

# Basic Message Primer

## Stream of Consciousness; Tell a Story

Build your messaging from well-worn talking points that embody the vision and themes that you want to convey. That content can be tailored to specific circumstances. Each messenger must feel comfortable “owning” the words and articulating themes in her/his voice. We begin with a stream of consciousness that incorporates the sense and meaning of what should be conveyed; let it flow and fully capture your passions and identity. Then refine the thoughts into three succinct points. Your messages will be most compelling if you also tell a story that connects to ideas your audience will see as tangible and relatable. Resonance is achieved when your voice and values make your audience care.

## Listen, Frame, Pivot, Bridge

Effective messaging requires study and practice. You should be comfortable with the messages and develop ease in delivering them. Try out messages on people you trust. Do practice runs in the mirror. Whenever time and opportunity allow, repeat your core message. Repetition wins acceptance: the more listeners hear a message, the greater the likelihood they will internalize it.

Engaging audiences through oral communications also entails *active listening*. Hearing your audience and understanding where they are is a vital step to taking them where you want to go through your messaging. Delivery of strong messages requires context, background, and perspective. Like the frame that surrounds a picture, a message framework gives meaning. *Framing your message* will also give consistency and increase the likelihood of audience acceptance. While the frame will provide the context, be sure to adapt messages to conform to the circumstances and particulars of your audience. Depending on the needs, you may choose to focus on one or several key messages. In all cases, however, as the lead advocate for your organization, you should frame your delivery so that your messages influence public policy and practices, shapes public opinion and puts in motion your desired course of action.

## Bridge Between

Your audience comes to the enterprise with their own predispositions, beliefs and attitudes that may often overlap with or complement the messages you convey.

Just as active listening will help you pivot to your point, you should also use this skill to discern connecting points between you and your audience. Bridging is a powerful technique that acknowledges and validates your audience’s view and connects it to your message.

To move from your listener's point back to your message, use connective bridge words: *Of equal importance; In addition to your example; In the same way, we also agree; Just as you pointed out...* When not engaged in confrontational debate, avoid the use of contrasting connectors that widen the divide between you and your audience, such as *but, however* and *on the other hand*, as they tend to negate the thoughts that preceded them.

## Crafting an Elevator Speech

An elevator speech is the formal message in your informal voice. Person-to-person contact, one of the most powerful communication forums, provides an opportunity to engage audiences and gain immediate feedback on whether your message resonated and you've won new support. Your elevator speech should be easy for anyone to understand, and potent enough to move people to care and then to action. This is when you take pen in hand to craft your elevator speech. The last page of this primer is blank. Use it for that purpose.

But first a few tips:

- Active listening is the first step so you are sure of your audience.
- KISS—Keep It Short and Simple.
- Frame your words around the core message.
- Use inclusive language that brings your audience onto your team.
- Use anecdotes, color and real stories.

Ask these important questions:

- What do you want people to know?
- What is your key takeaway?
- Why should anyone care?
- What are the values that drive your work?
- Which fact(s) bolster your case?
- Is there a call to action?

## Message Evaluation Checklist

The following checklist will help you apply your organization's message strategy to communicate the desired actions/behavior changes/outcomes effectively.

- Have you practiced, practiced, practiced delivery of your message?
- Do you have your own personalized elevator speech?
- Have you identified real stories and anecdotes to spice up your messages?
- Did you KISS your way through the message development?
- Are materials written in simple language, understandable to broad audiences?
  
- Can you eliminate any jargon or "inside baseball" language?
- Have you checked all facts and figures for accuracy?
- Is the message focused? Are the most important points covered?
- Are extraneous information, clauses, and caveats avoided?
- Is the message constructed with appropriate tone and appeal for specific audience engagement?
  
- Is the information relevant to the audience's concerns? Does it have a WIIFM (What's In It For Me)?
- If using graphics or imagery, do you reflect racial, ethnic, and generational diversity?
- Do the materials include websites and other contact for more information?
- For print, is the phone number, website URL, or email address prominently listed?
- Do you repeat your core message to win acceptance?
- Does your message convey urgency and a call to action?