



How to have empathetic discussions, even when sharing bad news.

PERSONALITY AI FOR DELIVERING BAD NEWS

By Greg Skloot, President of **Crystal** 

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THE EMPATHY EQUATION



Regardless of how well work or our lives are going, we all have to deliver bad news at some point. Whether needing to let someone go, leave a company, acknowledge a project's failure, or countless other possibilities, bad news can be just as difficult to share as it is to hear.

We don't always have control over the problems that occur or the things that happen, but we can control how we communicate them to others. Sensitive issues should be handled carefully and communicated in an empathetic way.

Empathetic communication is one that considers how the other person would like to communicate. It involves adapting your natural communication style to fit someone else's, in order to prevent stress and miscommunication.

At Crystal, we have an approach to empathetic communication that we call the "Empathy Equation". Generally speaking, it looks like this:

WHAT + WHY + HOW

This "equation" is a simple way to set yourself up for success when talking to anyone. To utilize the Empathy Equation, you first need to identify three key things before you talk with people:

WHAT they want from the interaction. **WHY** they want it. **HOW** they want to interact.

For example, let's say I need to tell someone on my team that they weren't selected for a promotion. Because they likely put a lot of emotional stake in the potential of being promoted, it's important that I minimize frustration and stress by sharing the news with sensitivity. It may not be the most comfortable discussion, but if I consider the Empathy Equation beforehand, I can go into the meeting feeling confident that we'll be able to work through any issues.



Because I know this person has a direct and formal personality, I can answer the Empathy Equation like this:

WHAT They want to hear the clear, honest truth. They want to know specifically why they weren't selected and what they can do to improve their performance.

WHY They place a lot of value in clear, direct communication since they put a lot of work toward achieving their professional goals.

HOW They are most comfortable in straightforward, face-to-face conversations, so I should set up a meeting with them to talk it over.

Now that I have this information I know I need to schedule a meeting with them and directly and clearly explain why they weren't selected and what they can do to improve their chances for a promotion next time.

To better understand how the Empathy Equation works, we should talk more about personality.



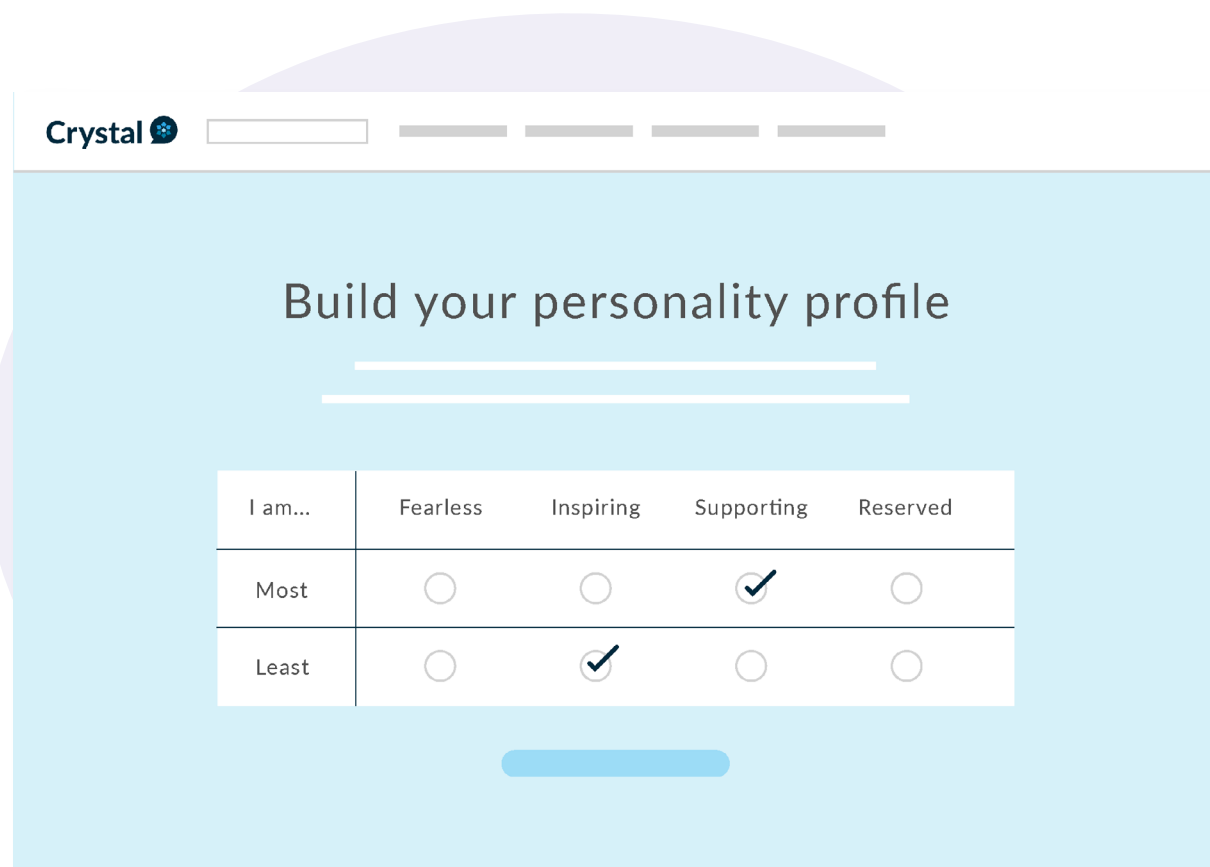
Section 1

Understanding Personality

UNDERSTANDING PERSONALITY

We built Crystal, to help people improve their communication and build stronger relationships with others. We do this by inviting anyone to take a free personality test and view the results for themselves and any friends or co-workers they choose to share it with. By learning to understand people better, you can communicate with them in an empathetic way that accounts for the uniqueness of their personality.

When you can see personality insights, provided by tools like Crystal, you'll better understand how someone else thinks, acts, and prefers to communicate.

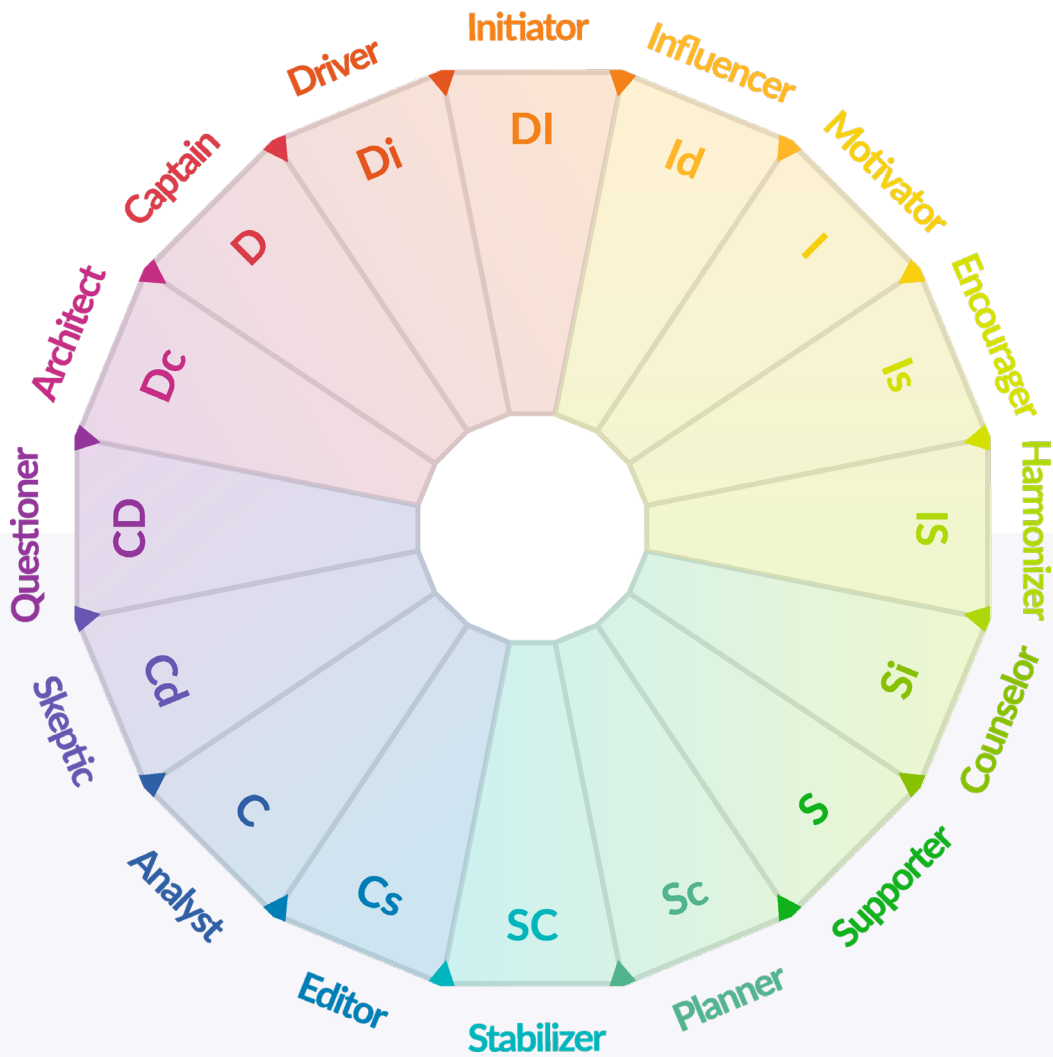


The screenshot shows the Crystal personality test interface. At the top, the Crystal logo is visible next to a search bar. Below the logo, the main heading reads "Build your personality profile". Underneath this heading is a table with four columns representing personality traits: Fearless, Inspiring, Supporting, and Reserved. The rows represent the frequency of each trait, categorized as "Most" and "Least". Radio buttons are used for selection, with checkmarks indicating the chosen options.

| I am... | Fearless | Inspiring | Supporting | Reserved |
|---------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Most | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Least | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Without getting too technical, when Crystal determines someone's personality, it uses a framework called DISC to classify their personality into a few categories which we refer to as D (dominance), I (influence), S (steadiness), and C (conscientiousness). Each of us has a primary DISC type in one of these categories and sometimes a secondary DISC type in another. To keep things simple, we separate these into easy-to-remember labels called Archetypes.

You can see them all on this graphic called the Personality Map:



Below is a breakdown of common personality traits within each of the categories in DISC.

D Personality Types: *Captains, Drivers, Initiators, Architects*



- Motivated by control over the future and personal authority
- Tend to prefer instant, concrete results and having an advantage over competition
- Communicate clearly and succinctly

I Personality Types: *Influencer, Motivator, Encourager, Harmonizer*



- Motivated by innovative, unique, creative ideas and excited by the future
- Tend to prefer building new relationships and experiences
- Communicate in a casual, expressive way

S Personality Types: *Counselor, Supporter, Planner, Stabilizer*



- Motivated by peace, safety, and others' wellbeing
- Tend to prefer security, reliability and trust
- Communicate in a friendly and genuine way

C Personality Types: *Editor, Analyst, Skeptic, Questioner*



- Motivated by logic, information, and problem solving
- Tend to prefer accurate information and quality solutions (quality over quantity)
- Communicate in a business-like, fact-based way

These differences are extremely important for your approach in every conversation. For example, someone who is an idealistic, energetic Motivator (I) is less likely to want you to get right to the point. They'd usually prefer to chat for a few minutes before discussing something deep or heavy. A Captain (D), on the other hand, is naturally direct and would often prefer if the point of the conversation is directly and clearly addressed right away.

By understanding someone's personality type, you can learn how to best communicate with them, even when delivering bad news.



Section 2

Delivering Bad News

DELIVERING BAD NEWS TO A D-TYPE

Determined, direct D-types are likely to handle bad news fairly well, as long as they can find a solution to overcome the problem and continue pursuing their goals. When sharing something negative with a D-type, ***it's important to be clear and honest;*** don't tiptoe around it. Offer ways the problem can be resolved and decide on some next steps.



When delivering bad news to D-types, try using phrases like:

“We can resolve this by...”

“We need to be honest with ourselves..”.

“How does this affect our progress?”

“That’s all the info I have...”

Do

- Provide specific ways to resolve the situation
- Be as direct and clear as possible
- Discuss how it affects their overall goals
- Allow them to guide the conversation

Don't

- End the conversation without settling on some next steps
- Draw the discussion out longer than necessary
- Be offended if they have an aggressive knee-jerk response
- Be indirect or vague about the situation



DELIVERING BAD NEWS TO AN I-TYPE



Optimistic, excitable I-types are more likely to be emotionally affected by bad news. Their tendency to focus on the upside and overlook the negative may lead problems to come as a bigger shock to them. ***It's important to communicate bad news to I-types with patience and compassion.*** Don't be emotionally disconnected or harsh; instead, share your perspective and allow them to express themselves.

When delivering bad news to I-types, try using phrases like:

“The other people who know about it are...”

“Do you want to talk through anything?”

“Here's what I think about it...”

“I know this cannot be easy for you...”

Do

- Allow them to discuss the news with others
- Expect some kind of emotional response
- Share your personal view on the situation
- Show understanding and empathy

Don't

- Meet in an uncomfortable environment
- Allow them to avoid the uncomfortable parts of the discussion
- Use an overly serious or businesslike demeanor
- End the discussion before they are ready



DELIVERING BAD NEWS TO AN S-TYPE

Calm, patient S-types may need some time to think about and process bad news. ***Be gentle, but clear about how this problem may impact others.*** Offer reassurance and give them space to consider next steps, rather than rushing a decision or action.



When delivering bad news to S-types, try using phrases like:

“You can tell me anything in confidence...”

“Do you think this impacts anyone else?”

“Do you feel prepared to talk about this?”

“We’re together in this...”

Do

- Have the discussion in private
- Discuss how it impacts the other people involved
- Give them time to process the news
- Provide steady verbal and non-verbal reassurance

Don't

- Rush into solutions and next steps
- Expect them to ask tough questions
- Ask them for an immediate reaction
- Prevent them from discussing it with others



DELIVERING BAD NEWS TO A C-TYPE



Serious, rational C-types likely need a lot of detail when processing bad news. They often want answers to why something happened and may need plenty of personal space to think through the situation. Avoid being emotional or overly expressive; instead, **remain calm, clear, and reasonable**. Be prepared to answer any questions they may have.

When delivering bad news to C-types, try using phrases like:

“These are the main reasons it happened...”

“Do you have any questions?”

“Here are the details...”

“You can take a minute to process this...”

Do

- Explain what went wrong
- Stay grounded, calm, and pragmatic
- Provide all of the details about who and what is involved
- Give them time to process and meet again later

Don't

- Hesitate to talk about practical challenges and implications
- Expect them to share their thoughts in a group
- Overshare your feelings
- Provide an overly optimistic expectation of the future



COMMUNICATE MEANINGFULLY

Delivering bad news can be tricky, especially when the impact is significant. But it doesn't have to be a miserable process. While you can't completely prevent stress or frustration, by communicating in an empathetic way that best suits the other person, *you can have a genuine, meaningful discussion that leaves them feeling understood, respected, and heard.*



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