Becoming Better Messengers:
Public Health Messaging in a Polarized Pandemic
12 – 1:00 pm
September 17, 2020
Presenters

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PHRASES Toolkit

Evidence-based tools and strategies to help public health professionals communicate more effectively. Get framing recommendations, sample emails, answers to tough questions, tested messaging, and more.

Get Started

Strategic Messaging

Sample Documents

Stories from the Field

Resource Library

https://www.phrases.org/
Becoming Better Messengers

Effective messaging of public health challenges and interventions is essential to public health practice and especially to implementing public health laws and policies in a polarized political environment. It is easy for public health leaders to become consumed with the ongoing political and resource shifts taking place in public health and health care. However, it is also clear that those in public health, at all levels, want to engage more deeply and meaningfully with communities of all backgrounds who are burdened by poor health.

https://www.networkforphl.org/resources/topics/trainings/becoming-better-messengers/
Moral Foundations Profile: Network PH Law Summit (n=69)
Responses submitted: September 15, 2020

Respondents’ Average Score, by Moral Foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Foundation</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctity</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14% of America, roughly ½ left and ½ right, consistently shouts, posts and votes while 67% of us are exhausted.

The Hidden Tribes of America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIBERAL WING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Activists</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXHAUSTED MAJORITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Liberals</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Liberals</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politically Disengaged</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderates</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONSERVATIVE WING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Conservatives</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devoted Conservatives</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: October 2018 by More In Common. Chart: Adapted from Axios Visuals 10/17/2018*
Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second

Moral Foundations Theory
Understanding evolutionary moral psychology

Social and political judgments are particularly intuitive

90% = Intuitive Elephant
10% = Rational Brain
We resonate differently to six foundational moral values:

1. Care / Harm
   - Compassion for the vulnerable;
   - Intolerance of suffering

2. Liberty / Oppression
   - Free choices & actions;
   - Social intolerance of bullies

3. Fairness / Cheating
   - People treated fairly, get what they deserve;
   - Social intolerance of “free-riders”

4. Loyalty / Betrayal
   - Personal trust, group identity
   - Social isolation for those who betray

5. Authority / Subversion
   - Competitive advantage of organized groups;
   - Intolerance of those who subvert system

6. Sanctity / Degradation
   - Part of human spirit is elevated & pure;
   - Aversion to personal degradation

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North Carolina Institute for Public Health
Moral Foundations Theory (MFT)

- **Care**
  - Harm

- **Liberty**
  - Oppression

- **Fairness**
  - Cheating

- **Loyalty**
  - Betrayal

- **Authority**
  - Subversion

- **Sanctity**
  - Degradation
The Liberal Moral Matrix

Help those in need!

Heavy on caring for the weak, preventing harm; focused on rights & fairness as equality of outcome
The Conservative Moral Matrix

Preserve norms and treasured institutions!

Help those in need!

Includes first three (as equality of opportunity), but even more on the three “institutional” values.

Care --- Harm
Liberty --- Oppression
Fairness --- Cheating
Loyalty --- Betrayal
Authority --- Subversion
Sanctity --- Degradation
Haidt calls this the “Conservative Advantage”

This framework gives us insight into a significant “Public Health Advantage” at this moment

- Care: Harm
- Liberty: Oppression
- Fairness: Cheating
- Loyalty: Betrayal
- Authority: Subversion
- Sanctity: Degradation
NC Public Health Leadership Conference (n=116)
Responses submitted: January 23 – February 14, 2020

Respondents’ Average Score, by Moral Foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Foundation</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctity</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Consider Knowledge vs. Self-Awareness

Self Aware or Not Aware

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I Don’t Know</th>
<th>Self Aware</th>
<th>Not Aware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m aware I do NOT know this”</td>
<td>“I’m not aware what I don’t know”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>“I know this”</td>
<td>“I was NOT aware I KNEW this!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I Do Know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes you can surprise yourself!
Public Health resonates with all six MFT values

1. Care

2. Liberty

3. Fairness

4. Loyalty

5. Authority

6. Sanctity

“The Public Health Advantage”

“Care”

Social justice

Equity

The heart of Public Health: Community coalitions

Public Health is a police power: Quarantine, food inspection, etc.

The nobility of Public Health: When others are running away from the fire, we run towards Ebola
Public health has the breadth of moral values and can use them in a way:

- People across the political spectrum can feel safe engaging in relationships with us to improve their communities

...AND...

- Civil discourse is vital to the heart of public health

Public Health & Civil Discourse

PH needs civil community discourse to occur

Community Coalition Building

PH can add value to community dialogue

Civil Conversations

Public Health

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North Carolina Institute for Public Health

The Network for Public Health Law
But What if the Discourse…
Looks Like This?

COVID-19 is also a public health communications crisis.

How can public health leaders gain trust and meet people where they are?
Empathy is Key

Empathy helps us:

• Build relationships
• Relate to and learn from others
• Become trusted messengers

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

— Maya Angelou
What Else Can We Do?

Be Candid
• State my position clearly
• Explain/advocate my position
• What data and interpretations informed it?
• ___ data leads me to believe that ___ is the best option.

Be Curious
• What’s your perspective?
• Test my position – what am I missing?
• Tell me more about that.
• Can you give me an example?
Empathetic Messages Bridge Divides

• Learn from the past
• Be humble
• Look for the human connection

NCDHHS’ COVID-19 Response website:
DEEPER TRAINING

New opportunities for skill-building training for our workforce on these deeper values

Ability to frame individual issues to resonate with each of the 6 foundational values

Useful both to frontline PH workers in the community AND to leadership officials advocating to decision-makers for law & policy change
## Six Intuitive Foundational Moral Values

### CORONAVIRUS WORKSHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Foundation</th>
<th>Your Public Health Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Care** (pairs with Harm) | - Protect yourself and others  
- Help those most vulnerable  
- Public health can assist you  
- Stay healthy and safe |
| Reflects the base of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Security, Shelter, Food, Water, Warmth) |
| **2. Liberty** (pairs with Oppression) | - Coronavirus can threaten our safety and freedom  
- We want our community to be free from fear of contagion  
- The quicker we beat this, the quicker we recover and return to normal |
| Physical and Mental Freedom  
Social Intolerance of Bullies |
| **3. Fairness** (pairs with Cheating) | - Everyone has an interest in beating his outbreak  
- Those at home all need to have resources to stay there  
- Infection does not discriminate  
- We have an interest in everyone getting appropriate care |
| Equality of Opportunities  
Social Intolerance of “Free-Riders” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Foundations</th>
<th>Your Public Health Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **4. Loyalty** (pairs with Betrayal) | - Do your part, wash your hands and don’t be a risk to others  
- We need to protect our community  
- Limited resources should go first to responders, HCW’s and those caring for us.  
- I’m loyal to you and want to keep you safe |
| • Personal Trust, Group Identity, Patriotism  
• Social isolation of those who betray |
| **5. Authority** (pairs with Subversion) | - Scientific evidence and common sense: protective measures work  
- Listen to your local public health official  
- Respect HCW’s and the risks they are taking  
- Quarantine and social distancing may be necessary  
- Be a good role model for others |
| • Competitive advantage of organized groups  
• Deference to “good” leaders  
• Social intolerance of those who subvert the system |
| **6. Sanctity** (pairs with Degradation) | - Public health does not run, it stands by your community  
- Support those taking risks to care for your loved ones  
- Look for ways to serve others  
- Help nurture the spirits of those needing comfort  
- Be willing to sacrifice your wants for community needs |
| • Not simply a religious value  
• Respect for the human spirit  
• Social aversion of personal degradation |
Centering Equity in Public Health Messaging

• The WHAT and the WHY
• Audience considerations
• Creating a narrative
• Other language considerations
• Engaging the Community
The WHAT and the WHY

• What does it mean to center equity?
  • Focusing on equity in the CONTENT of the message
  • Focusing on equity as an OUTCOME of the message

• Why should we center equity?
  • Share solutions that ensure that everyone has what they need in the way they need to have the best health possible
  • Normalize conversations about what leads to differences in health outcomes
  • Reach people where they are

Naming and Framing...

We can’t get to the America we want without talking about racial equity, structural racism, and racial and ethnic discrimination. But if communications aren’t framed carefully they can reinforce misconceptions about people of color and set back change.
Audience Considerations

Resistant  Curious  Aware  Advocate  Champion

OR

Unaware  Resistant  Neutral  Supportive  Leading
Creating a Narrative

• Lead with Values
• Connect to history when possible
• Draw a through-line to the issue today
• Focus on solutions

1. Care
2. Liberty
3. Fairness
4. Loyalty
5. Authority
6. Sanctity
Other Language Considerations

• Use language that is meaningful to your audience…and meaningful to you
• Take an asset-based perspective
• Focus on places or conditions rather than people (or systems over individuals)
  • Instead of...African Americans in this community have higher rates of diabetes.
  • Consider...Diabetes is more common in neighborhoods that don’t have access to healthy foods
• Be aware of cognitive biases: the Framing Effect and Authority Bias

Engaging the Community

...to develop messaging
...to lead with the message
...to create opportunities for community storytelling
...to recognize and appreciate the differences in communities
...to build community trust

https://www.mobilecause.com/storytelling-for-your-organization/
Communication as an Essential Public Health Service: Tying it all together

- Developing and disseminating accessible health information
- Communicating with accuracy and necessary speed
- Using appropriate communications channels
- Developing culturally and linguistically appropriate and relevant communications
- Employ the principles of risk communication, health literacy, and health education
- Actively engage in two-way communication
- Ensure communications are asset-based
3 Take-Aways

1. Community health has a *vital role* to play amid this polarization.

2. Community health cannot afford the luxury of *contempt or condescension* towards those in our communities who do not happen to share our viewpoints.

3. We must build the skill-sets of our entire workforce in order to change law & policy to meet many new challenges.

*Try to find the goodness in every human being.*

*Don’t ever give up on that other person.*

*John Lewis*
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