

I am sorry, I have some Bad News!

One thing I have learned in my time as a coach is that you can't do what I do without constantly learning. I am constantly learning how to support people in reaching their goals quicker but I also learn so much from the people as they achieve their goals.

Lately I have learned a lot about character, strength and resilience from people who have received bad news.

The truth is that we live in a society with so much information coming at us and such a supply of bad news that perhaps we become numb to it, but into each of our lives comes some pieces of bad news, that we have always dreaded or perhaps never even dreamed of.

I had the chance to have dinner one Saturday night at very famous, high end private club. A table of four was seated in the last table available in the Dining Room on a Saturday Night. I was seated by the Maitre D stand and was very close to ear shot when a member approached the Maitre D and explained in a very aggressive manner that her night was ruined because their table was rectangular and she preferred square. Although the news of getting a rectangular table might have seemed like devastating news to this member, this is not what I am talking about.

I am talking about those moments in life when people receive life altering news. In recent times I have learned so much from people who have received news like the death of a loved one, news about a life threatening disease, the loss of a job, the loss of a marriage, the closing down of a business or a catastrophic loss of property.

In your personal life and in your role as a leader you will receive bad news and how you receive it and handle it can make a significant difference to your life and to your organization. I recently spent some time with two leaders who talked about this topic. One was John Furlong CEO of the 2010 Winter Olympic and the other was General Rick Hillier (Retired Chief of Defense for the Canadian Forces).

Mr. Furlong talked about the day of the Opening Ceremonies for the Olympics. When he woke up he thought it might be the most extraordinary day of this life when years of planning would culminate in an amazing celebration. He had no idea that on that day he would be given the news that one of the athletes had been killed on a practice run. He said it was devastating. The pain was excruciating and many people who had no control over the situation felt responsible. In those moments it is hard to remember what the goal is. It is easy to lose sight of the vision, yet the leader has to help people call on any energy that is left and carry on.

General Hillier was a man that could expect this kind of bad news because in his line of work the death of one of his people was something he was trained to prepare for. Regardless of this preparation he was a human being who cared deeply about his people. He was also a leader of character that knew that once the soldier and his family had been

honored and taken care of, a lack of energy or lack of focus and resolve could cost other lives.

Here are some lessons that I have learned from amazing people I know who have recently received bad news.

Grieve!

Not only is this ok but it is necessary. When we lose a significant person or thing there is a lot of pain associated with it. When we try to avoid it or pretend that it is not there we will pay a price later. Feel it! Experience it! Work through it! The time it takes to work through it will vary with the person and the severity of the news, but be patient and work through it.

Re-frame!

There comes a point when we can begin to see what has happened in a different way. We can give it new meaning. We can learn from it for the future and appreciate it for the lesson it has given us. When the pain of losing a job has diminished we can appreciate the time it gives us and the new opportunities in front of us. A significant loss gives us a great appreciation for what we have. Perhaps over time we can shift the focus of our loss to gratitude for both, what we had and what we have.

Re-Assess!

I was recently talking to someone who suffered a devastating loss. He told me that it was like he had been asleep and had woken up. He saw everything differently and it felt like he was seeing with new eyes. Some people that I have worked with on bad news situations seem to find strength, a sense of accountability, and a new level of creativity and optimism. They begin to see themselves as new people that are capable of new things and new thinking!

Rely!

They have taught me that it is critical to have great support. They have learned the power of the support systems they have developed over the years. Whether the support comes from families, communities, co-workers, professionals or books, they are open to all the support they can get. They have learned that it is ok to ask for support and they appreciate all they get.

Resolve!

They decide on where they are going to go and how their new reality is going to look. They decide to live and be an example to others. They decide how they will be.