

Writing Negative Messages



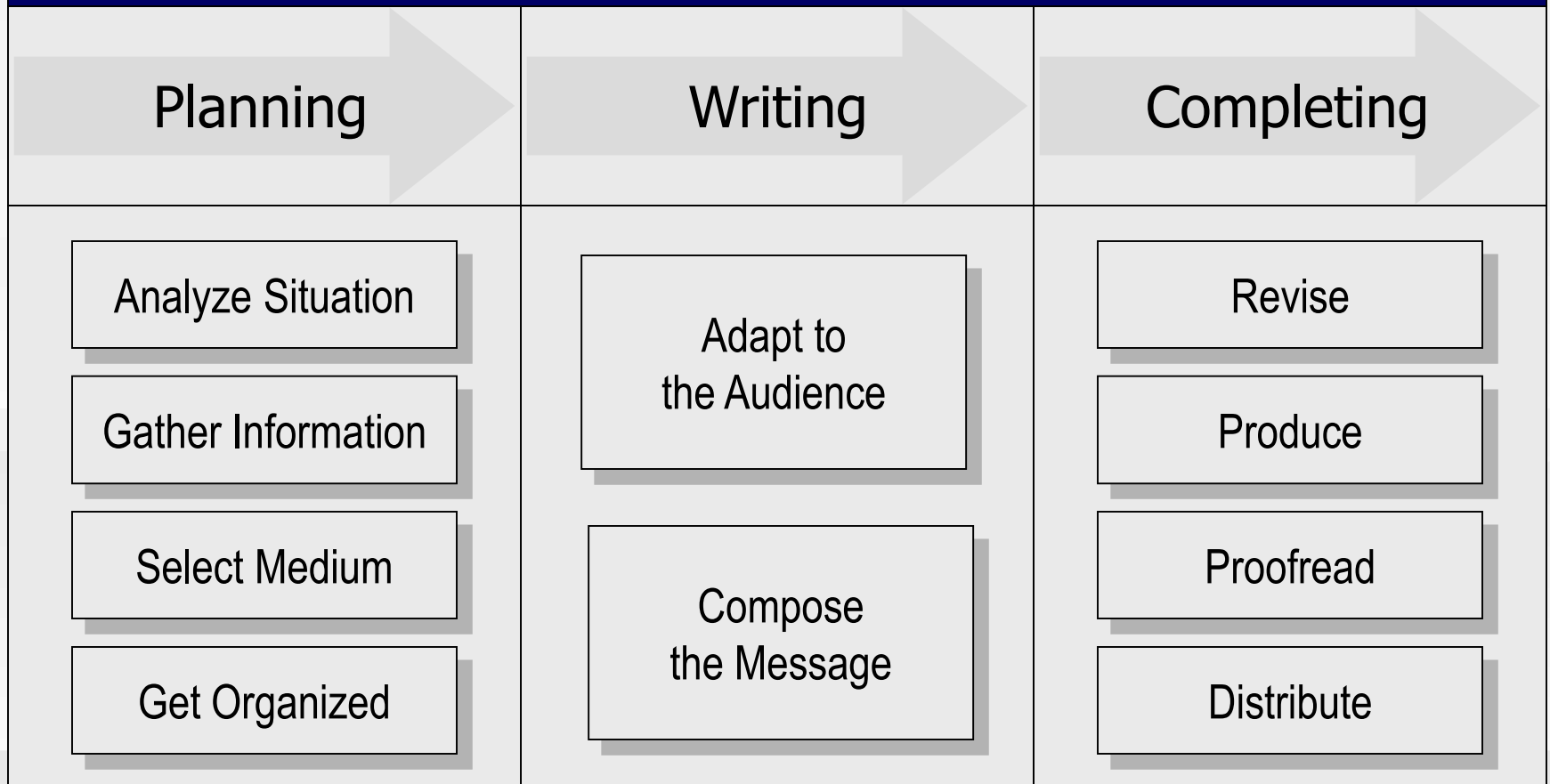
Writing Negative Messages

- **Negative Message?**

Writing Negative Messages

1. Three Step Process
2. Developing Negative Messages
3. Indirect Approach
4. Ethics and Etiquettes
5. Communicating in Crisis
6. Rejecting Job Application

Three-Step Writing Process



Goals of Negative Messages

Convey the Message

Gain Acceptance

Maintain Goodwill

Build Corporate Image

Minimize Future
Correspondence



Planning the Message

Analyze the
Situation

Determine
Your Purpose

Profile the
Audience

Gather
Information

Select a
Medium

Define Your
Main Idea

Writing the Message

Use the “You” Attitude

Build Credibility

Protect Your Company

Avoid Accusations

Write Clearly

Be Sensitive

Table 9.1 Choosing Positive Words

<i>Examples of Negative Phrasings</i>	<i>Positive Alternatives</i>
Your request <i>doesn't make any sense</i> .	
The <i>damage won't</i> be fixed for a week.	
Although it wasn't our <i>fault</i> , there will be an <i>unavoidable delay</i> in your order.	
<i>Due to unforeseen circumstances</i> , I <i>won't</i> be able to attend your meeting.	
I <i>regret</i> the misunderstanding.	
I was <i>shocked</i> to learn that you're unhappy.	
<i>Unfortunately</i> , we <i>haven't</i> received your payment.	
Employees <i>cannot</i> park in the customer parking lot.	
The enclosed statement is <i>wrong</i> .	

Completing the Message



Revising

Producing

Proofreading

Delivering

Developing Negative Messages



Type of Approach
Direct or Indirect

Cultural Variations

Ethical Standards

Choosing the Best Approach

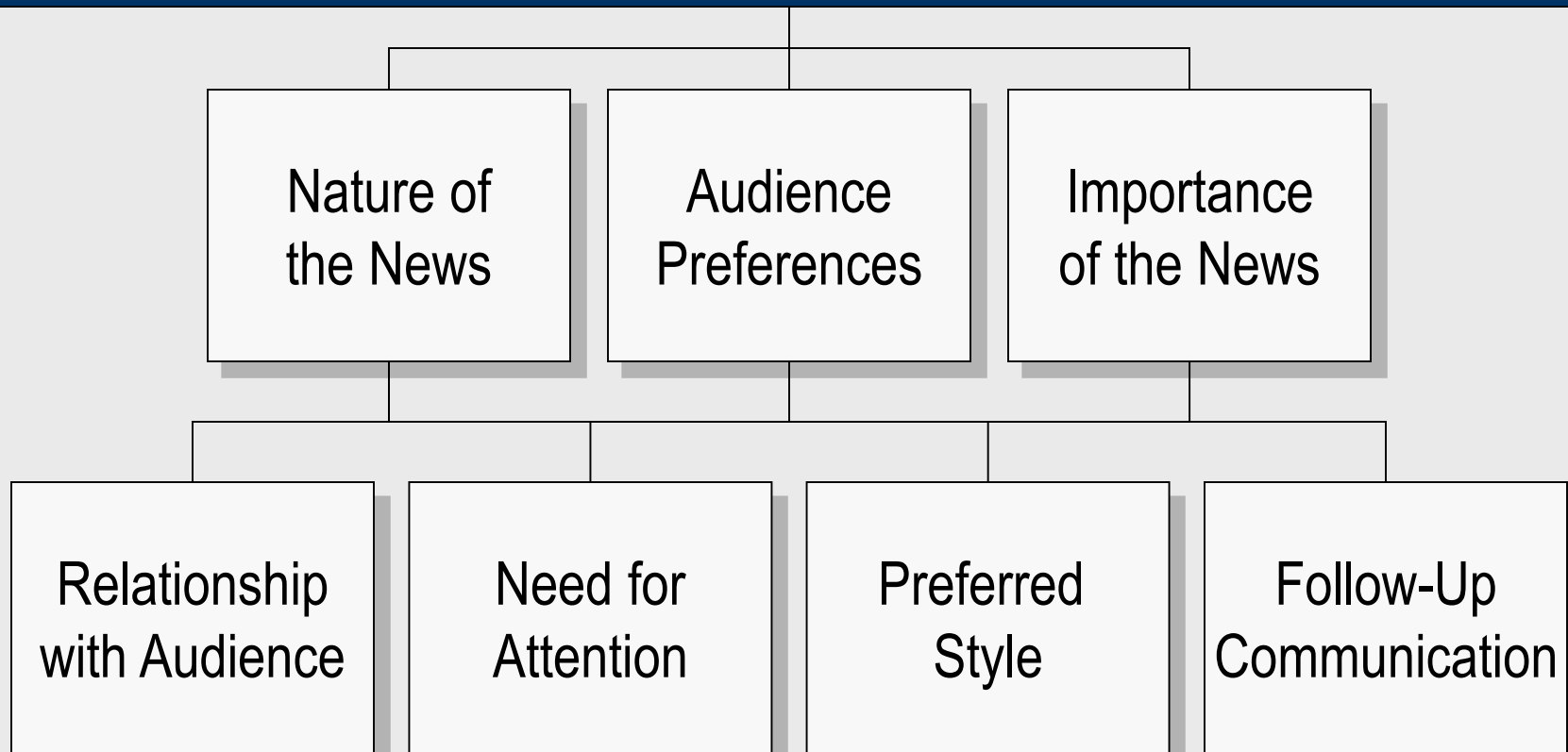


Figure 9.1 Choosing the Approach

Direct Approach

Indirect Approach

Firmness is needed

Bad news won't come as a shock

Situation is routine or minor

Audience prefers bad news first

BAD NEWS

REASONS

POSITIVE CLOSE

Audience will be displeased

Audience is emotionally involved

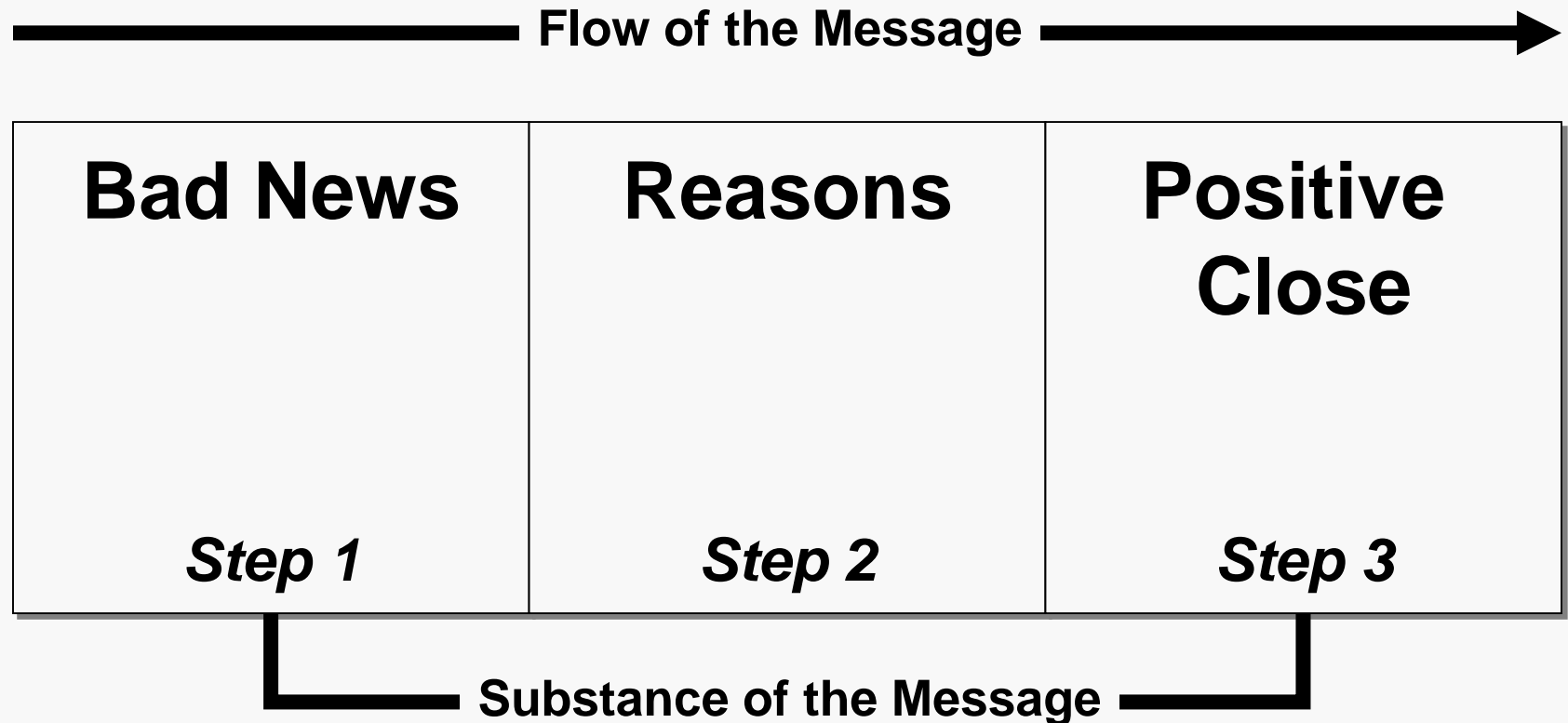
BUFFER

REASONS

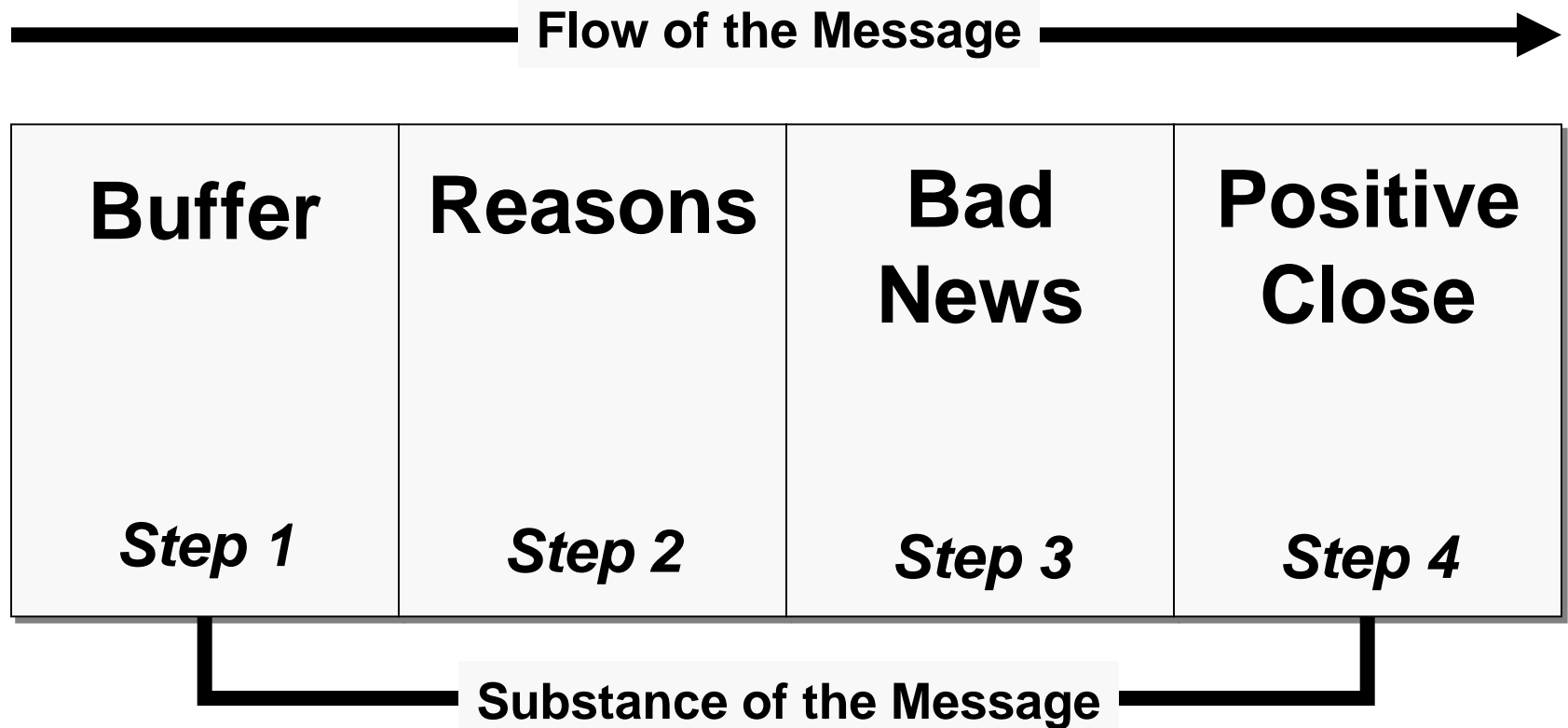
BAD NEWS

POSITIVE CLOSE

The Direct Approach



The Indirect Approach



Begin With a Buffer

Things to Do

- Show appreciation
- Pay attention
- Compliment reader
- Be understanding
- Show sincerity

Things to Avoid

- Saying “no”
- A know-it-all tone
- Wordy phrases
- Apologies
- Lengthy buffers

Table 9.2 Types of Buffers

TABLE 9.2

Types of Buffers

Buffer Type	Strategy	Example
Agreement	Find a point on which you and the reader share similar views.	We both know how hard it is to make a profit in this industry.
Appreciation	Express sincere thanks for receiving something.	Your check for \$127.17 arrived yesterday. Thank you.
Cooperation	Convey your willingness to help in any way you realistically can.	Employee Services is here to assist all associates with their health insurance, retirement planning, and continuing education needs.
Fairness	Assure the reader that you've closely examined and carefully considered the problem, or mention an appropriate action that has already been taken.	For the past week, we have had our bandwidth monitoring tools running around the clock to track your actual upload and download speeds.
Good news	Start with the part of your message that is favorable.	We have credited your account in the amount of \$14.95 to cover the cost of return shipping.
Praise	Find an attribute or an achievement to compliment.	The Stratford Group clearly has an impressive record of accomplishment in helping clients resolve financial reporting problems.
Resale	Favorably discuss the product or company related to the subject of the letter.	With their heavy-duty, full-suspension hardware and fine veneers, the desks and file cabinets in our Montclair line have long been popular with value-conscious professionals.
Understanding	Demonstrate that you understand the reader's goals and needs.	So that you can more easily find the printer with the features you need, we are enclosing a brochure that describes all the Epson printers currently available.

Provide Reasons and Information

Guide Your Readers

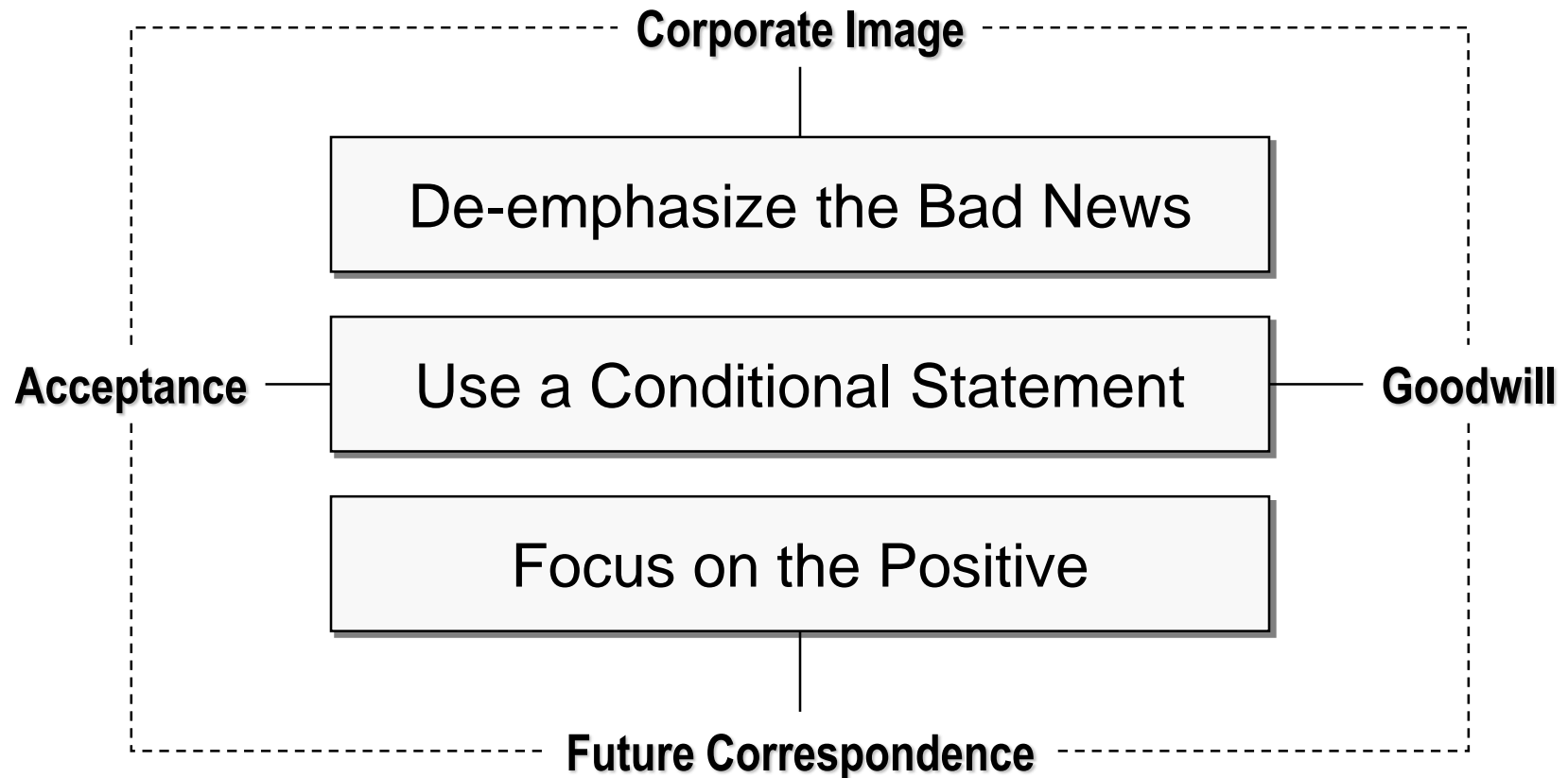
Provide Support

Suggest Benefits

Minimize Policy



State the Bad News



Close on a Positive Note

- **Avoid negativity or uncertainty**
- **Limit future correspondence**
- **Be optimistic about the future**
- **Be sincere and avoid clichés**
- **Conclude with confidence**

Adapting to Your Audience



**Cultural
Differences**

**Internal and
External Audience**

Cultural Differences



Communication Diversity

Proper Tone

Message Organization

Cultural Conventions

The Type of Audience

Internal

Timeliness

Completeness

External

Diversity

Confidentiality

Maintain High Standards of Ethics and Etiquette

Laws and Regulations

Human Impact

Emotions



Checklist: Creating Negative Messages



Checklist

Creating Negative Messages

A. Choose the better approach.

- Consider using the direct approach when the audience is aware of the possibility of negative news, when the reader is not emotionally involved in the message, when you know that the reader would prefer the bad news first, when you know that firmness is necessary, and when you want to discourage a response.
- Consider using the indirect approach when the news is likely to come as a shock or surprise, when your audience has a high emotional investment in the outcome, and when you want to maintain a good relationship with the audience.

B. For the indirect approach, open with an effective buffer.

- Establish common ground with the audience.
- Validate the request, if you are responding to a request.
- Don't trivialize the reader's concerns.
- Don't mislead the reader into thinking the coming news might be positive.

C. Provide reasons and additional information.

- Explain why the news is negative.
- Adjust the amount of detail to fit the situation and the audience.

- Avoid explanations when the reasons are confidential, excessively complicated, or irrelevant to the reader.
- If appropriate, state how you plan to correct or respond to the negative news.
- Seek the advice of company lawyers if you're unsure what to say.

D. Clearly state the bad news.

- State the bad news as positively as possible, using tactful wording.
- To help protect readers' feelings, deemphasize the bad news by minimizing the space devoted to it, subordinating it, or embedding it.
- If your response might change in the future if circumstances change, explain the conditions to the reader.
- Emphasize what you can do or have done rather than what you can't or won't do.

E. Close on a respectful note.

- Express best wishes without being falsely positive.
- Suggest actions readers might take, if appropriate, and provide them with necessary information.
- Encourage further communication only if you're willing to discuss the situation further.

Types of Negative Messages

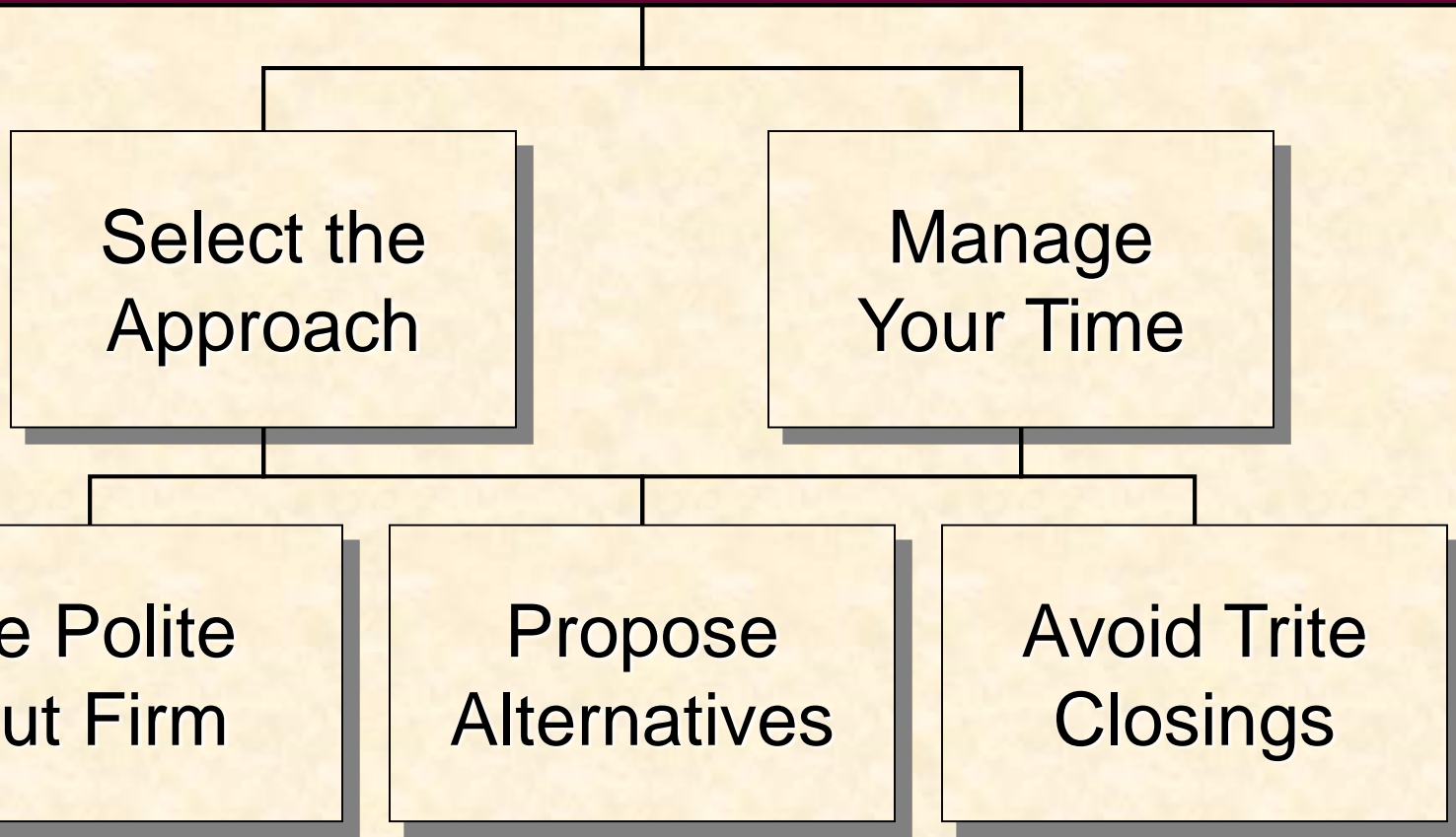
Routine Matters

Organizational News

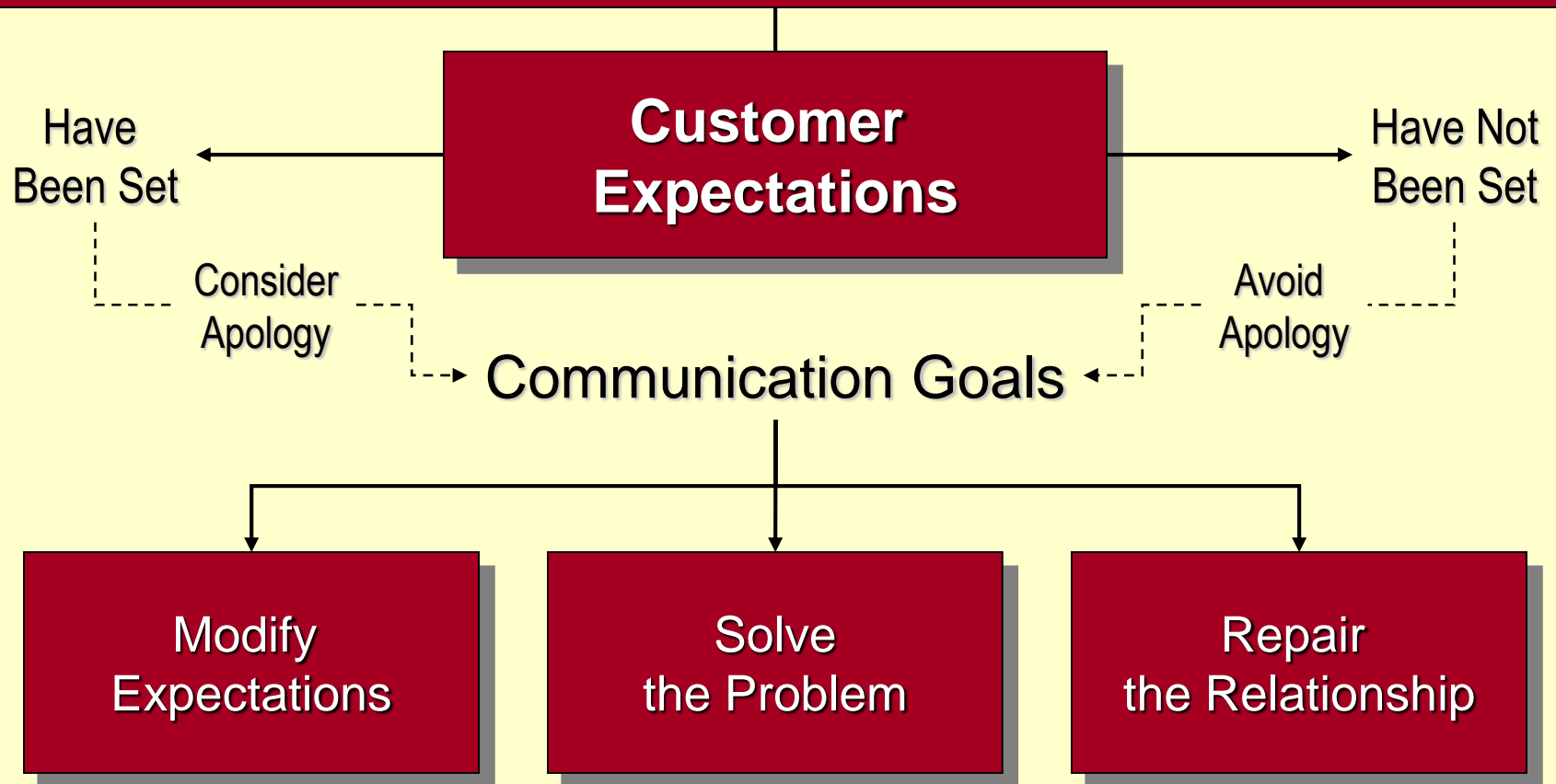
Employment Issues



Routine Matters



Status of Transactions



Checklist: Transaction



Checklist

Handling Bad News About Transactions

- Reset the customer's expectations regarding the transaction.
- Explain what happened and why, if appropriate.
- Explain how you will resolve the situation.
- Repair any damage done to the business relationship, perhaps offering future discounts, free merchandise, or other considerations.
- Offer a professional, businesslike expression of apology if your organization made a mistake.

Claims and Adjustments

Things to Employ	Things to Avoid
✓ Courtesy and Respect	✓ Accepting Blame
✓ Indirect Approach	✓ Making Accusations
✓ Understanding and Tact	✓ Being Negative
✓ Positive Attitude	✓ Defaming Others

Checklist: Refusing Claims



Checklist

Refusing Claims

- Use the indirect approach because the reader is expecting or hoping for a positive response.
- Indicate your full understanding of the nature of the complaint.
- Explain why you are refusing the request, without hiding behind company policy.
- Provide an accurate, factual account of the transaction.
- Emphasize ways things should have been handled rather than dwell on the reader's negligence.
- Avoid any appearance of defamation.
- Avoid expressing personal opinions.
- End with a positive, friendly, helpful close.
- Make any suggested action easy for readers to comply with.

Negative Organizational News

Match the Approach to the Situation

Consider Unique Needs of Each Group

Give Each Group Time to Respond

Plan a Sequence of Announcements

Negative Organizational News

Plan for and Manage a Response

Stay Positive, But Also Be Realistic

Minimize the Element of Surprise

Seek Expert Advice If You're Not Sure

Crisis Communication

Crisis Management Plan

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graph TD; A[Crisis Management Plan] --> B[Define Operational Procedures]; A --> C[Outline Tasks and Responsibilities]; B --> D[Speaking for the Company]; B --> E[Contacting Key Executives]; B --> F[Identifying Media Outlets];
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Define Operational
Procedures

Outline Tasks
and Responsibilities

Speaking for
the Company

Contacting
Key Executives

Identifying
Media Outlets

How to communicate in a crisis

TABLE 9.3

How to Communicate in a Crisis

WHEN A CRISIS HITS

Do

Prepare for trouble ahead of time by identifying potential problems, appointing and training a response team, and preparing and testing a crisis management plan.

Get top management involved immediately.

Set up a news center for company representatives and the media that is equipped with phones, computers, and other electronic tools for preparing news releases and online updates.

At the news center, take the following steps:

- Issue frequent news updates, and have trained personnel available to respond to questions around the clock.
- Provide complete information packets to the news media as soon as possible.
- Prevent conflicting statements and provide continuity by appointing a single person trained in advance to speak for the company.
- Tell receptionists and other employees to direct all phone calls to the designated spokesperson in the news center.
- Provide updates when new information is available via blog postings, microblog updates, text messaging, Facebook, and other appropriate media.

Tell the whole story—openly, completely, and honestly. If you are at fault, apologize.

Demonstrate the company's concern by your statements and your actions.

Don't

Don't blame anyone for anything.

Don't speculate in public.

Don't refuse to answer questions.

Don't release information that will violate anyone's right to privacy.

Don't use the crisis to pitch products or services.

Don't play favorites with media representatives.

Recommendation Letters

Requested
by Businesses

Be Direct

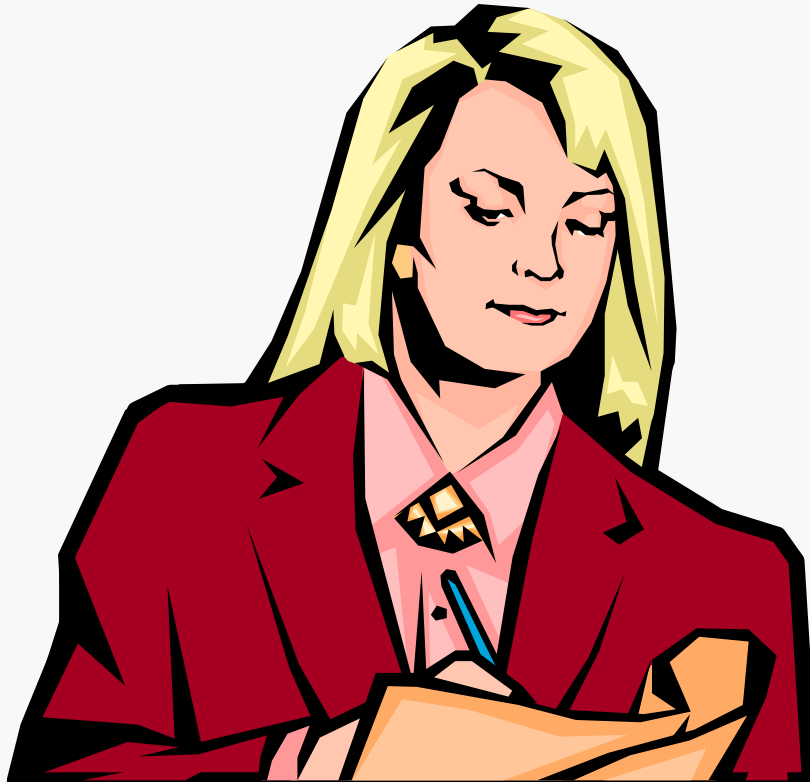
State Facts

Requested
by Individuals

Practice
Diplomacy

Recognize
Feelings

Employment Applications



Be Clear and Direct

State the Reasons

Suggest Alternatives

Performance Reviews

Job Requirements

Feedback

Action Plans



Negative Performance Reviews

- ✓ Confront the problem
- ✓ Plan the message
- ✓ Respect privacy
- ✓ Stay focused
- ✓ Get a commitment

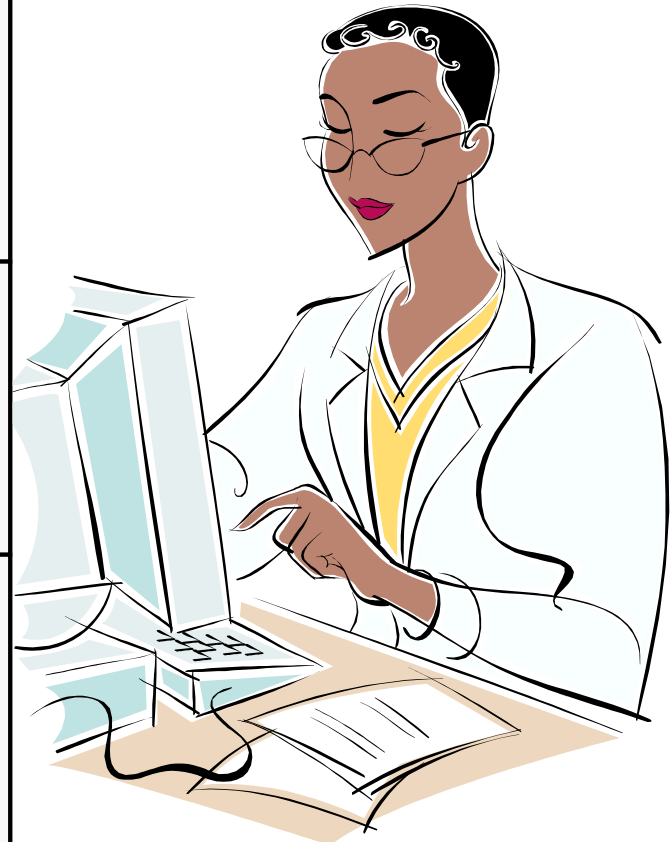


Termination Letters

Express the Decision

Avoid Litigious Statements

Minimize Negative Feelings



Checklist: Negative Employment Messages



Checklist

Writing Negative Employment Messages

A. Refusing requests for employee references and recommendations

- Don't feel obligated to write a recommendation letter if you don't feel comfortable doing so.
- Take a diplomatic approach to minimize hurt feelings.
- Compliment the reader's accomplishments.
- Suggest alternatives, if available.
- Use the options available to you on social networks, such as ignoring a request from someone you don't know or writing a recommendation on a single positive attribute.

B. Rejecting job applicants

- If possible, respond to all applications, even if you use only a form message to acknowledge receipt.
- If you use the direct approach, take care to avoid being blunt or cold.
- If you use the indirect approach, don't mislead the reader in your buffer or delay the bad news for more than a sentence or two.
- Avoid explaining why the applicant was rejected.
- Suggest alternatives if possible.

C. Giving negative performance reviews

- Document performance problems throughout the year.
- Evaluate all employees consistently.
- Keep job descriptions up to date as employee responsibilities change.
- Maintain an objective and unbiased tone.
- Use nonjudgmental language.
- Focus on problem resolution.
- Make sure negative feedback is documented and shared with the employee.
- Don't avoid confrontations by withholding negative feedback.
- Ask the employee for a commitment to improve.

D. Terminating employment

- State your reasons accurately and make sure they are objectively verifiable.
- Avoid statements that might expose your company to a wrongful termination lawsuit.
- Consult company lawyers to clarify all terms of the separation.
- Deliver the letter in person if at all possible.
- End the relationship on terms as positive as possible.

Goals of Negative Messages



Primary Goals

- Make the receiver understand and accept the bad news
- Maintain a positive image of you and your organization

Goals of Negative Messages



Secondary Goals

- Reduce bad feelings
- Convey fairness
- Eliminate future correspondence
- Avoid creating legal liability