“Say it like you mean it” . . .
Reframing Public Health Issues for Better Understanding and More Success

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What I’ll Cover

• Framing Messages for Environmental Change
• Framing Messages in a Difficult Environment
• What the Experts Suggest
• Putting it All Together
Framing Messages for Environmental Change
Why Work on Changing the Environment?
Change the Community to Change People

- Has greater impact
- Applies to everyone equally
- Lasts longer
- Costs less
- Changes social norms (and behaviors) over time
What is a Frame?

- Mental organizational tools – frames of reference
- Shared widely
- Link your message to commonly held frames
- Seek shared values, clear language, and short, simple statements
Commonly Held U.S. Frames

- God helps those who help themselves
- America is the greatest country in the world
- Individual responsibility
- We are all interdependent
- It takes a village to raise a child
YOYOs
WITTs

Jared Bernstein
All Together Now: Common Sense for a Fair Economy
Framing Messages

• Two Ingredients
  – Knowledge about audience (frames)
  – Your recommended solution
Framing Messages in a Difficult Environment
RWJF: How Conservatives See Health

• Health is a Journey
• America is successful when it comes to health
• Resources that could improve health are limited
Health is a Journey

“Don’t Stop Believin’!”
Journey to Health

• Challenging
• Unpredictable
• People make bad choices and have to live with consequences
Optimism: Success of America

- Most healthy country in the world!
- Life expectancy has increased
- Medical miracles
Limited Resources

• Everybody can’t have everything
• Pouring resources into the lowest-income?
• Bringing the bottom up can bring the top down.
• Don’t take from the have to give to the have-nots
Limited Resources

• BUT
• A minimum acceptable level
• Balance between what government/individuals provide
Stuck Between Frames

• Interdependence Frame
  – Poverty anywhere in our community affects us all

• Personal Responsibility Frame
  – People should pull themselves up by the bootstraps
Stuck Between Frames

- **Interdependence Frame**
  - Poverty anywhere in our community effects us all
  - The poor will always be with you

- **Personal Responsibility Frame**
  - People should pull themselves up by the bootstraps
  - What if their boots have no straps? Or they don’t have boots at all?
Stuck Between Frames

**Interdependence Frame**
- Poverty anywhere in our community effects us all
- The poor will always be with you

**Personal Responsibility Frame**
- People should pull themselves up by the bootstraps
- What if their boots have no straps? Or they don’t have boots at all?

**Otherizing**
What the Experts Suggest
Berkeley Media Studies Group: Moving from Portrait to Landscape
Portrait in Landscape?
Focus on the Individual’s Health Behavior
Focus on Community: Health Behavior in Context
Updated (by me): Focus on Community, As Community Supports Individual
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2010: 
*A New Way to Talk About Social Determinants of Health*

- Large set of studies
- What messages worked best to talk about Social Determinants of Health and prevention
- Different types of audiences
Elements of a Good Message

- Simple language
- Value-driven and emotionally compelling
- 1 strong, compelling fact
- Offer solutions
- Incorporate personal responsibility
- Focus on providing opportunities rather than addressing disparities
What Tested Well

• Health starts – long before illness – in our homes, schools and jobs

• Your neighborhood or job shouldn’t be hazardous to your health.

• All Americans should have the opportunity to make the choices that allow them to live a long, healthy life, regardless of their income, education or ethnic background.
Language to Avoid

• Equal, equality, equalizing
• Leveling the playing field
• Creating balance
• Unjust/injustice
• Outrage/immoral
New Messages

• Health starts where you live, work, play and learn.
• We work to create healthier communities.
• Let’s make the healthy choice the easy choice.
Worked at Community Level

• Health starts where you live, work, play and learn.
• We will create healthier communities.
• Let’s make the healthy choice the easy choice.
New Messages

• Health starts where you live, work, play and learn.

• We will create healthier communities.

• Let’s make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Didn’t work for state.
RWJ 2015 Update: Trigger Words

- Responsibility (too hard on a personal level)
- Choice/Choose (always triggers personal responsibility frame)
- Lifestyle (judging individual behaviors)
- Opportunity (unclear)
“Choice”

- Even used in other ways “choice” always triggers the individual behavior frame
  - “Let’s make the healthy choice the easy choice.”
Responding to “Choice”

• Families don’t choose what foods are available in their neighborhood. That’s why we need to:
• Good choices aren’t possible in every area in our county. We can change that by:
• People want to make good choices. We can make it easier by:
What messages might work?

- Giving tools to make better decisions
- A fair shot at good health
- Enabling people to choose the right path
“Reconsidering the Politics of Public Health”
Chokshi & Stine, JAMA, 8/22/13
doi: 10.1001/jama.2013.110872
Nanny State vs. Savvy State

- Focus on the solution, not just the problem
- Look for strategic partners
- Don’t apologize for regulatory work
- Share your vision
Focus on the Solution

• Let people know:
  – Active public health choices are made by NOT acting
  – Regulatory action is more effective and less expensive than other interventions – describe more expensive and less effective alternatives
Look for Strategic Partners

• Look to conservatives for ideas
• Seek common ground with elected officials
• Find those who can speak without fear
• Physicians have a special duty to share their patients’ experiences of regret
Look for Conservatives for Ideas

- Oklahoma City Mayor: “This city is going on a diet”
- NC Housing Finance Agency requiring smoke-free policy for affordable housing tax credits
Seek Common Ground With Elected Officials

- ROI for QuitlineNC (other prevention)
- Potential health care savings (smoking, prenatal care)
Find Those Who Can Speak Without Fear

• Business Leaders
• Physicians
• Advocates
• Survivors
Don’t apologize for Regulatory Work

• Taxpayers and consumers are increasingly paying for others’ bad choices
• Policies are more judicious, narrow and effective than other interventions
• Often low-cost or no-cost
Share Your Vision

• Develop a vision of a healthy alternative community, and help others believe in it.
Berkeley Media Studies Group: Top 10 Public Health Media Bites of the Year Great Ones!!!
“Violence is a contagious disease . . . Actually, it’s the number one cause of death . . . of young people, so it’s frankly the cancer or heart disease of the young”

– Gary Slutkin, Cure Violence, 2013
• “Anyone who smokes in multi-unit housing is not just smoking in their own home – they’re smoking in mine”
  – C. Denney, 2013
• “If we want to climb the economic ladder through education, then we need to ensure that ladder rests on a stable foundation of work that pays enough to live on.”
  – Maureen Conway, Aspen Institute, 2015
• “Cheap soda has taxed this nation dearly. It’s time to tax it back.”
  – Jim O’Hara, Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2015
“Food can either empower us and make us strong, or it can kill us. Healthy food is not just our tradition, it’s our identity.”

– Denisa Livingston, community health advocate
• “Our national pastime should be about promoting a healthy and active lifestyle, not a deadly and addictive product.”
  – Matthew Myers, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids
How do you come up with the “great one”? 

• Spend some time with it 
• The folks who run the Upworthy website say they write 25 headlines for each story before selecting the best 
• Follow some simple guidelines (see handout)
Practice

- Tobacco-Free Parks
- Shared-use Agreement with Schools
- Enforcing Tobacco-Free Schools Policy
- Tobacco Tax
- Sugary Drink Tax
- Tobacco21
Thank-You!