

How Not to Get Shot!©

Often times, as communicators, we are messengers of bad news.

Here's a summary of how to be the messenger that does not get shot.

A central theme here is that we want to preserve your relationship while grappling with a difficult issue.

- Go **visual (vs. verbal)**. If you tell the other person the bad news, it is coming from you, must be associated with you, and puts you in the position you don't want to be in.

Get the bad news written down somewhere.

- **Separate** the written bad news physically separated from and away from you, off to the side. If it is written on a piece of paper, don't hold the paper. Put it where you can point to it, and the two of you can look at it. If you can't do that, hold the paper away from your body.
- Since you don't want to be the source of the bad news, when you're referring to the bad news (on the paper or chart), you want your listener to be looking at the source of bad news, (paper or chart), not you. **Listeners are more likely to follow your eyes than your hand gestures.** In other words, if you're looking at the listener while pointing at the bad news, the listener will still look at you. When you're referring to the bad news paper, if you look at it, your listener will, too.

How Not to Get Shot!©

- **Refer to the paper, report or chart** as the source of the information, not you. "The report says," or "the situation dictates." Avoid, avoid, avoid referring to yourself "I," or "My."
- Have the meeting place where you deliver the bad news be different from where you'd want to have more pleasant conversations. Different from where you might have brain storming sessions to look for solutions.

You'll generate memories where you give the "bad news." You don't want the "bad news" location/memories to contaminate future conversations or meetings.

- Use an approachable voice when looking at the person. Shift your tone of voice to a more flat, credible voice when looking at the paper.
- Use facts, specific descriptions. Avoid interpretations. (Interpretations are yours and point to you as the source of bad news.
- The way we've described the physical setting, you end up with a three-point space. You are one point, the listener is the second point, and the bad news is the third point.

Position your body so that you are on the "same side" as the listener. Do not sit "opposed" to each other. That would put you in an me vs. you position.

- Finally, **reverse** most of these suggestions **when you're delivering good news**. You do want to be associated with that.