

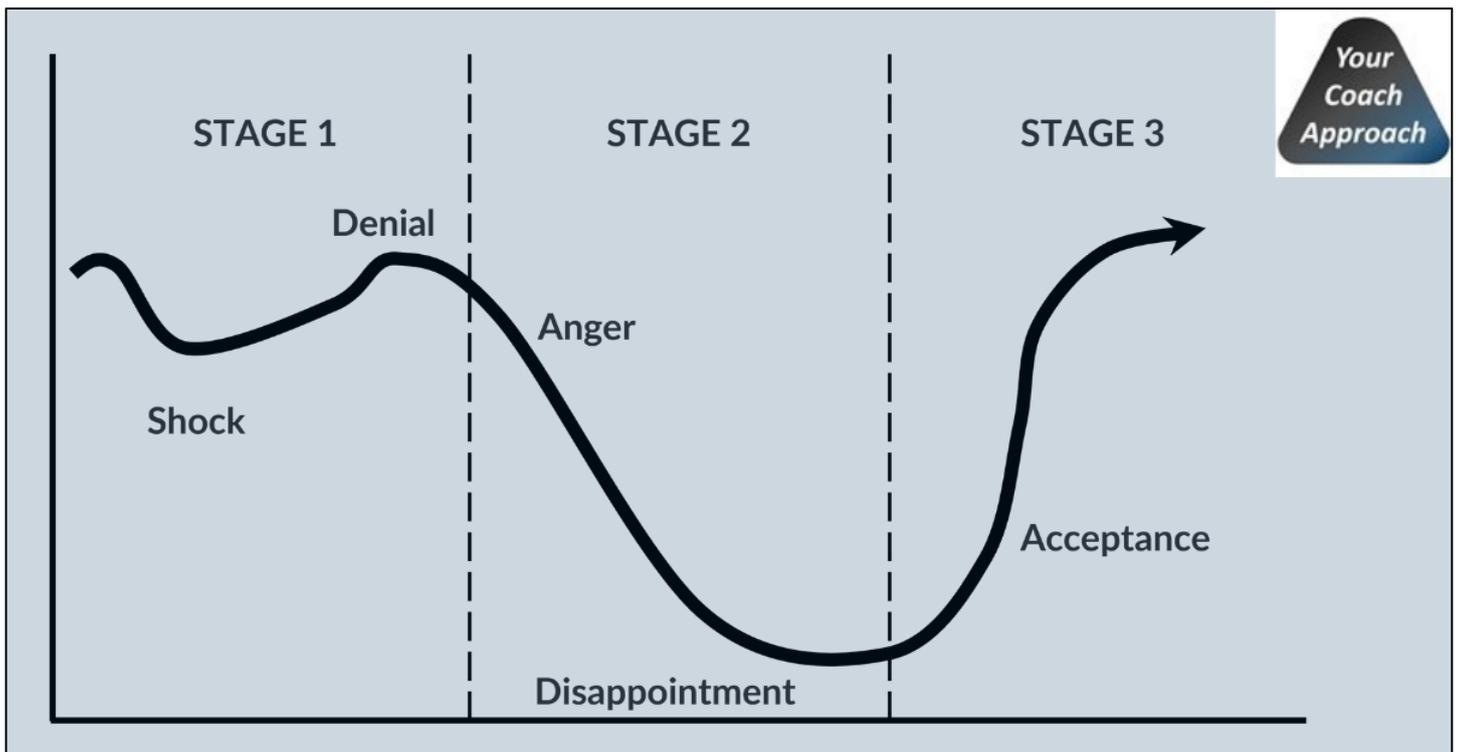
INTRODUCTION

The Acceptance Curve, or Change Curve, is based on a model developed in the 1960s by Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross. She originally used it to explain the grieving process. Its use quickly expanded to help people understand their reaction to significant change or unwelcome news. In the 1980s management consultants started using the Acceptance curve to help organisations head in new directions. Or adapt their organisational culture. These days many industries use the Acceptance Curve world-wide as a change management tool.

Because the Acceptance Curve sets out how an individual is likely to react to unwanted news or change, it's a useful tool to turn to when we need to deliver bad news to clients. Or for that matter, suppliers, business partners, employees. Or any other human being.

The original Acceptance Curve was divided into 5 stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, this can be condensed into 3 stages for the purposes of managing difficult situations with those we need to interact with as an interior designer, as shown below.

Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross Acceptance Curve Adapted for the Interior Design Industry



As we're all individuals, we all progress through the various stages of acceptance at different rates. Even as individuals, the time we take to accept unwelcome news can vary depending on what else is going on in our world.

Stage 1 – Shock and Denial

This stage usually starts with shock. As a result, during this time the client might not be very responsive or decisive. And if you need input from the client, your project may experience delays.

Once the first shock has passed, your client may then experience denial. Although this is more common if the unwelcome news you need to deliver is catastrophic for the project. Rather than resulting in a minor delay or increase in cost. Although the unwelcome news itself may be undeniable, your client may deny the effects of the unwelcome news. That's to say, the client may feel that everything's going to be OK regardless.

In many instances, when delivering unwelcome news to clients this stage can be very short-lived. In fact, your client might not experience this stage at all.

Stage 2 – Anger and Disappointment

Anger is the next stage. And unlike the earlier response, your client is unlikely to skip this stage. Something has gone wrong, and the client is angry. More than that, your client may be looking for a scapegoat. And such is the life of an interior designer, you could well be that scapegoat. Not least, because it was you that had to deliver the unwelcome news in the first place. Getting sensible responses from your client in this period might be too much to hope for.

The next emotion is the low point in the curve. In the original model Kuebler-Ross' labelled this point depression. Which is reasonable for an emotion associated with the grievance process. However, for interior design projects the client's emotion is more likely to be sadness or disappointment. Again, you might not get sensible responses from your client as they're experiencing a 'what's the point' feeling. However, the good news about low points? After this, the only way is up.

Stage 3 – Acceptance

The final stage. And the client's mood is improving. They've now absorbed the unwelcome news and accepted the effect it's had on the project. What the project looks like is now the new reality for them. They've regained their original enthusiasm for the project. As a consequence, it'll be easier for you to talk to your client. Get their input and have them make decisions. That's not say everything will be rosy just yet. The client may remain cautious given their recent experience. So, engage with them often to allow trust to rebuild.