

MARKETING GUIDE

Messaging That's Memorable Your Minute Message Model™

INTRODUCTION

“So, tell me about your school.” If these words strike fear in your heart, you’re not alone.

We frequently hear from the schools we work with that they *know* what makes their educational approach unique but struggle to express it clearly and succinctly. And though they can reel off statistics and curricular details, they have trouble conveying the real impact their school has on their students.

In our noisy, sound-bite culture you need a way to state your case quickly and memorably. Our Minute Message Model is designed to help you do just that. With it, you’ll create powerful messages and learn to represent your organization with confidence, so you can attract more support from more people.

We call our system the Minute Message Model to help you remember two critical points:

- Make it brief.
- Say the most important things first.

Whether you've got one minute to get your message across during a shared elevator ride, five minutes at a reception, or ten minutes while your prospective families take a tour, the Minute Message Model will help you use that time confidently and well.

Message Basics

Use Your Full Name

Your name typically conveys a great deal of information about your school in a way that an acronym or an abbreviation just doesn't.

Never Assume

Your audience most likely doesn't work in education. If you assume that everyone understands educational jargon or will recognize even common acronyms, you're potentially losing an opportunity to be engaging and informative. What's the educational problem you're addressing and why should your audience care? Start there every time.

Repeat, Ad Nauseam

You will likely get bored of repeating your message while you wait for your key audiences to absorb it. Remember that we're bombarded with thousands of messages each day and it takes a lot of repetition for any one message to really sink in. Do what you can to make sure that message is yours.

Add Benefits, Subtract Features

Features are what your school does. Benefits are what happen as a result. Right-fit families need to understand why the combination of your approach, programs, and campus amenities is more than just the sum of its parts.

Your Minute Messages

1. The Belief Message

Define yourself and what you believe.

When you have just a minute to describe your school, say the most important things first; don't waste time listing details. Speak in clear, engaging, emotional terms about the big, exciting ideas—the belief—behind your school. Often referred to as an “elevator pitch,” your Belief Message should make you stand out from the pack and convey the essentials without going into specifics. A good Belief Message will suggest the problem you're trying to solve. You'll have one Belief Message and everyone—board, staff, volunteers—should memorize and be able to recite it. Doing so will ensure that you're all building the same brand.

Exercise: The Belief

A compelling Belief Message provides an introduction to your school, its brand, and the work you do. This simple exercise helps you to write a Belief Message that will make your audiences interested, informed, and eager to know more.

_____ believes _____.

Our School Name Value

Every day we _____ for _____,

Verb Object Constituents

because _____.

Problem Statement

Example: Belief Message

At Marin Academy, we believe that educational excellence should push the boundaries of what is known today in order to prepare students for a world we can't even imagine tomorrow. Every day, we create immersive learning opportunities for our students, honing their ability to think critically and creatively. And because many voices are welcomed and encouraged at MA, our students cultivate the tools they need to live their lives fully, and the inspiration to contribute as compassionate citizens to our world.

2. Problem Messages

Now that your audience is intrigued and knows the basics about your school, you have an opportunity to elaborate. What problems does your school exist to solve? What unique aspects of these problems does your school address?

You'll have only one Belief Message, but you can create several Problem Messages. Each one highlights a problem (or opportunity) and reinforces the idea that your work helps solve it. Think the problems you address are so obvious you don't need to mention them? Think again. When you fail to communicate or frame the problem, you're depriving yourself of a valuable opportunity to set your school up as the expert in solving it. Powerful Problem Messages are visionary. They help you build an emotional connection with your audience and encourage people to join you in your work. Write your Problem Messages by answering the question, "What's the problem out there that my school alone can solve?"

Example: Problem Message

Marin Academy: False dichotomies plague American education. Subject matter specialists work in silos, drawing false boxes around teaching and coursework. Students are labeled as creative, athletic, or academic, and the "academics" are either math/science kids or English/humanities kids. The crime in this is that labeled students rarely go on to access the parts of themselves that have not been recognized and validated. With overwhelming evidence about the human brain's multifaceted abilities, it's time to move beyond an either/or way of teaching and learning.

3. Impact Messages

If you have an effective Belief Message and a set of powerful Problem Messages, chances are your audience will want to hear more. Now's your chance to prove that your school is effective. This is best done with a story rather than facts, figures, or charts.

Don't explain what programs you offer. Instead, demonstrate the efficacy of those programs by showing what happens when they operate. Tell a story, share an anecdote, or invite your audience to imagine a "what if" scenario. Make it dramatic so it sticks with them.

A great story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It has a protagonist—someone your audience can empathize with—and something unexpected. Without a conflict, there's no drama. Most importantly, wrap up your story by pointing out how *only* your school could have created the outcome you just described.

Example: Impact Message

Brian and Bart were members of Marin Academy's class of 2004; the events in the U.S.-led armed conflict in Iraq formed the backdrop to their senior year. Highly aware of world affairs, they discussed the conflict often, in and outside of class. Both boys had been deeply engaged in their history and English classes during their four years at MA, so they were well-equipped to discuss geopolitical conflicts. But they felt unqualified to debate a bigger question: Why do societies engage in armed conflict in the first place? Neither one felt he thoroughly understood the arguments for or against armed conflict.

Brian and Bart were torn. They wanted to enjoy the final months of high school, and celebrate all they had achieved at MA, but they still felt compelled to try to answer the question "Why war?"

They sought their English teacher's advice and, with his help, created a proposal for a semester-long English class on the history of thought about armed conflicts from ancient Rome to modern-day Iraq. They designed a course that they themselves would never be able to take, as an expression of their desire to, as the school's mission states, "accept the responsibility of education in a democratic society."

Today, it is a popular class at MA and a lasting legacy of the two young men who were encouraged to push the boundaries of their own thinking.

4. Detail Messages

Once you've communicated what your school believes, what problems it exists to solve, and how it makes an impact, only then is it time to talk about your programs—but you still have to explain why the features of your programs are important. Your Detail Messages do this.

Detail Messages describe the nuts and bolts of how you achieve impact and give concrete, concise examples of how you put your values into action. They link the features of your programs with the benefits that those programs provide. And, if you tailor them to your audience, then you'll be in a stronger position to establish why they should engage with your school, whether that means enrolling, volunteering, donating, or just spreading the word.

For instance, compare “We have a 1-1 iPad program.” to “We use technology to enhance student learning, cultivate digital citizenship, and foster digital literacy across the curriculum.” Which school sounds worthier of your engagement?

Example: Marin Academy

Program: Honors Curriculum

Program Description (with benefit): Marin Academy has carefully considered the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) program, and while it has merit, we have elected to create our own college-level honors curriculum, which is available to students who demonstrate the ability to work at an advanced level. We do this because we value a depth-over-breadth approach to learning and want to offer courses that prepare our students to be reflective, analytical learners; classes geared to standardized tests do not best achieve that objective.

Summary

Introduce your school through your **Belief Message**. Then use a **Problem Message** to identify a problem that you solve. Next, add an **Impact Message** that shows your audience how your work plays out in real life. Then (and only then) go into program and curriculum specifics using a **Detail Message**, explaining how your programs help you achieve impact and put your values into action.

End each Detail Message by asking for what you want. If you want prospective families to sign up for school tours, ask them to do so. If you're speaking to donors, ask for money. Be concrete: how much, from how many, to accomplish exactly what? If you need volunteers, ask your audience members to sign on.

Use the accumulated momentum of your messaging. **Ask.**

Conclusion

No one knows your school as well as you do.

Even your most ardent supporters can quickly get lost in a list of everything you offer. The thing that they care most about is that you're achieving your vision and making a difference. Every conversation, every newsletter, every annual report, video, tweet, and news interview is a new chance to use your time well by reminding your audiences why your school matters and how they can be a part of it. **Use your time well with the Minute Message Model.**

Learn More

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofit organizations.

We believe that a brand that sets you apart is essential to a nonprofit's success. Every day we guide nonprofits to uncover the big, bold idea that will attract more people to their work. Because in today's world, a worthy mission is not enough. You've got to communicate what makes you unique at every opportunity.

Our clients successfully raise more money and attract the support they need to achieve their goals. To find out how Mission Minded can help your organization, call us today at 415-990-9360.