



## **A Model for Your Messages: Problem, Solution and Action**

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*The Strategic Press Information Network, also known as the SPIN Project, has helped many groups craft effective messages. Below are two articles on creating powerful messages from their guidebook, [SPIN Works! The Nuts & Bolts of Good PR, A Media Guidebook for Public Interest Organizations](#).*

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. Here is a more detailed description of these three key components of your message.

### **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

depending 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."

### **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.

### **Sample: CHEJ's Dioxin Message**

**Problem:** American families are being made sick by dioxin, a toxic industrial by-product. Dioxin in our food, air and water is linked to serious health problems, such as reduced IQs and hyperactive behavior in children, cancer, infertility and birth defects. Every American man, woman and child's bodies contain 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.

