Developing Effective Key Messages

Concise, clear messages that promote action are essential to any media strategy, document, or interaction. They allow you to construct effective press releases, focus your interviews, and be consistent with reporters and editors. A strong set of messages has four elements:

PROBLEM/ISSUE

Clearly define the reason for the media event, press release, or media interaction. Example: "The University Administration is attempting to cut the budgets of several departments on campus."

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Also known as the 'caring statement', this explains why the media – and by extension, the public – should be interested in the problem, issue, or event.

Example: "This will harm the quality of education of our institution and hurt our students."

SOLUTION

You need to provide a solution or resolution to the issue or problem you have defined. Example: "The University Administration must not pursue these harmful cuts. Instead, they should lobby the provincial government for an appropriate level of public investment."

ACTION

An effective message outlines what needs to be done to achieve the desired solution. Ideally, this will provide some way for the public to get involved with your initiative or campaign.

Example: If you are concerned about the cuts at our university, please let the administration know by sending them a letter of concern.

Tips for effective messages

- Define your audience before crafting your messages (Students? Faculty? Politicians?). Who you are speaking to will determine how you focus and construct each point.
- Messages are most effective when they are personal. That is, when they speak to how a
 given issue will impact an individual or group of individuals, and how they can become
 involved in the solution.

- Make sure all of your messages are supported by solid, well-researched facts, and that you
 have easy access to this data before doing interviews.
- Make sure all of your spokespeople are familiar with your key messages before talking to the media. Consistency across your faculty association is important.
- While key messages are a very important, they aren't meant to be straightjackets. Some situations will require you to go beyond your messages, or even develop new ones.