somewhat) tasteless costumes, and some complaints about those costumes. The team who organized last year's Halloween ignored those complaints "because we're all adults here, and we can all take a joke." Well, this year, we *won't* all be adults: your company is also sponsoring a trick-or-treat event for kids from 10 local foster homes. Immediately following the costume contest and lunch, there will be dozens of (supervised) kids, ages 2–8, going office-to-office for candy. Your Human Resources department has provided the candy and treats, but it's up to you to make sure that the costume contest is kid-friendly.

As your instructor directs:

- Write a memo, suitable for distributing to all staff, which establishes guidelines for participating in the costume contest and persuades your co-workers to comply.
- Create a sign, suitable for posting in the common areas of your workplace, that establishes your costume guidelines and invites your co-workers to participate in the event.

Hints:

- Adults are more likely to comply with a policy decision when they understand the rationale behind that decision. Be sure to communicate your decision process as well as your guidelines.
- Choose a persuasive message format, create common ground and goodwill, and use creativity in both your language and your visual design.

11.26 Campaigning against Holiday Toy Ads

Discussions on pages 323 and 330 outlined the campaign of CCFC (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood) against holiday toy ads directed at children.

This is the sample letter to toy manufacturers from parents suggested by CCFC:

> I am writing to urge you to suspend all advertising to children this holiday season. With the global economic crisis intensifying, many families will have to scale back their holiday shopping this year. It's wrong to create unrealistic expectations in children or to foment family stress by encouraging kids to lobby for gifts that their parents may not be able to afford.
>
> I understand the need to create awareness of your products. I urge you to do that by advertising directly to parents instead of enlisting children as lobbyists for their holiday gifts. Since it's parents, not children, who can truly understand their family's financial situation in these difficult times, it is more important than ever that you respect their authority as gatekeepers. Please target parents instead of children with your holiday advertising.

Source: "Tell Toy Companies: Target Parents, Not Kids, with Holiday Ads," Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Judge Baker Children's Center, accessed June 30, 2011, http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/621/t/6914/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=26139

This is the letter to toy manufacturers from the CCFC:

CAMPAIGN FOR A COMMERCIAL-FREE CHILDHOOD

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood
c/o Judge Baker Children's Center
53 Parker Hill Avenue, Boston, MA 02120-3225
Phone: 617-278-4172 • Fax: 617-232-7343
Email: CCFC@JBCC.Harvard.edu
Website: www.commercialfreechildhood.org

PLEASE NOTE: This letter was sent to 24 companies, not just Mattel. A complete list can be found at: www.commercialfreechildhood.org/actions/holidaymarketers.htm

October 27, 2008

Mr. Robert Eckert
Chief Executive Officer, Mattel
333 Continental Boulevard
El Segundo, CA 90245

Dear Mr. Eckert:

As families struggle to cope with the global economic crisis, we are writing to urge you to suspend all holiday marketing aimed at children. With fears of a recession or even a depression intensifying, Americans routinely list the economy as their number one concern. There is little doubt that many parents will have to scale back their holiday purchases significantly and experts predict that parents will spend less money on toys and gifts for children this holiday season. [1] Under normal circumstances it is unfair to bypass parents and target children directly with marketing, but with an uncertain future and budgets tighter than ever, it is particularly egregious to foment family conflict by advertising toys and games directly to kids that their parents may not be able to afford.

Research demonstrates that children's exposure to advertising is linked to the things they ask their parents to buy and family stress. [2] Using advertising to encourage children to nag for products may be good for sales, but it creates considerable family conflict. Even in normal times, buying holiday gifts causes financial strain for many families. A 2005 poll found that approximately one-third of Americans took more than three months to pay off their holiday credit card debt and 14% carried credit card debt into the next holiday season. [3]

Early reports indicate that spending on advertising to children will not reflect the current economic downturn. To date, spending forecasts for forth quarter television advertising on children's television have not been affected. [4] If parents are cutting their purchases back this holiday season while commercial pressures on children remain at record levels, the burden on families will be tremendous.

As you know, children are more vulnerable to advertising than adults. Seductive advertising designed explicitly to exploit their vulnerabilities will create unrealistic expectations in kids too young to understand the economic crises and will make parenting in these uncertain times even more difficult. **We understand the need to create awareness of your products. We urge you to do that by advertising directly to parents instead of enlisting children as lobbyists for their holiday gifts.** Since it's parents, not children, who can truly understand their family's financial situation in these difficult times, it is more important than ever that you respect their authority as gatekeepers: Target parents instead of children this holiday season.

Please note that we are sending this letter to CEO's of all the leading toy and game manufacturers and will be happy to offer public praise for any company that puts America's families first by suspending their holiday advertising to children. We would also welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you further.

Sincerely,

Susan Linn, Ed.D.

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[1] Anderson, M. (2008, Oct 8). Holiday spending on toys expected to be less. *The Associated Press.* Accessed October 17, 2008 from http://www.thenewstribune.com/1031/v-lite/story/502479.html.
[2] Buijen, M. & Valkenburg (2003). The effects of television advertising on materialism, parent–child conflict, and unhappiness: A review of research. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24, 437–456.
[3] Center for a New American Dream (2005). Hot Holiday Gift for Kids This Year? — A Piggy Bank, Say Fed Up Americans. Accessed October 17, 2008 from http://www.newdream.org/holiday/poll05.php.
[4] Freidman, W. (2008, Oct 13). So Far, Kids' TV Saved from Ad Hits. *MediaPost's Media Daily News*. Accessed October 17, 2008 from http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art_aid=92573.

Source: Reprinted with permission of Judge Baker Children's Center, Boston, MA.

This is the response from the TIA (Toy Industry Association):

Toy Industry Association's Statement

The Toy Industry Association notes with interest, but begs to disagree with, the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood's suggestion that marketing of toys be focused this year on parents and not on children.

We believe parents should know what their children want and are perfectly capable of deciding, as they have always done, how to fit satisfaction of those desires into the family budget. Children are a vital part of the gift selection process and should not be removed from it.

We offer several thoughts to guide families through the gift buying process:

- Children have their own ideas about what appeals to them and parents are not necessarily going to know, without their children's input, if a new toy is going to excite them. We have faith in parents' ability to hear from their children what they would like and then make a decision as to what, and how much, to give them.
- In fact, most parents and grandparents appreciate knowing which items are on their child's wish lists before they go out to purchase a gift for them, as it makes shopping easier. If children are not aware of what is new and available, how will they be able to tell their families what their preferences are?
- Parents do a pretty good job of budgeting and making purchase decisions. While there is certainly greater economic disturbance going on now, families have always faced different levels of economic well-being and have managed to tailor their spending to their means.

Toy Industry Association, Inc.

Source: Reprinted with permission of Judge Baker Children's Center, Boston, MA.

This is the statement on the website of the TIA:

TIA Statement on Marketing to Children

TIA Position Statement for Holiday Season 2008

The Toy Industry Association and its members are proud of the toys and games we produce and their role in play, which is an important, life-shaping experience in the growth of a child. We believe it is appropriate to market toys and games both to children and to their parents, so long as it is done responsibly.

Ultimately, TIA and its members understand that a parent or primary caregiver knows his or her child best. Our research confirms that parents agree that they should be involved in all aspects of their child's life, including the child's television viewing, computer time, and purchasing decisions.

The toy industry believes firmly in self-regulation and is committed to follow best practices in marketing to our consumers, as reflected in various national codes and industry guidelines. These include the Children's Advertising Review Unit of the Council of Better Business Bureaus (of which TIA is a long-standing member) in the United States and the codes of the International Chamber of Commerce and local self-regulatory codes internationally. We are actively involved with various self-regulatory organizations in continually reviewing and improving those guidelines as needed.

Children are the reason our industry exists. We are parents ourselves and we treat all children with the same care and respect.

Source: Industry Statements, from http://www.toyassociation.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Industry_Statements&TEMPLATE=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=1474 (accessed April 5, 2009).

In small groups, discuss these four documents. Here are some questions to get you started:

1. Do the openers grab your attention? Why or why not?
2. What persuasive strategies do they use?
3. What arguments do they use? How do they build credibility?
4. What common ground do they use?
5. What emotional appeals do they use?
6. How do they deal with objections?
7. What are the differences between the TIA response to CCFC and the TIA's statement on its own website?
8. Do the documents convince you? Why or why not? Which document is the most persuasive?
9. How could these documents be improved?

As your instructor directs,

a. As a group, share your analyses with the class in a five-minute presentation.
b. Prepare three documents for your instructor.
   - Write a detailed analysis of one of the documents.
   - On the basis of that analysis, rewrite the document.
   - Write a memo explaining the changes you made and why you kept some of the original document (if you did).