

Messaging Strategy and Techniques

A simple technique to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in verbal communication is to use a box format. The box is limited to four key messages in bold type. These are what should be emphasized.

Each key message is limited to three or four sub points that support and give context. Ideally, messages should be about 12 words in length. They also should have these traits: simplicity (easy to articulate and understand); pass the “common sense” test; and connect with common core values and beliefs.

No one message is more important than another, and it doesn't matter which point is made first or last. All of your messages communicate what you are trying to say. The box allows you to tailor your comments to your audience.

The center box is the conclusion that people should reach as a result of your interview or presentation. It should be repeated – not like a broken record – but as often as possible to reinforce the goal, conclusion or theme.

When using the box in a question and answer format, it is necessary to think ATM – that is **A**nswer or **A**ddress the question, and then **T**ransition to one of the key **M**essages. It is best to use only one message per question; but you must use every opportunity to get your message out.

Whenever you are asked a question, you should answer or address the question. Don't dodge it because it will only come back to you. If it is a question that has nothing to do with your key message or it is confrontational, address it and then transition to the message box. If you do not know the answer, simply say that you will get back to the person – and be sure to follow up!

Round out your answers with examples. It is important to tell stories. Most of us do not remember statistics very well, but we always seem to recall a story. The most memorable stories will involve people. It is ok to be as provocative as the facts reasonably allow, but by no means should you ever say anything that is not true.

Do not repeat negatives. We tend to do this out of politeness. Just say, “No,” and then transition to the box. Be careful not to be defensive. Advocate for your position – be positive!

The underlying foundation of this concept is simple and easy to use. As long as you are talking about topics within the box, you are on message and drawing people to the conclusion in the center.

Keep in mind that the box is not a public handout. Treat it as a confidential, internal document. The box also is by no means a script. It is your notes – a crib sheet that doesn't script you but prompts you.

We always remind ourselves and colleagues to “be creative, think outside the box.” To effectively deliver your message, “think inside the box!!”