



Elements of Good Political Messaging

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TYPES OF POLITICAL MESSAGES:

Effective political messages can mean the difference between a chance for victory and almost certain defeat during election, lobbying, and other kinds of campaigns. At least four kinds of messages should be developed for any campaign:

1 CORE MESSAGE

This is the central message for your campaign. It is the reason for running your campaign and the reason for people to vote for your candidate or support your position. The message should be attractive and compelling, expressing a vision for the future. Abbreviated example: *"We can solve these problems, and I know how. Let's solve them together because our best days are ahead of us."*

2 POLICY-BASED MESSAGES

Here, in each message, ONE and ONLY ONE idea is conveyed. Each policy-based message should promote an idea by describing it and its importance. Every policy-based message should be consistent with the core message. Abbreviated Example: *"We need school choice to put our schools back into the hands of parents."*

3 CHARACTER-BASED MESSAGES

These messages focus on a person's character, past, qualifications, and skills showing that they are fit for the office they are running for. In the case of political action committee messaging, a "character-based" message could show why an organization, or its leaders are credible advocates for a campaign. Abbreviated example: *"John Doe has the courage, experience, and character to put us back on track."*

4 VALUE-BASED MESSAGES

These messages relate to social values being advanced by the campaign. These messages should be consistent with the core message. Sometimes, value-based messages can be more politically compelling than any other kind of message. Abbreviated example: *"Vote John Doe because government should serve the people, not the other way around."*

COMPONENTS OF GOOD MESSAGING:

Nothing guarantees that political messaging will work in the ways candidates and issue advocates want it to. But if your messaging includes all the components shown below, it will be much more effective than if it does not.

1 YOUR MESSAGES SHOULD BE CLEAR AND CONCISE

Attention spans are short, and there are a lot of candidates and issues for voters and lawmakers to consider. Your messages should be very short, very clear so they cannot be misunderstood by people not informed in an issue as much as you are and, in the interest of brevity, your messages should be very concise.

2 YOU NEED AN EFFECTIVE MESSENGER

Sometimes, the person delivering a message can be more important than the message itself. For example, if a candidate is accused of doing something shady during a campaign, another public official supporting the candidate may be more effective in quashing the accusation than the candidate himself/herself. In the case of education legislation, an endorsement from a professional educator may be more compelling than that of a political committee's Executive Director.

3 INCLUDE A CALL TO ACTION

Your message needs to make clear that your audience has a role to play in the future you are trying to build with your candidacy or your issue advocacy. Something as simple as, *“...be a part of a better future...” can work for a candidate or ballot measure campaign. “With your help, we can [pass/defeat] this proposal which promises to [help/hurt] our state so much.”*

4 MAKE YOUR GOALS CLEAR, SHORT, AND SIMPLE

When it comes to political messaging, the attention span of most voters and officials tends to be short. You must therefore put all of the elements in your message at the front with a simple statement. If you do, and your audience is interested, you may get the chance to elaborate. If you don't, your message will be lost. Something like, *“...my ideas will improve academic achievement and economic opportunity.”*

OTHER TIPS:

You may not be able to incorporate all of these into all your messages but, when you can, the impact of your messaging will be improved.

1 USE EMOTION

Often an emotionally compelling story will prove more compelling than a filing cabinet worth of statistics. Logic is important, but most people are ultimately driven by emotions, not cold logic. Appeal to the feelings of your audience whenever you can. Make your statements personal whenever you can.

2 INCLUDE YOUR AUDIENCE

Wherever possible, use words like “we,” “together,” and “us” instead of too many “I’s.” You do not want to appear arrogant. More importantly, using such words can draw people in, show your audience that they have a role to play in building a better future, and demonstrate that they will share the benefits of your candidacy or the legislation you are fighting for.

3 RELATE TO YOUR AUDIENCE

Make sure you convey your message in such a way as your audience believes that you are “one of them” or that you are on “their side.” Use words that your audience uses – stay away from jargon. Convey ideas in ways that relate to the experience of your audience.

4 BE AUTHENTIC

Most candidates and issue advocates who try to be something they are not or who otherwise come off as insincere are quickly sniffed out and rejected. People are hungry for authenticity. Be sincere and be real.