

How you communicate your message or talk about your cause is essential if you want to create positive change. This guide provides top tips and best practice advice on communicating for change from three different perspectives: the communications trainer, the equality charity and the media agency.

THE COMMUNICATIONS TRAINER

Kathryn Quinton, Communications Director at the Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF) offers some insight into how we can frame difficult social issues to encourage greater public engagement.

Is it time to reframe your message?

Brexit. Trump. Fake news. We live in extraordinary times. Against this backdrop, what unites campaigners and communicators is to convince others to care about certain issues as much as we do, to create positive change. What follows are the key ingredients of an evidence-based approach – commonly called ‘strategic communications’ – to create this positive change.

WHY WE NEED A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Our established ways of communicating and

campaigning aren't working when it comes to winning the hearts and minds of most people.

Looking at the opinions of the British public, approximately 40% of people are conflicted about certain social issues. This means they're open to receiving both positive and negative messages about them, and we can shift their opinion if we use the right approach.

Typically, we tend to focus our efforts on talking to the people who already agree with us or who never will. We try to persuade with facts alone and dial up the sense of crisis and urgency, making people feel overwhelmed and causing them to switch off rather than engage with our issue.

Public opinion really is crucial as it influences policy. There's a growing body of evidence that proves we can shift public opinion if we understand what people think and feel about an issue and why, and – most importantly – frame our arguments accordingly.

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FRAMING THE ISSUE

We don't communicate in a vacuum. Framing involves making conscious choices about what to leave in and out of our communications in order to influence the unconscious associations, values and emotions that our words and phrases trigger in others, and therefore their response.

There are four key ingredients to creating effective communications for change:

1. Frame messages in shared values
2. Tell a different story
3. Think carefully about metaphors
4. Find hope and agency

1. Frame messages in shared values

Facts alone rarely change minds. We tend to accept facts that support what we already believe and reject those that don't.

To avoid this we should frame facts and messages using shared values. Our values represent our deeply held beliefs and we use them subconsciously all the time to make sense of the world.

We need to be aware of which values our messages are triggering and frame our communications to engage those values that will help achieve our progressive aims.

2. Tell a different story

As campaigners and communicators it's very tempting to refute the messages we disagree with and that undermine our cause. Our campaign tendency is to fact-check and myth-bust in our campaigns.

But doing this can call to mind the very things – the negative frame – we're trying to invalidate. Evidence shows that this repetition of the myth only reinforces it, leaving people remembering the falsehoods as correct. Instead we need to talk about the issue by telling a different story.

3. Think carefully about metaphors

Metaphors are a useful and powerful framing tool as they help us to convey complex information quickly, drawing on common reference points with an audience.

But they can be problematic from a framing perspective. For example, talking about migrants being 'lured' to the UK with the promise of jobs, and then

Identify the source of the problem and suggest concrete solutions to show that change is possible

'hunted' down by the police on the one hand evokes sympathy, but on the other, reinforces the dehumanising narrative around migrants. So how should we use metaphors? The charity case study in this guide offers an effective new metaphor for homelessness.

4. Find hope and agency

We should avoid crisis language and show that change is possible – a challenging task in the day-to-day framing of the tough social issues many of us are tackling.

Too often, we start and end with the problem, breeding fatalism. Instead we should identify the source of the problem and suggest concrete solutions to show that change is possible.

As in traditional storytelling, we need to offer clear villains and heroes.

By collectively employing a strategic communications approach we can start to win hearts and minds on the issues we care about and build our movements for change.

*The **Equality and Diversity Forum** is a national network of organisations making a reality of equality, human rights and social justice in people's lives. Through their strategic communications programme, *Equally Ours*, they build capacity across the sector to shift public opinion by communicating in powerful and progressive ways.*

THE EQUALITY CHARITY

Simon Rayner, Head of Marketing & Communications at Crisis, discusses how they applied the concept of framing to effectively tackle the perception of homelessness throughout the UK.

Telling a different story



**Together
we will end
homelessness**

Crisis identified the critical role public attitudes have in building support and political commitment for action and change.

For the past two years we have been working with the FrameWorks Institute and the wider homelessness sector to better understand public opinion on homelessness, how it is portrayed in the charity sector and in the media,

Through the wide selection of stories collected we have been able to depict the different types of homelessness and connect each person's individual story to a malfunction within our society.

and how we can shift public conversation by talking about homelessness in a new way. Crisis is still at the beginning of this reframing journey however we have started to put the recommendations from the project into practice.

The work so far has concluded that public attitudes to homelessness can and must change. To achieve this shift in opinion we must first understand what the public thinks. At present people sadly make automatic assumptions and have fixed ideas about homelessness.

Many people think rough sleeping is the only form of homelessness and affects a specific type of person – a middle aged man with substance misuse issues, a young runaway or a woman fleeing domestic abuse. Most importantly, the public has a fatalistic view when it comes to homelessness, strongly believing that it is an inevitability that cannot be resolved.



We know this is simply not true but we often trigger these beliefs inadvertently through our own communications on the issue. This can be through the stereotypical images we use, talking about peoples' past choices which have led to their homelessness or suggesting we are all a pay cheque away from being without a home.

With this in mind the Crisis team has made a number of changes to our communications and will continue to develop content using framing principles and recommendations.

To achieve this shift in opinion we must first understand what the public thinks.

One key example of our new communications tactics is our Everybody In campaign. To generate audience engagement we've created an online action to get the public and politicians openly pledging why they commit to ending homelessness. All of this is backed up by Crisis' plan to wipe out homelessness, which provides concrete solutions to achieve this goal in ten years time.

What the project has shown us is that delivering messages without a clear solution or policy ask either increases public perception that the problem is too big to solve - or leads individuals to find their own solutions, further feeding a sense of fatalism.

A key part of the Everybody In campaign has been tapping into the stories of real people with lived experience of homelessness. Through the wide selection of stories collected we have been able to depict the different types of homelessness and connect each person's individual story to a malfunction within our society. Adam's story exemplifies this, connecting his experience of sofa surfing with

the high cost of housing and his inability as a low-paid worker to save a deposit for a privately rented home.

Framing an issue effectively means doing things a little differently to standard campaigning or awareness raising.

Here are some general guiding principles followed by our Communications team here at Crisis:



- Be clear about what you want to communicate and your intended impact
- Know what you're up against – and the opportunities available – by understanding how people think and feel
- Make deliberate choices about how information is presented: what to emphasise, what to explain and what to leave unsaid
- Trigger certain ways of thinking and bypass others



- it's very hard to argue against a feeling or belief once it's activated
- Say why it matters – don't just tell it like it is – by aligning your solutions with people's ideals of what's desirable and good
- Show that change is possible, not that problems are unsolvable
- Equip your audience to think differently – don't meet them where they are

Crisis is the national charity for homelessness. Created in 1967 as an urgent response to the growing homelessness crisis, Crisis has helped tens of thousands of people out of homelessness and campaigned for change.

To generate audience engagement we've created an online action to get the public and politicians openly pledging why they commit to ending homelessness.

THE MEDIA AGENCY

Caroline Holmes, Account Director at Weber Shandwick, shares her top tips in developing effective strategic communications.

Understand your audience



In order to create effective communications, which drive change, we need to understand what matters to our audience.

There are many ways we can do this without going to great expense. Firstly, simply ask your audience. Are you holding an event where you could survey members? Could you set up a poll on Survey Monkey and send it to your stakeholders? Your Social Media feeds offer a glut of information from back-end analytics – some free – through to the conversations your followers are having. Most importantly,

you must continue to evaluate the response received to the communications you're putting out and tweak as you go along.

Deciding which tools to use again should depend on the audience. Social Media is an essential consideration in 2018 but the channels differ by audience and may not always be right for all demographics. Try and find out what channels and news outlets your audience use and conversely contact media outlets to understand their readers or viewers.

When thinking about how to tailor a message to a specific audience there are a number of things to bear in mind:

- Does the message appeal to the audience? If not, what might make it more relevant?
- Is the message simple and actionable?
- Is the message suitable for the channels you're intending to distribute it through? A heavily corporate message, for instance, may sit better with business press than Snapchat

Effective communication for me can be summed up in three words: relevant, targeted and plain-English.

Weber Shandwick is a leading global public relations firms dealing with media, business and government.

This guide forms part of **Stronger Voices**, a training programme created in partnership with the Equality and Diversity Forum and funded by City Bridge Trust, designed to help strengthen the voices of London's equality sector.



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