

# 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



"EACH OF YOU HAS BEEN GIVEN A SIMPLE, YET POWERFUL TOOL..."

# 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

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## State warns whooping cough epidemic could be worst in 50 years

June 23, 2010 | 12:10 pm

THE ORANGE COUNTY  
**REGISTER** LIFE

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

### Whooping cough worst in 50 years



Health Watch

### Whooping Cough epidemic could be worst in 50 years

Wednesday, June 23, 2010

**NewScientist**

**Health**

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### Whooping cough outbreak could be worst in 50 years

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### Whooping Cough Epidemic Worst in 50 Years

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### WHOOPING COUGH EPIDEMIC, "MAY BE 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 8<sup>th</sup> grade
  - Only 12 percent of adults have *Proficient* health literacy
- Use vivid and compelling examples, stories, or visuals

# Trust Determination Theory

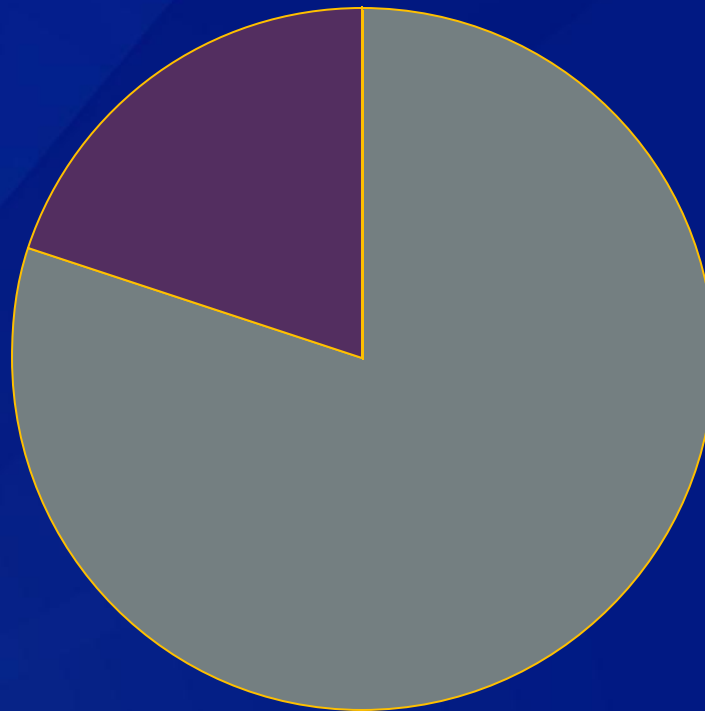
- When people are upset or highly concerned, they tend to be distrustful: distrusting that others are listening, caring, competent, honest and hard working.



# What Determines Trust? Low Concern Settings

**All other  
factors**

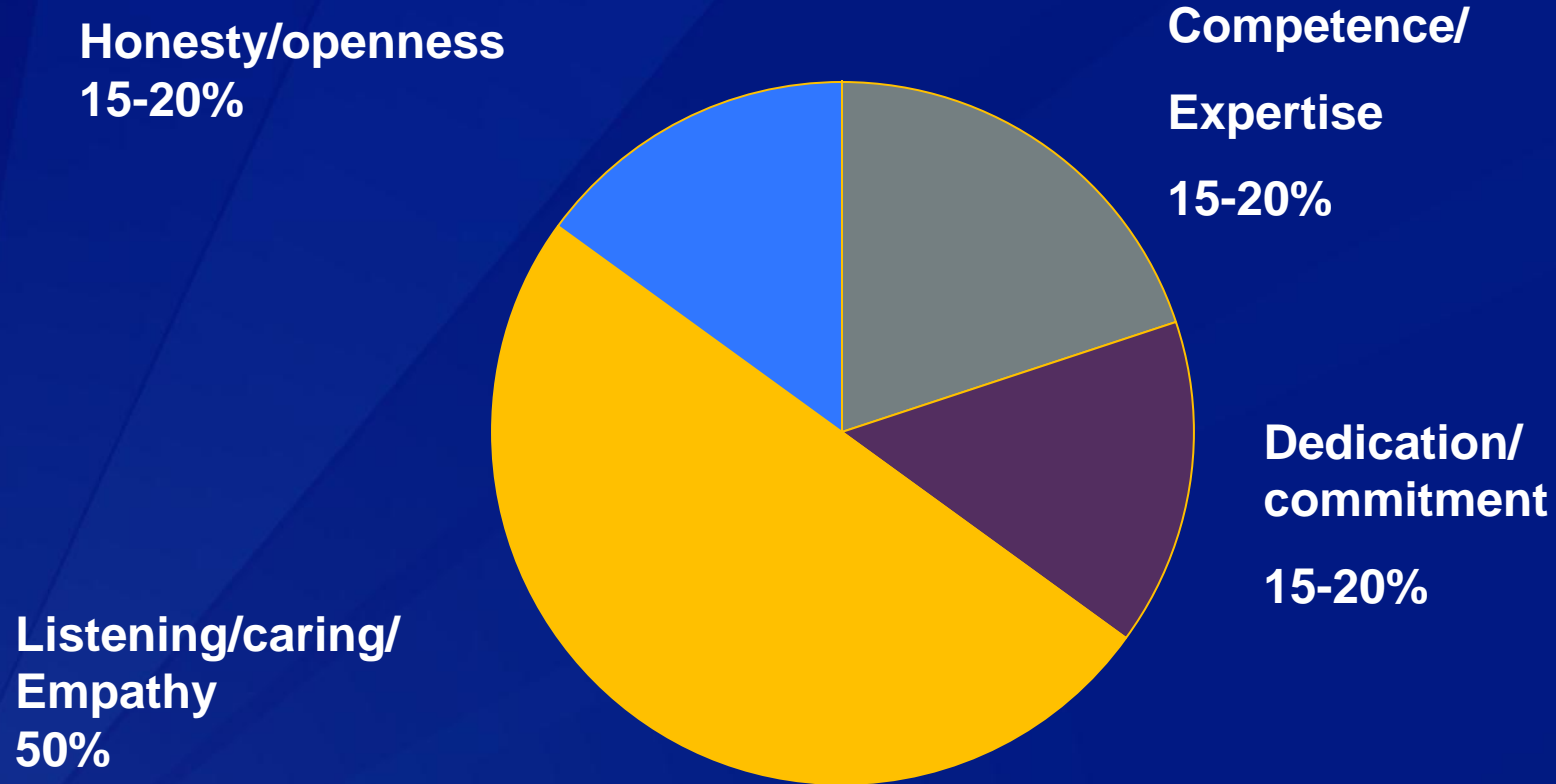
**15-20%**



**Competence/  
Expertise**

**80-85%**

# What Determines Trust? High Concern Settings

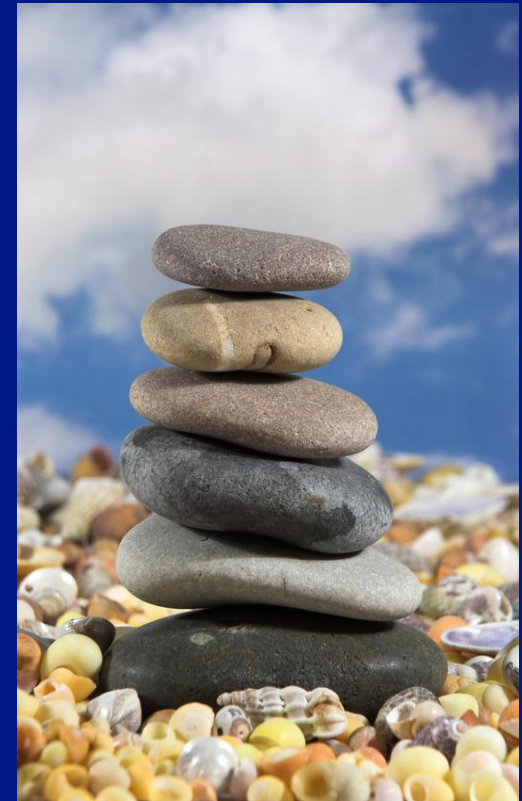


# Implications of Trust Determination Theory

- 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.





# 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?**

**Key Message/Fact 1.**

**Vaccines are held to the highest safety standards**

Today US has safest vaccine supply in its history

Vaccine safety is continually monitored

Signals of potential problems investigated and, if necessary, corrected (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup> rotavirus vaccine)

**Key Message/Fact 2.**

**Getting vaccinated is far less risky than getting the diseases**

Like any medication, no vaccine is 100% safe. Most people experience no, or only mild, side effects such as pain or swelling

Serious side effects, such as allergic reactions are very rare

Vaccine-preventable diseases are dangerous, even deadly (Story of unvaccinated child)

**Key Message/Fact 3.**

**Vaccine-preventable diseases remain a threat to children**

Outbreaks occur when rates drop (222 cases of measles in 2011)

Diseases still prevalent in parts of the world and get brought into the US frequently, others still circulating in the U.S. (whooping cough)

Before vaccination: 3.5 million children got measles. Many died, suffered blindness or encephalitis (brain swelling)

**Thank you!**