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## DELIVERING BAD NEWS

In the workplace, we have all had to share bad news--particularly in recent times with budget cuts and resources cut to the bone. Are there any historical figures who might model effective ways to get the news out and then lead people to work enthusiastically?

The Battle of Gettysburg offers numerous examples, with both armies rushing into an escalating battle. As the battle lines formed, commanders found they had too few troops, too little equipment, or not enough time for the situations they faced. At pivotal moments, they had to tell their troops that no reinforcements could reach them quickly, or that supplies were running out.

### JOHN BUFORD

One of our favorite role models is the Union cavalry leader, John Buford. On a scouting expedition, Buford's cavalry spotted over 7,000 Confederate infantry marching toward Gettysburg, and he quickly reported his discovery to the nearest infantry Corps commander. Then instead of leaving the scene of the upcoming battle, Buford asked his 2,700 cavalymen to stay in Gettysburg to engage the approaching armies and hope to slow them down.



Buford did not sugar-coat this decision, but told his men what the next day's battle would hold, as they awaited reinforcements. His experienced troops, who had also seen the approaching Confederates on five roads into town, knew that Buford was being totally open with them. They respected his judgment, having fought with him in prior battles, and they were ready to follow his lead.

Put yourself in his situation in a contemporary workplace. How far would your people follow you if you covered up any bad news of a coming crisis? For a short while, you might avoid people blaming you for the coming crisis, but how long will their respect last when they learn that you knew about the problem in advance? Will you ever have their trust again?

When you share your news honestly, you are treating your employees with respect. Your candor also demonstrates your trust in them--you are saying that you believe they can handle the situation.

### JOSHUA CHAMBERLAIN

Anyone who has seen the movie, *Gettysburg*, or read *Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara, knows how Joshua Chamberlain turned a group of deserters into desperately needed fighting forces, because he reminded them of the higher purpose of the war. Chamberlain also told them that he needed them in the coming battle.



Chamberlain showed two of the most important things a leader can do to motivate his people in the face of severe shortages or diminishing budgets: (1) remind staff of the importance of their work (not the task, but the mission); (2) tell them you need them.

## **WINSTON CHURCHILL - The Power of Words**

In those terms, who better models the turning of bad news into a call for action than Winston Churchill? In the face of an imminent invasion in World War II, he set the tone of defiance, strength, and purpose, showing the British they could rally (in the face of military shortages) and achieve a great victory. And rally they did.

*We will never turn from our purpose, however somber the road, however grievous the cost, because we know that out of this time of trial and tribulation will be born a new freedom and glory for all mankind...Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth were to last for a thousand years, men will still say, this was their finest hour.*

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