

GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

A vital part of organizing is using media coverage to get your issue out to the public. And a key part of using the media effectively is communicating what your group is fighting for through messages which resonate with the public. Developing a message which really reaches your audience doesn't happen by accident. It takes work. And as CHEJ gets ready for the public release of the American People's Dioxin Report this fall, we have been devoting a lot of time to crafting our messages. We have gotten help from the Strategic Press Information Network, also known as the SPIN Project.

Below we have reprinted two pieces on creating powerful messages from their new guidebook, *SPIN Works! The Nuts & Bolts of Good PR, A Media Guidebook for Public Interest Organizations* by Robert Bray, published by the Independent Media Institute/SPIN Project.

A MODEL FOR YOUR MESSAGES: PROBLEM, SOLUTION AND ACTION

BY ROBERT BRAY

Your key messages should communicate in a succinct and pithy way the most critical components of your issue. Do not try to explain everything; instead, condense your issue down to two or three strategic messages.

Try this model for creating and sharpening your key messages. Condense your issue into three media messages: 1) The Problem; 2) The Solution; and 3) The Call to Action. Literally write out a couple of sentences per message onto a "message talking points" page.

MESSAGE 1. THE PROBLEM

What is the problem you are working to address? Forget the mountains of minutiae you have gathered on your issue. Step back and look at the big picture. Take a moment to create a message that *frames* the problem

clearly, broadly, and in as compelling a way as possible. Whoever frames the problem controls the terms of the debate. Message #1 is the framing message. It will communicate the scope of the issue or problem, and dramatize its impact.

MESSAGE 2. THE SOLUTION

While defining the problem is crucial, if you just stop there you will be in danger of sounding like a whiner. Be sure to move on to the next message: the solution. Message #2 is the "values" message. Use it to communicate a sense of your values: In what kind of society do you want to live? How do you want people to be treated? Make sure to provide hope in your solution message.

MESSAGE 3. A CALL TO ACTION

You have already defined the problem and offered a solution. Now, what do we need to do to get to the solution? That is the call to action. The action call may be different de-

pending on your targeted audience. What you ask the governor, state legislature and elected officials to do might be different from what you ask regular voters or community members to do.

Now that you have a model for preparing your key messages, practice delivering them—from Message #1 right through Message #3. The messages must move together: “The problem is X, but the solution is Y. That is why we are calling on the state legislature to pass Z.”

CHEJ’s DIOXIN MESSAGE

PROBLEM:

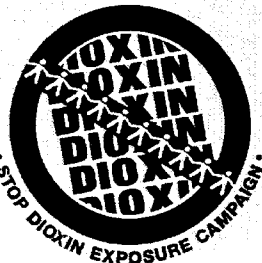
American families — our children — are being made sick by dioxin, a toxic industrial by-product. Dioxin in our food, air and water is linked to serious health problems like reduced IQs and hyperactive behavior in children, cancer, infertility, and birth defects. Every American man, woman and child’s body contains enough or almost enough dioxin to cause adverse health effects. No additional exposure is safe.

SOLUTION:

Eliminating harmful dioxin discharges and cleaning up dangerous dioxin-contaminated sites will protect our health, safeguard our environment and strengthen our economy.

ACTION:

It’s time that lawmakers get tough on industries and eliminate their dioxin-spewing practices that threaten our children’s health and that of every American. Elected officials need to enact — and enforce — health protections that will prevent this life-threatening chemical from harming our families.



ARE THE MESSAGES SOUNDBITES?

Yes and no. Consider using this three message model as an aid to help you cut through the complexities of your issue and focus on the key points. This will also help you frame the issue.

Sometimes, you will not have the time to communicate all three, but only enough time—say ten seconds—to make your case. Still, go through all your messages, and the chances of one “hitting” will be greater.

VISIONARY VOCABULARY: KEY WORDS TO CONVEY VALUES IN YOUR MESSAGES

BY HOLLY MINCHE

“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is a large matter—it’s the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”

— Mark Twain

The way you talk about your issues can make all the difference in the world. If you want your message to have the impact of a lightning strike—and not the brief flash of a lightning bug—then vision and values are a crucial part of what you have to say. To help people understand your issue, you must first broaden your message and use language that will connect with the largest number of people.

As you craft your message, it is important to use simple, specific, easy to understand language. No tech talk or insider jargon! Talk about your issues in a way that all people can personally relate to by linking your messages to the core values that we all care about—family, health, safety, security, respect, fairness. Help your audience understand what is at stake for them.

Use hard-hitting action words that will grip your audience by the heart or hit them right in the gut. These words are the antidote to stifling jargon and “bureaucrat-ese” that deadens much political discourse. For example, instead of saying “The factory runoff will negatively impact the surrounding residents, say “The toxic poison will imperil the lives of hard-working people and endanger their community.”

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Words such as compassion, fairness, heritage, justice, etc. all connect with people's core values. Use these and other hard-hitting action words to flesh out your messages. What words can you add to this list?

Activate	Engage		
Advocate	Equality		
Affirm	Fairness		
American	Faith		
Assist	Family		
Balance	Fighting		
Bedrock	Forward		
Benefit	Harm		
Bold	Health		
Champion	Help		
Change	Heritage		
Community	Honor		
Compassion	Hope		
Confirm	Hurt		
Damage	Imperil		
Defend	Injure		
Degrade	Integrity		
Democracy	Jeopardize		
Destroy	Justice		
Dignity	Legacy		
Diversity	Mobilize		
Endanger	Nation		
Energize	Neighborhood		
		Nourish	Responsible
		Nurture	Risk
		People	Safeguard
		Power	Strengthen
		Preserve	Support
		Pride	Sustain
		Principle	Threaten
		Progress	Tolerance
		Promote	Tradition
		Protect	Trust
		Public	Unity
		Relief	Value
		Respect	Working

The SPIN Project provides technical media assistance to nonprofit public-interest organizations across the nation that want to influence debate, shape public opinion and garner positive media attention. SPIN's public relations consulting includes comprehensive media training and intensive media strategizing and planning. For more information:

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BURNING ISSUES IN DETROIT

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Henry Ford is the only "giant" hospital in the state still committed to burning waste. Seventeen other Michigan hospitals, including the University Hospital, have also signed a pledge to reduce mercury emissions.

Recently, there have been a few hopeful signs from HFHS. In July, the Coalition met with representatives of HFHS's Committee on Public Responsibility and asked the Committee to recommend an end to incineration at the next Board of Trustees' meeting. Michael Whelan, Vice President of Facilities Support

Services, stated in an August interview that Henry Ford Hospital will sign a pledge to reduce mercury emissions "soon." Earlier Whelan agreed to explore methods of waste minimization and work toward "greener" purchasing practices on a long-term basis. Progress in all these areas will be welcome, but incineration is central to the burning issues of health and environmental justice in Detroit. The Coalition plans to keep fighting until the incinerator is finally shut down. ♦

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