

MARKETING GUIDE

Messaging That's Memorable Your Minute Message Model™

INTRODUCTION

“So, what does your organization do?” If these words strike fear in your heart, you’re not alone.

We frequently hear from our nonprofit clients that they *know* why their organization matters but struggle to express it clearly and succinctly.

Many report wasting time expounding on insignificant details of their programs while they grasp for something compelling to say. And, just like that, they lose another opportunity to make a decisive impression. They learn the hard way what we know: without practiced brevity and focus, it’s hard to command any attention, much less excite interest in your work.

In our noisy, sound-bite culture you need a way to state your case quickly and memorably. Mission Minded designed our messaging framework—the Minute Message Model™—to help you do just that. With it, you’ll create powerful messages and learn to represent your organization with confidence, helping you attract more support from more people.

We call our framework 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 to present your case for support to your next major donor, the Minute Message Model will help you use that time confidently and well.

Let us help you get started with this introduction to the Minute Message Model:

Message Basics

Use Your Full Name

Your organization's name can convey a great deal of information about what you do in a way that an acronym can't. Avoid using shorthand for your organization's name, even with audiences familiar with your organization.

Never Assume

Your audiences don't know nearly as much about your organization as you hope they do. What's the problem you're addressing and why should they care? Don't be shy about reminding them every time.

Repeat, Ad Nauseam

You will likely get sick to death of repeating your message while waiting for your key audiences to absorb it. Remember that we're bombarded with thousands of messages every day and it takes a lot of repetition for any one message to really sink in. Make sure that message is yours.

Add Benefits, Subtract Features

Features are what your organization does. Benefits are what happens as a result of that work. People don't get engaged or motivated because of features; they act to get results.

Your Minute Messages

1. The Belief Message

Define yourself and what you believe.

When you have just a minute to describe your organization, say the most important things first; don't waste time on details. Instead, speak in clear, broad terms about the big, exciting idea—the belief—that motivates your organization. Often referred to as an “elevator pitch,” your Belief Message should make you stand out from others in your field and make it easy to understand the basics of what you're here to accomplish, without going into detail. A good Belief Message will also refer to 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 organization, its brand, and the work you do. This simple exercise allows you to write a Belief Message that will leave your audiences interested, informed, and eager to know more.

_____ believes _____.

Name of Organization Value

Every day we _____ for _____,

Verb Object Constituents

because _____.

Problem Statement

Example: Belief Message

At Healthier Kids Foundation, we believe preventative care at an early age makes things fair for everyone. Every day, we work side-by-side with families to identify and eliminate kids' health issues before they even begin. Because without us, barriers that could be corrected may stand in the way of kids joyfully climbing the ladder of life.

2. Problem Messages

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

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

Examples: Problem Message

Curious Theatre: Big theatres have to produce shows that are guaranteed to fill seats. There will always be a need for entertainment but somebody has to be producing the art that makes us think harder, feel more, and propels our society forward. Denver needs an independent theatre that can choose topics and stories that don't just fill seats, but fill minds with new ideas, hearts with passion and lives with meaning.

Energy Outreach Colorado: Every day, unexpected circumstances arise for people in Colorado just like you and me. Life doesn't ask permission when it brings on a setback, and more often than not, one missed payment leads to another. When times get tough, our neighbors deserve an ally that alleviates their home energy struggles so they can stop worrying and get back to living.

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 organization 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 organization could have created the outcome you just described.

Example: Impact Message

Brian had been living on the streets for three months. He was hungry and tired of the hard life he had dealt with. He'd been to numerous shelters around town where he'd gotten a meal and a bed, but a day later he was right back where he started. When he came to Town Services, Sarah met him at the door. They talked about his current state and what he hoped for. She helped him find food and shelter for the night, and the next morning helped him enroll in a class that could help him regain control of his situation. And yet, after only two days, Brian failed to show up. Sarah wondered what was wrong, but knew that any number of challenging factors—from mental illness to drug addiction—could be at play.

Brian reappeared several days later, but the pattern continued: in for a few days, then out again. Sarah finally confronted Brian directly: did he really want to make the changes in his life that would help him move off the streets? Was he ready to commit? That's when Sarah learned something surprising. Brian was disappearing frequently to care for his dog, Sunshine. Most shelters won't accept animals, so Brian and his friend Julio would each take turns living on the street to make sure that Sunshine would be well cared for.

Once Sarah better understood Brian's needs, she knew what she had to do. She picked up the phone and made some calls. Today, Town Services proudly partners with Home for Fido to ensure that people experiencing homelessness—and their pets—can find better lives. Brian now works full-time at Home for Fido caring for the animals and, with regular employment, himself, too.

4. Detail Messages

Once you've communicated what your organization believes, what problems it exists to solve, and how it makes an impact, only then is it time to talk about what you're doing—but you still have to explain why 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. If you tailor Detail Messages to your audience, then you'll be in a stronger position to establish why they should engage with your organization, whether that means volunteering, donating, enrolling, or just spreading the word.

For instance, compare “Our computer literacy workshop gives our low-income clients the skills they need to create a resume, look for a job, and become more self-sufficient and relevant in a technology-charged world.” to “We offer computer literacy workshops to low-income clients.” Which organization sounds more worthy of your engagement?

Example: Energy Outreach Colorado

Program: Single Family Weatherization Program

Program Description (with benefit): When people living in inefficient homes are connected to weatherization programs that make their homes more efficient, they can better afford their home energy bills, allowing them to allocate more of their budget to life's needs.

Summary

Introduce your organization 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) talk about program specifics using a **Detail Message**, explaining how your programs help solve the problem.

If you're speaking to donors, the time to ask for money is after the **Detail Message**. Be concrete: how much to accomplish exactly what? If you need volunteers, ask your audience to sign on. If you're looking to cement a strategic partnership with a peer agency, ask them to join you in your work.

Use this moment. **Ask.**

Conclusion

No one knows your organization as well as you do.

Even your most ardent supporters can quickly get lost in a stream of data and programmatic jargon. What they care most about is that you're achieving your mission, solving problems, and making a difference. They care less about how you do it. Every conversation, every newsletter, every annual report, video, tweet, and news interview is a new chance to use your time well by reinforcing *why* your organization matters and why people should get involved. **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.