

“Say it like you mean it” . . .
Reframing Public Health Issues
for Better Understanding and
More Success

Ann Houston Staples, BA, MA, MCHES
Director of Public Education & Communication
Tobacco Prevention & Control Branch
NC Division of Public Health, Chronic Disease & Injury Section

What I'll Cover

- Framing Messages for Environmental Change
- Framing Messages in a Difficult Environment
- What the Experts Suggest
- Putting it All Together

Framing Messages for Environmental Change

Why Work on Changing the Environment?

Change the Community to Change People

- Has greater impact
- Applies to everyone equally
- Lasts longer
- Costs less
- Changes social norms (and behaviors) over time

What is a Frame?

- Mental organizational tools – frames of reference
- Shared widely
- Link your message to commonly held frames
- Seek shared values, clear language, and short, simple statements



Commonly Held U.S. Frames

- God helps those who help themselves
- America is the greatest country in the world
- Individual responsibility
- We are all interdependent
- It takes a village to raise a child

YOYOs

WITTs

Jared Bernstein
*All Together Now:
Common Sense for a
Fair Economy*

Framing Messages

- Two Ingredients
 - Knowledge about audience (frames)
 - Your recommended solution



Framing Messages in a Difficult Environment

RWJF: How Conservatives See Health

- Health is a Journey
- America is successful when it comes to health
- Resources that could improve health are limited

Health is a Journey



“Don’t Stop Believin’!”

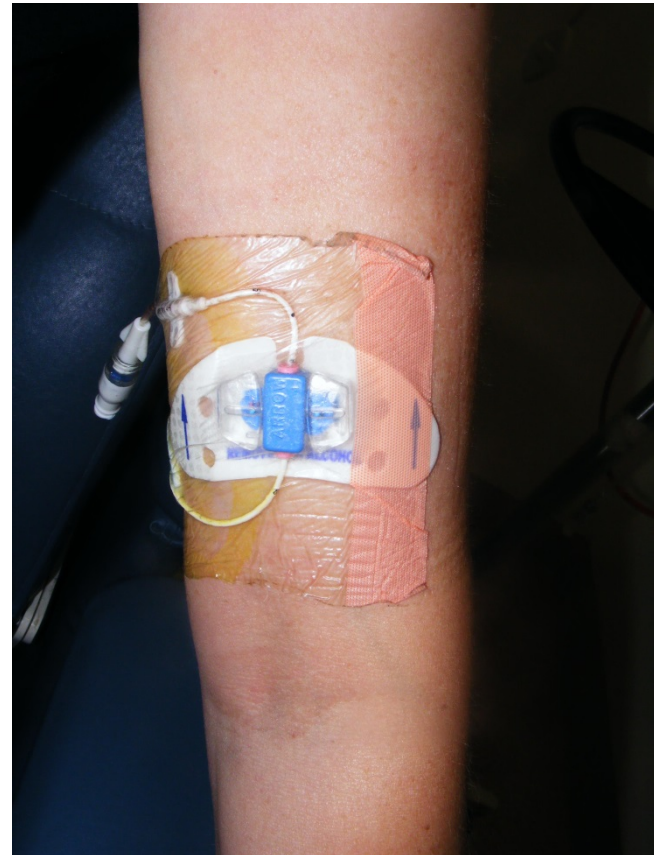
Journey to Health

- Challenging
- Unpredictable
- People make bad choices and have to live with consequences



Optimism: Success of America

- Most healthy country in the world!
- Life expectancy has increased
- Medical miracles



Limited Resources

- Everybody can't have everything
- Pouring resources into the lowest-income?
- Bringing the bottom up can bring the top down.
- Don't take from the haves to give to the have-nots



Limited Resources

- BUT
- A minimum acceptable level
- Balance between what government/individuals provide



Stuck Between Frames

- **Interdependence Frame**

- Poverty anywhere in our community effects us all

- **Personal Responsibility Frame**

- People should pull themselves up by the bootstraps

Stuck Between Frames

- **Interdependence Frame**

- Poverty anywhere in our community effects us all
- The poor will always be with you

- **Personal Responsibility Frame**

- People should pull themselves up by the bootstraps
- What if their boots have no straps? Or they don't have boots at all?

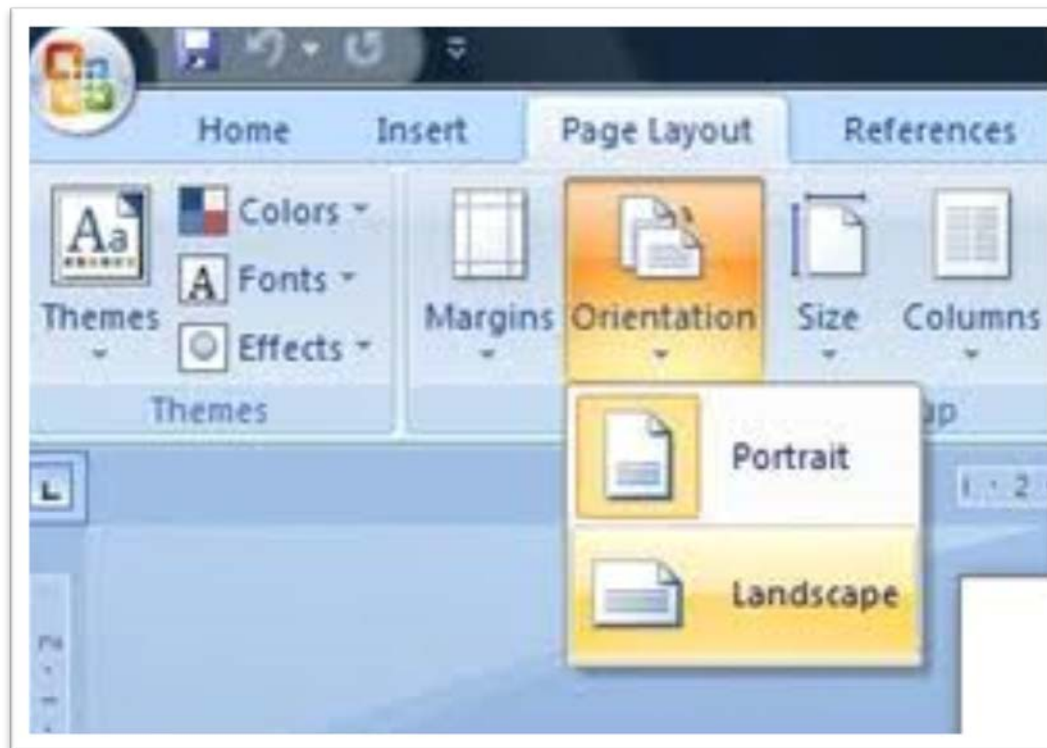
Stuck Between Frames

Otherizing

- **Interdependence Frame**
 - Poverty anywhere in our community effects us all
 - The poor will always be with you
- **Personal Responsibility Frame**
 - People should pull themselves up by the bootstraps
 - What if their boots have no straps? Or they don't have boots at all?

What the Experts Suggest

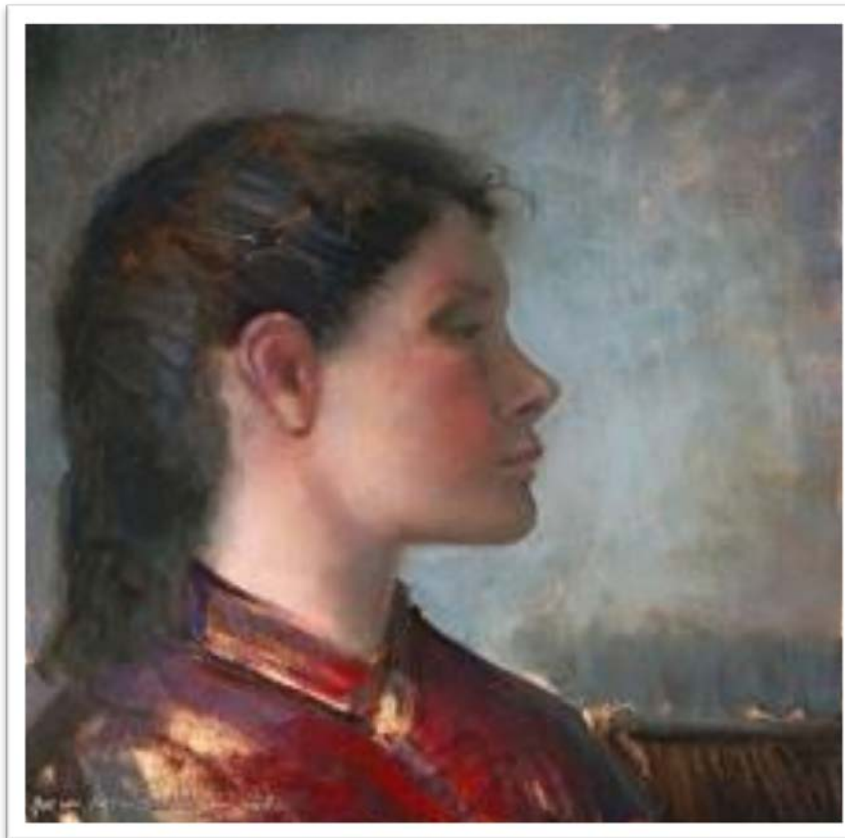
Berkeley Media Studies Group: Moving from Portrait to Landscape



Portrait in Landscape?



Focus on the Individual's Health Behavior



Focus on Community: Health Behavior in Context



Updated (by me): Focus on Community, As Community Supports Individual



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2010: *A New Way to Talk About Social Determinants of Health*

- Large set of studies
- What messages worked best to talk about Social Determinants of Health and prevention
- Different types of audiences

Elements of a Good Message

- Simple language
- Value-driven and emotionally compelling
- 1 strong, compelling fact
- Offer solutions
- Incorporate personal responsibility
- Focus on providing opportunities rather than addressing disparities

What Tested Well

- Health starts – long before illness – in our homes, schools and jobs
- Your neighborhood or job shouldn't be hazardous to your health.
- All Americans should have the opportunity to make the choices that allow them to live a long, healthy life, regardless of their income, education or ethnic background.

Language to Avoid

- Equal, equality, equalizing
- Leveling the playing field
- Creating balance
- Unjust/injustice
- Outrage/immoral

New Messages

- Health starts where you live, work, play and learn.
- We work to create healthier communities.
- Let's make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Worked at Community Level

- Health starts where you live, work, play and learn.
- We will create healthier communities.
- Let's make the healthy choice the easy choice.

New Messages

- Health starts where you live, work, play and learn.
- We will create healthier communities.
- Let's make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Didn't work
for state

RWJ 2015 Update: Trigger Words

- Responsibility (too hard on a personal level)
- Choice/Choose (always triggers personal responsibility frame)
- Lifestyle (judging individual behaviors)
- Opportunity (unclear)

“Choice”

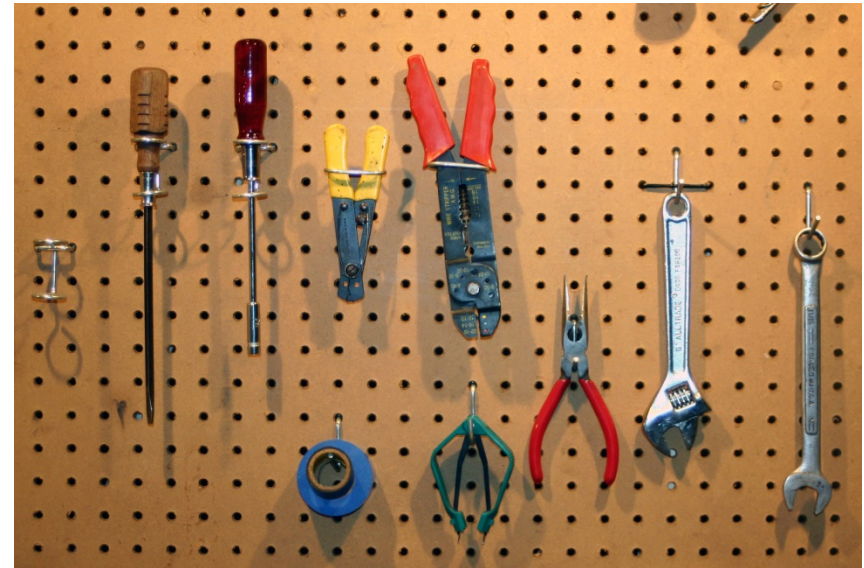
- Even used in other ways “choice” always triggers the individual behavior frame
 - “Let’s make the healthy choice the easy choice.”

Responding to “Choice”

- Families don't choose what foods are available in their neighborhood. That's why we need to:
- Good choices aren't possible in every area in our county. We can change that by:
- People want to make good choices. We can make it easier by:

What messages might work?

- Giving tools to make better decisions
- A fair shot at good health
- Enabling people to choose the right path



“Reconsidering the Politics of Public Health”

Chokshi & Stine, JAMA, 8/22/13

doi: [10.1001/jama.2013.110872](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2013.110872)

Nanny State vs. Savvy State

- Focus on the solution, not just the problem
- Look for strategic partners
- Don't apologize for regulatory work
- Share your vision

Focus on the Solution

- Let people know:
 - Active public health choices are made by NOT acting
 - Regulatory action is more effective and less expensive than other interventions – describe more expensive and less effective alternatives

Look for Strategic Partners

- Look to conservatives for ideas
- Seek common ground with elected officials
- Find those who can speak without fear
- Physicians have a special duty to share their patients' experiences of regret

Look for Conservatives for Ideas

- Oklahoma City Mayor: “This city is going on a diet”
- NC Housing Finance Agency requiring smoke-free policy for affordable housing tax credits

Seek Common Ground With Elected Officials

- ROI for QuitlineNC (other prevention)
- Potential health care savings (smoking, prenatal care)

Find Those Who Can Speak Without Fear

- Business Leaders
- Physicians
- Advocates
- Survivors

Don't apologize for Regulatory Work

- Taxpayers and consumers are increasingly paying for others' bad choices
- Policies are more judicious, narrow and effective than other interventions
- Often low-cost or no-cost

Share Your Vision

- Develop a vision of a healthy alternative community, and help others believe in it.



Berkeley Media Studies Group: Top 10 Public Health Media Bites of the Year Great Ones!!!

- “Violence is a contagious disease . . . Actually, it’s the number one cause of death . . . of young people, so it’s frankly the cancer or heart disease of the young”
 - Gary Slutkin, *Cure Violence*, 2013

- “Anyone who smokes in multi-unit housing is not just smoking in their own home – they’re smoking in mine”
– C. Denney, 2013

- “If we want to climb the economic ladder through education, then we need to ensure that ladder rests on a stable foundation of work that pays enough to live on.”
 - Maureen Conway, Aspen Institute, 2015

- “Cheap soda has taxed this nation dearly. It’s time to tax it back.”
 - Jim O’Hara, Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2015

- “Food can either empower us and make us strong, or it can kill us. Healthy food is not just our tradition, it’s our identity.”
 - Denisa Livingston, community health advocate

- “Our national pastime should be about promoting a healthy and active lifestyle, not a deadly and addictive product.”
 - Matthew Myers, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids

How do you come up with the “great one”?

- Spend some time with it
- The folks who run the Upworthy website say they write 25 headlines for each story before selecting the best
- Follow some simple guidelines (see handout)

Practice

- Tobacco-Free Parks
- Shared-use Agreement with Schools
- Enforcing Tobacco-Free Schools Policy
- Tobacco Tax
- Sugary Drink Tax
- Tobacco21

Thank-You!

