

WORD Up!

210's Bookshelf

Confederates in the Attic,
by Tony Horwitz

Pulitzer Prize-winning Tony Horwitz travels throughout the South participating in Civil War battle re-enactments and theorizes why and how the Southern ideology still resonates today, 144 years after Appomattox. Horwitz visits and profiles various chapters of the Sons of the Confederacy, Daughters of the Confederacy, Children of the Confederacy, Cats of the Confederacy, and a group of hardcores in Kentucky (that will give readers chills when they realize that the mentality still exists). In many respects, the groups profiled consider their activities as cultural preservation, and in that sense they are no different than other groups such as the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution (except for that group in Kentucky). This book is a great read that provides laughs, shock, and an examination of why we are still so obsessed with the Civil War.

Rating: Top Shelf

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Bad News in the Boardroom: Managing the Elephant

Let's talk about the elephant in the room. You know which elephant—the declining sales, service cut backs, reduced spending, and layoffs elephant. In this struggling economy, it's likely you'll have to give bad news to someone, sometime, about something. Since bad news delivered poorly can have disastrous consequences, it's important to have a few strategies in hand to help ease the blow.

Your goals are to deliver the bad news, ensure the recipient understands and accepts the message and that your decision is fair and reasonable. This sounds like a tall order, so here are a few strategies for delivering bad news that will leave you feeling better about the situation:

- **Establish some goodwill.** You can do this by describing the situation. "As you know, Bill, our sales have steadily declined for the past three quarters. Our competition's new widget has more features and costs less than our widget." Avoid pointing fingers: "Those pencil pushers up on the fourth floor have determined that we need to cut staff."
- **Give the bad news with reasons.** People want to know why. Tell them. Be respectful. "Tom, your service team is rude, slow, and unprofessional. We're going with another vendor whose service standards meet our own."
- **Provide an alternative if one exists.** If an alternative doesn't exist, don't make up one. "Even though you embezzled \$2.5 million, I'll see what I can do to make sure you don't get prosecuted."
- **End on a positive note.** It might be difficult, but try. "Thanks for the effort you've made to give our customers great service."



The Word Around 210

News, events and updates

- Suzanne Guess was quoted in Elizabeth Frick's article, "The Best Job I Never Took," published in the December 2008 issue of *Intercom*. Suzanne reviews warning signs she uses to determine whether to accept a project. These warning signs led her to "fire" a client that cost 210 Communications money, but earned the loyalty of 210 staff and consultants. To read the full article, go to www.210comm.net/MediaCenter/ArticlesAbout210.
- Suzanne also appeared on 95 KGGO's morning show with Lou, Round Guy, and Heather on Inauguration Day and enjoyed some of Obama's favorite chocolate chip cookies from Baby Boomers. ■

Three things to avoid saying or writing:

- "I'm afraid we can't... ." Really? You're scared? This is an empty phrase that doesn't do anything but take up air or space on a page.
- "I'm sorry, but I can't... ." You probably can, but are choosing not to do so. If you're so sorry about it, why don't you change your policy?
- "I'm sure you'll agree... ." You better be sure I'll agree. Like mind-reader sure. Are you that sure?

A few words about apologies:

- If you're not at fault, don't take credit for the mistake. Don't point fingers, though. A simple explanation may be all you need to provide.
- When you do need to apologize, do it once, briefly, and sincerely.

Delivering bad news is challenging and uncomfortable for all. With some advance planning, everyone can walk away with dignity intact. ■

“Words can burn or soothe. Choose them carefully.”



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