

## **MESSAGING TIPS: WHAT IS A MESSAGE?**

The messages you develop must answer the questions: Why? Why care? Why act? A message must explain what's valued, what's at risk and it must align you with others who share your values and concerns. A message must be short, simple and repeated to be heard. To be effective, a message must be included in every communication - written and oral - and used in all your free and paid media. A message must clearly state the issue/organization/campaign's values and align itself with the concerns of the majority of citizens.

### **Effective Messages**

- Messages come from campaign strategies and goals. Clearly define your goals and the audiences you want to engage.
- Messages have a firm foundation in the issues.
- Your messages are a road map, but you must know where you want to go. Begin messages where people are and then take them where you want them to go.
- Use your messages as the foundation of all campaigns or projects. They may have their own sub-messages, but they should support the main message.
- Your messages should not always be delivered by you. Different spokespeople may have more credibility and be more persuasive, depending on the audience.

### **Developing Your Message: 8 Rules for Success**

Rule 1	Have one main message with a maximum of three underlying themes to support it.
Rule 2	All messages should support the campaign's main goals.
Rule 3	Messages are the ideas you are trying to communicate to the public. Messages are reinforced by sound bites, phrases, statistics and anecdotes.
Rule 4	Messages don't change frequently. For messages to have impact they have to be repeated over and over and over again.
Rule 5	Messages should be tailored for specific audiences, while still remaining constant.
Rule 6	Consistent messages should permeate all of your communications efforts, not just contact with the media.
Rule 7	Messages must be simple. They are ideas that can be explained in a sentence or two – if it requires a paragraph or two, keep working to refine and simplify it.
Rule 8	Remember: messages take time to create. Don't rush the process.

**MESSAGING EXERCISE:**  
**MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT FOR CANDIDATES**

There are certain basic assumptions that should be explored as you begin making public statements and growing into the role of candidate. Your beliefs are by far the most important guiding factor in message development, but how you present these beliefs is crucial to using your beliefs to develop a consistent message and image that voters will respond to. Following are some questions to guide early message development. While you probably will not have precise answers to many of these questions, you can probably make some general assumptions to begin building a picture of yourself as a candidate.

- Why are you running?
- What do you want to accomplish in elected office? What issues do you feel are the most important?
- Do you think voters also care about these issues? Are there some that you think they care about more than others? Which do you think they are?
- Are there specific plans you want to champion?
- What are your strengths? In what arena do you feel most comfortable—talking to large groups, visiting child care centers, spending time at picnics, etc.?
- Which interest groups are important to you? Are there issues that they believe are important?
- What about your opponents? What issues have they articulated? Is there overlap between their issues and your issues? Are there issues where there is a stark contrast, giving voters a clear choice?
- Who are the voters that you expect will support you? What do they care about? What issues can move them?
- Who will you have to persuade? What issues will move these voters?
- Beyond issues, who are you as a candidate? What image do you want to project? How can you project that image in the campaign?

- What will your opponents say about you? How can you proactively build your message to protect yourself against attacks?
- What will you say about your opponents? Does your message give you credibility so that you can criticize your opponents' positions?
- What issues are you already known for? Are there issues that you want to build upon, or will you need to downplay these issues in the campaign?
- What messages have worked in past elections in the area? Why have they been effective?

### **MESSAGING TIPS: STAYING "ON MESSAGE"**

When questions are asked -- no matter how off topic they are – use transitional phrases to revert back to your key messages.

Some of those transitional phrases are:

- The fact of the matter is...
- The bottom line is...
- The real question is...
- That's not the issue. The issue is...
- I can't tell you that. But I CAN tell you...
- The reality is...

### ***Handling/Fielding Tough Questions***

What to avoid:

- Avoid "no comment" statements. It implies you have something to hide.
- If you don't know the answer, say so and promise to find out.
- Don't lie. It will come back to haunt the campaign at a later time.
- Don't ramble. Keep comments short, sweet and on message.
- Don't be combative or pick a fight. Be cool under pressure and be considerate. This best represents the campaign.