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# Being Right is Not Enough: Effective Political Communication

2017 Florida League of Cities Annual Conference

August 18, 2017

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## Speakers

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## Agenda

Communicating an Effective Message

Working with the Media

Working in a Political Environment



# Communicating an Effective Message



Focus on What You Can Control,  
Not What you Can't



## A Key to Success: Being Able to Communicate Effectively

The two words 'information' and 'communication' are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. **Information** is **giving out**; **communication** is **getting through**.

Sydney J. Harris

## Framing the Message

### Frame

The value-based structures that  
shape the way we see the world.

George Lakoff

## Framing the Message

What is the frame for government? What words come to mind when people think of government?

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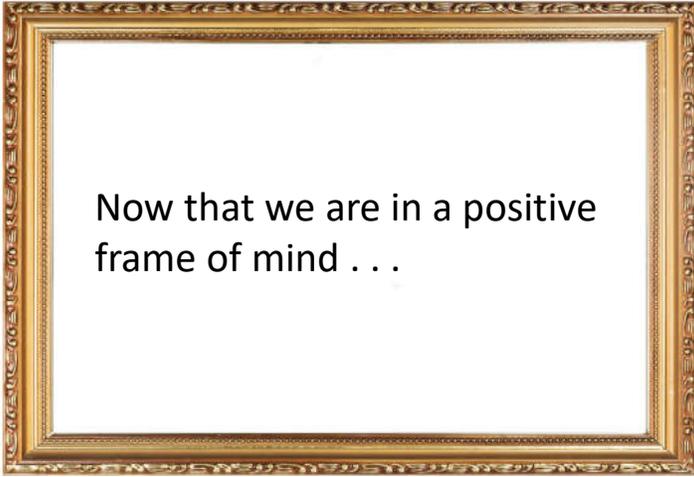
## Creating a Positive Frame



- Start with shared values/experiences
- Use value words
- Tell a story/paint a picture
- Focus on services and outcomes - WIIFM
- Show that you care

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Now that we are in a positive  
frame of mind . . .



## Define the Message



What does this action mean for the  
people in our city?

What questions would they ask?

What are the three most important  
ideas they need to grasp?



## Prepare the Message

Write down the key message ideas

- No more than 3!

Make them understandable to the public

- And positively framed!

Practice communicating your ideas



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## Communicating the Message

Stick to the key ideas

Use the language you developed

Observe/listen to see if you are getting through

- If not, try adapting your language to suit your current audience

Know when to stop talking

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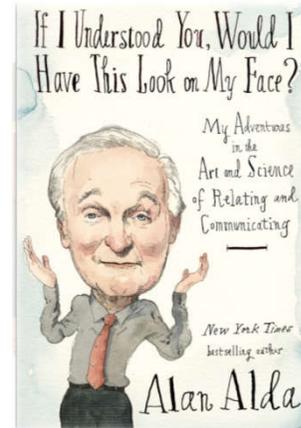
## Effective Communication from Alan Alda

Don't sacrifice understanding for accuracy

Observe or imagine what a person is thinking or feeling

Talk about the people doing the work, not the things

Focus on the other and *really* listen



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## Working With the Media

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## The Media as Audiences



Don't expect them to tell our story

Getting ahead of the story allows us to help frame it

Being accessible, respectful and cooperative earns trust

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## Budget News

Despite \$3 Million Increase in Taxes and Fees, City Staff to Present \$4.5 Million Budget Deficit for FY2018

Sarasota City, consider tax increases next year

oward property tax  
ls rising  
OST F all...

County property owners will pay higher taxes

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## Talk About Taxes

The Mayor “said his city took a tough approach, holding the tax rate steady for the last 8 years, including during the downturn. The decision not to increase the rate when values were dropping cost the city \$130 million but delivered ‘significant financial relief’ to taxpayers at the time.”



## Getting Your Message Out

### Be responsive

- “I’ll call you right back.”
  - Frame, define, prepare, reply

### Take the initiative

- Reach out with news before the media reaches out to you
- Create your own communication channels
  - Always in compliance with the Sunshine Laws



# Working in a Political Environment

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## When Under Attack

Defending yourself often makes things worse

Defending others (appropriately) can make things better

No matter how personal the attack, don't respond in kind

- Quit Taking It Personally

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## Key Messages



Policy disagreements

- Not personal ones



Differences of opinion

- Not smart/stupid
- Not noble/evil



“We” are striving to do what is best for the people

- Not “I”

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