Developing Effective Media Messages

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Why Invest Time in Message Development?

• To ensure accuracy and consistency
• To increase your confidence/comfort level
• To increase your chances that the message you want to communicate is what gets heard or seen
  – You can’t stay “on message” if you don’t have one
  – Average sound bite is 7-9 seconds
  – Most of what you say will not be heard
• The message development process can shed light on where there is disagreement about what we should say or a lack of data to support what we want to say
Tips for Crafting Effective Media Messages

• Know your desired headline
  – Don’t “fyi” media or the public
  – If you aren’t clear on the outcome you desire, you can end up in places you don’t want to be
State warns whooping cough epidemic could be worst in 50 years

Published: June 23, 2010 Updated: 1:03 p.m.

Whooping cough worst in 50 years
Tips for Crafting Effective Media Messages (2)

• Think about your audience and use appropriate language
  – Avoid technical jargon
  – Your audience is not the journalist

• Keep it simple
  – Don’t go overboard with too many details and numbers
Interviews on Emotionally Charged Topics: Risk Communication

- Developed by Dr. Vincent Covello
- Part of a science-based approach to communicating effectively in situations that are:
  - High concern
  - Emotionally charged
  - Controversial
Key Theoretical Constructs

- Mental noise theory
- Trust determination theory
- Negative dominance theory
Mental Noise Theory

- People who are upset have difficulty processing information: hearing, understanding, remembering.
- Mental noise can reduce our ability to process communication up to 80%.
- Nonverbal communication overrides verbal when concern is high:
  - Provides 50-75% of the message content
  - Noticed intensely by the audience
  - Interpreted negatively
Implications of Mental Noise Theory

• Limit the number of messages
  – 3 key messages
  – 3 supporting facts for each
• Keep messages brief and concise
  – 27 words
  – 9 seconds
• Put your most important messages first and last
Implications of Mental Noise Theory (2)

• Provide information at or below average grade level of the audience
  – Average is 8th grade
  – Only 12 percent of adults have Proficient health literacy

• Use vivid and compelling examples, stories, or visuals
Trust Determination Theory

• When people are upset or highly concerned, they tend to be distrustful: distrusting that others are listening, caring, competent, honest and hard working.
What Determines Trust?
Low Concern Settings

- All other factors
  - 15-20%
- Competence/Expertise
  - 80-85%
What Determines Trust? High Concern Settings

- Honesty/openness: 15-20%
- Listening/caring/Empathy: 50%
- Competence/Expertise: 15-20%
- Dedication/commitment: 15-20%
Implications of Trust Determination Theory

• People need to know that you care before they care what you know
  – Acknowledge emotions, before you appeal to reason
  – Express empathy

• Identify with and reinforce the primacy of shared values
  – The health and safety of children
Outrage Reducers/Trust Builders

• Acknowledge uncertainty, don’t wait until you’re certain, share the dilemma.
  – “It’s not being wrong that kills you—it’s being wrong after sounding sure.”
  – Dilemma sharing is explicitly claiming that a decision is difficult, and the right answer isn’t obvious.
  – It is acknowledging uncertainty about decisions you face and asking for help.

Psandman.com
Other Outrage Reducers/Trust Builders

• Avoid absolutes.
  – Don’t claim anything is totally “safe.”
  – Avoid terms like “always” or “never”
• Use trusted thought leaders
  – Often best to use trusted local leaders
  – Credibility transference
• Be careful with risk comparisons.
Negative Dominance Theory

- When people are upset or highly concerned, they often think negatively, focusing on the negative meanings of words and gestures.
- Any negatives get amplified
- 1N=3P
This doesn’t mean you should not share bad news

- Tell people bad news they already know.
- Tell people bad news they’re going to find out anyway.
- Consider telling people bad news they probably won’t find out anyway.
- Tell people the good news too!
Important things to remember

• 27/9/3
• Most important points go first and last
• Average grade level minus 4
• Express empathy and caring
• Acknowledge uncertainty
• Avoid absolutes
• 1N=3P
• Be cognizant of nonverbal communication
### Message Map
**Stakeholder: General Public**
Are vaccines safe?

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<td><strong>Vaccines are held to the highest safety standards</strong>&lt;br&gt;Today US has safest vaccine supply in its history&lt;br&gt;Vaccine safety is continually monitored&lt;br&gt;Signals of potential problems investigated and, if necessary, corrected (e.g., 1st rotavirus vaccine)</td>
<td><strong>Getting vaccinated is far less risky than getting the diseases</strong>&lt;br&gt;Like any medication, no vaccine is 100% safe. Most people experience no, or only mild, side effects such as pain or swelling&lt;br&gt;Serious side effects, such as allergic reactions are very rare</td>
<td><strong>Vaccine-preventable diseases remain a threat to children</strong>&lt;br&gt;Outbreaks occur when rates drop (222 cases of measles in 2011)&lt;br&gt;Diseases still prevalent in parts of the world and get brought into the US frequently, others still circulating in the U.S. (whooping cough)&lt;br&gt;Before vaccination: 3.5 million children got measles. Many died, suffered blindness or encephalitis (brain swelling)</td>
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Thank you!