Case #2—Bad News Letter

# Case Abstract

Truss Right is a fictional company that has recently hired a new employee (the student) as Plant Coordinator. The seasonal nature of construction trades means Truss Right lays off employees annually. Students working through this case are asked to write a bad news letter to an employee informing him that his overtime hours are going to be cut back.

**Keywords:** Bad News, Letter, Empathy, Ethics, and Professionalism.

# Teaching Goals

The goal of this case is to teach students how to write a bad news letter for a specific audience within a specific context that will show students how to maintain professionalism while showing empathy.

# Learning Objective

Students will learn to:

* Write a bad news letter
* Make ethical writing decisions
* Show empathy to audience
* Maintain professionalism

# Possible Deliverables

* Bad news letter
* Bad news email
* Audio recording
* Video recording

# Outcomes

This case places students in a situation that will help them understand how ethics and empathy can play an important role in professional communication. They should be able to write an effective letter to a specific individual in a specific context that maintains a professional tone while considering the impact the bad news letter will have on the reader.

# Case Overview

Truss Right is a roof truss manufacturer in the Midwest that has been leading the industry since 1999. A small operation in Middletown, Iowa, this company has seen significant changes since the economic downturn in 2008 but has rebounded in recent years. You’ve been hired recently as the Plant Coordinator, a position that puts you as the mediator between employees and management. When winter nears, Truss Right’s business slows down and overtime hours need to be limited.

The Plant Manager, John Harding, wants you to begin the process of limiting employees’ overtime. In particular, Mr. Harding wants to limit the overtime of one employee, David, earlier than is expected by David because seasonal workers are low priority for hours. Mr. Harding has also been suspicious of David’s work conduct based on some rumors. David’s salary is also one of the highest in the plant, even among full-time workers.

David’s employee profile is given below for you to evaluate the type of work he’s done with Truss Right. Jason Roberts, the Plant Supervisor, has given you some notes on David’s work habits and personal life. You also do a little investigating into David’s supposed conduct mentioned by Mr. Harding. Some videos have surfaced that capture David committing certain acts, and you are able to get your hands on them. Evaluate all of the information you have for David before informing him of Mr. Harding’s decision to limit his hours.

# Employee Profile

## David

**Job Title: Salary : Age: Experience:**

Yard Forklift Driver $15/hr 32 10 years

**Work Profile:**

David has been with the company working off and on between full and part-time. Mr. Harding understands that he is not a long term, permanent employee, but his experience, knowledge, and work ethic are unmatched.

David has previously been the Plant Supervisor, has worked in every production position, and knows all of the ins and outs of the job. His work ethic is also one of the best in the company because he is dependable, works 70+ hours per week, stays late every night and works every weekend.

David is extremely smart and adept at solving problems. His attention to details saves the company on several occasions, especially in the shipping yard where forklift drivers are the last line of quality. David has proven to be the best forklift driver Truss Right has ever had, and Mr. Harding trusts his abilities and judgment. David is well respected and liked by every employee in the plant, and his rare absence is often noticeable.

**Personal Biography:**

David is married with four kids, ages seven, four, two, and three months. Because David’s wife stays at home, his job is the only means of income for his family; and David’s salary in the summer carries his family through the months he is in graduate school, so every hour he works is crucial. David’s family has a mortgage and tuition fees that exhaust all of their income during the school year, so this job helps support them in the cold winter months.

## Your task

Mr. Harding has asked you to write a bad news letter to David informing him of his termination of employment. Take careful consideration of what you have found in David’s profile and your investigation into his conduct. Your letter should be empathetic, ethical, and professional.