



CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



Whether you have a soundbite or a keynote address, persuading audiences that don't already agree has the same basic structure: you must get your audience to believe in you before they will believe in your message. Feelings come first; logic comes later.

Step 1—CONNECT: Open strongly by establishing that you understand and (to whatever degree you can) share your audiences' feelings on the issue at hand. Use this first statement and body language to present yourself as someone your audience will be willing to listen to, and disarm people ready to write you off.

Step 2—LEAD: After you have connected with your audience's feelings, use stories, facts or logic to lead them one step at a time to your point of view, always remaining respectful of the feelings and opinions they started with.

Step 3—TAKEAWAY: Identify and highlight (or even repeat) the main point you want your audience to remember a month later. Is there a metaphor, image, or phrase that might make your case in a more memorable way than bare facts?

To craft a strong message, you need to understand your audience, how they perceive you and the issue, and the point you want to make. *The basic approach here is "Connect, then Lead": first establish yourself as someone worth listening to by validating the way the audience currently feels about the issue, then introduce ideas that lead in the direction of the position you want them to walk away agreeing with.*

I. UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

Before you can connect with your audience, you need to clearly understand what they are feeling, and how they perceive you.

1) Is your audience a political audience or a strictly policy audience? Is your whole audience made up of politically supportive colleagues? Is there anyone whose support you do not have but hope to win? Any time your audience is wider than just colleagues, these guidelines apply.

2) How does your audience feel about this issue? Think about the issue from their point of view: understanding their emotions is key to connecting with them.

- **Why does this issue matter to them?** How does it relate to their interests, their values and their identity? Consider why are they attached to their current point of view before you try to change it.

- **Are you starting with the same information?** What will they have heard or read about this issue? They may start with very different information than you have, or have very little interest in it.

- **What is the general emotional reaction of your audience with this issue?** Are they scared? Insecure? Angry? Ambivalent? Uninterested?

- **How can you empathize with their feelings about the issue?** You have some hopes and concerns in common with every audience. Find that common ground, share it with them, and explain that you understand how that concern or hope led to their opinion.

3) How does your audience feel about you? Do you need to dispel preconceptions?

- *What does your audience know about you?* Do any of your inherent characteristics (gender, political party, the clothes you wear) signal to them some stereotypes or preconceived notions?

- *How does your audience perceive you in general?* Do they respect your point of view? Do you seem like someone they can relate to or would trust? If not, you need to show them otherwise.

- *How does your audience think you feel about this issue?* The more you confirm their preconceived notions, the more likely they tune you out.

- *Have you been challenged personally in a way that calls for you to stand up for yourself?* This is the lesson from swiftboating: letting a personal challenge go unanswered is interpreted as weakness. It is important to stay calm, but also to respond humanly and not back down.

II. CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

1) What do you need to say to get your audience to trust you?

- *What can you say to validate their feelings about the issue?* Don't just say you share their feelings, talk in a way that shows that you do.

- *What can you say to dispel negative preconceptions they have of you?* Do not let negative assumptions go unchallenged.

- *What can you say to establish your credibility as someone who understands this issue?* If you have relevant first-hand experience, lead with that before your resume. If your integrity has been challenged (swiftboating), respond both calmly and forcefully. If you don't stand up for your own honor, people conclude you won't stand up for theirs either.

2) What do you want your audience to remember about the issue?

- *What is the main point that is most important for your audience to remember about the issue?* Stick to your main point, and make it stick.

- *What are the most powerful facts and stories supporting your case?* Some people think the more facts you offer, the more likely it is that one will work; in fact, the more you offer, the more they all blur. Pick your best.

3) How can you make your points in an engaging, memorable way?

- *Is there a story you can relate that will establish your emotional connection with the audience?* You can't beat a story for drawing your new audience in.

- *Can you explain your main point with a vivid metaphor, idiomatic expression or memorable phrase?* The more colorful and you make it, the farther it will spread.

- *Can you illustrate your point by asking your audience to imagine a scenario with sympathetic people in it?* You can create a great story even if you haven't experienced one: "Imagine being the mother of a young boy in [war-torn region] ..."

- *If you want to use a statistic, can you explain it in a way that people can picture?* For instance, instead of saying "just 5 microns of anthrax can kill", try "all it takes is a sugar-bag sized amount of anthrax to kill everyone in New York City."

- *Could you get your audience thinking in new ways by asking a rhetorical question?* How would that work?