

Spitfire has truly enjoyed working with the Violence Free Minnesota and its members to hone its messaging so current and prospective donors understand the depth and breadth of the causes of domestic violence and what is required to prevent and end it.

Now that Violence Free Minnesota and its members have a message platform and understand the fundamentals of how to use it to inform their elevator speech, we want to be sure that members also know how to tailor the messaging for specific target audiences.

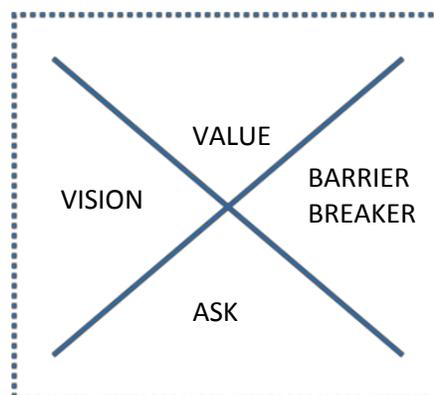
This memo walks through Spitfire's process and provides an example of how to use our message box.

Developing tailored messaging

Good messaging has four main points, because that is the number of points a person can hold in their head at any one time. These points need to be both concise and compelling. It is that easy, and that hard.

Ultimately, your messaging should help you accomplish your organization's overall objectives; in this case, raising money.

To help you think through your message points, use a message box. You can start at any message point and hop around to your heart's desire in a speech, during an interview, in a press release – any time you are communicating about your issue. Just stay in the message box. Messages should remain flexible so you can deliver the ones that best fit an audience's knowledge and interest.



For each different target audience that you are trying to reach you should have a different message box. This is because every audience has different values and your messages will be most effective if they are tailored to each of your target audiences. Tailoring your messages doesn't mean starting from scratch, but rather adjusting each of the points as needed for the new audience.

Once you have filled in the four core messages in your box (described below), you can develop supporting points for each message, including compelling facts, stories and statistics.

Effective tailored messages narrow the focus and allow you to make a few strong points that people will remember – rather than throwing out a variety of points and letting the audience decide which of these it wants to retain. But before you can decide on your talking points, you need to answer a couple of questions.

Who are you trying to reach with your message?

The audience for your message should be as narrow and targeted as possible. Your audience should never be the general public – it is simply too big and diverse to reach everyone with a single message. Instead, you should select a very specific target that relates to your goal.

In this case, we are going to choose **corporate social responsibility (CSR) directors at large companies that are headquartered in Minnesota.**





What does your audience care about?

Effective messaging must take into account the values and core concerns of the target audience. By tapping into your audience's existing values, you can create common ground and more easily motivate them to act. These can be "big" values like ending violence, or they can also be "smaller," more niche values, such as a corporation not wanting employees to have to take time off due to domestic violence.

The "Value" message point is where you connect with your audience and tap into what they care about. This message point reminds them of your common ground, or says something that will get them to agree or at least nod their heads. For newcomer audiences this is a point that you may spend a great deal of time on when making a speech or preparing materials. For the choir this is more of a touch and move on point. Briefly touch on your shared values and then advance to other points that are more pressing.

The important thing to keep in mind here is that you want to be sure your message taps into one existing value that your audience has already (note: not the value that you *want* them to have).

Take the time to think carefully about what your audience cares about. Be honest with yourself – the values of your audience may be different than your own values. Brainstorm a list and then select the one that seems to be most important to your audience. To gain insights into their values you can review public opinion studies or even informally talk to members of your target audience.

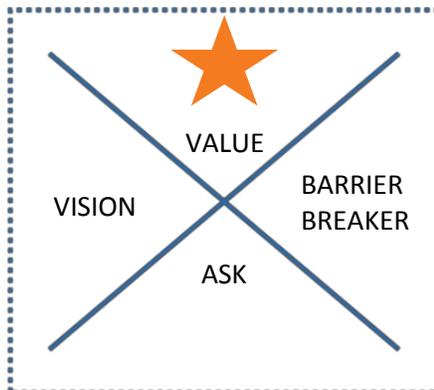
In this case, based on conversations with members of Violence Free Minnesota, we have identified two values (though there may be others) for the corporate social responsibility directors at large companies headquartered in Minnesota audience – which means we will draft two distinct message sets.

Value 1: Corporations want to be seen as good members of the community.

Value 2: Domestic violence is an issue that affects their employees. Given the prevalence of domestic violence, we know people who work for these corporations either are victims or survivors of domestic violence or know someone who is, and they care about the issues that impact their colleagues' lives.



The Value Message – Top (North) Section



Sample Message for Value 1:

We know you are committed to making a difference in the communities where your employees live and work, and domestic violence is an issue that touches too many Minnesota families.

Sample Message for Value 2:

We know you care about the issues that impact your employees’ lives and the communities in which they live, and domestic violence is an issue that touches too many Minnesota families.

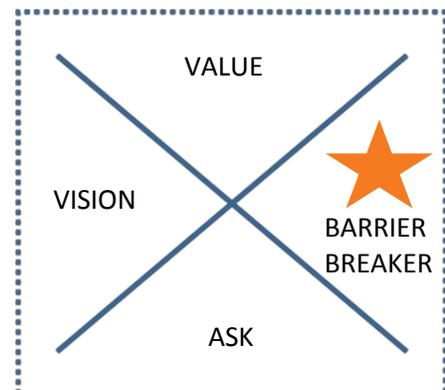
What keeps your audience from taking the action you want them to?

Once you tap into your audience’s primary value, even after you get them nodding, they’ll still push back with “yeah, but...” You need to be prepared with a counter message that will help them overcome that barrier without reinforcing or repeating it. So, give the audience a different way to think about their concern. This is a message point that can be paired with a strong fact or statistic.

For corporate social responsibility directors at large companies headquartered in Minnesota, the barrier is that they don’t prioritize, nor see domestic violence as a priority issue they need to fund beyond workplace giving programs or small contributions.

The Barrier Breaker – Right (East) Section

The “Barrier-Breaker” message point addresses your audience’s “yeah, but” by countering their key misconceptions about your issue. For this message point, avoid repeating your audience’s barrier. For instance, if their barrier is thinking domestic violence is a problem that doesn’t affect them, do not start your messaging with “Many businesses don’t believe domestic violence is a problem that affects them, but it does...” Skip repeating the barrier and instead go right to the heart of your rebuttal, offering facts or a new perspective that will help them see the problem in a new light.



For our target audience, the barrier we need to overcome is that domestic violence isn’t a priority issue for them.

Sample Message to Break the Barrier:

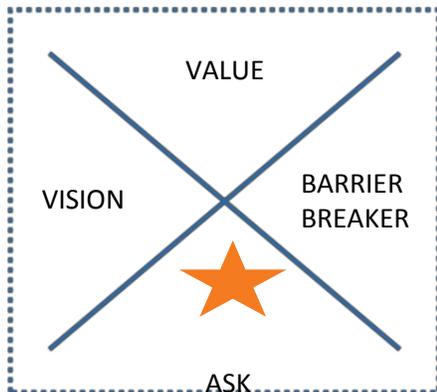
[Note this is derived from the message platform]

Every day, 300 Minnesotans – some of whom may be likely your employees – suffer at the hands of their abusers and reach out for support and guidance. They are denied. Minnesota’s domestic violence programs simply don’t have the resources to help everyone in need.



What do you want your audience to do?

At least one message point, your “Ask,” should be focused on getting the target audience to do something. You have their attention, now ask them to help you accomplish your objective. Keep in mind that the more doable your ask is the better. Asking someone to end domestic violence is overwhelming and your audience may have no idea where to start. But providing a specific ask that is realistic, such as asking Minnesota-based corporate social responsibility directors to increase their giving to support Violence Free Minnesota and its member programs in a more substantial way is certainly much more doable.



The Ask – Bottom (South) Section

In this case, your ask is pretty simple: give money. The specific ask will vary based on the relationship you already have with your target audience. And make sure you are walking audiences up different stages of support with your asks. For someone who has not previously engaged with VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA, the first ask may be to see if they’ll set up a meeting with your team, followed by a site visit or tour and, finally, an ask for money.

Sample Message for the Ask:

A corporate contribution to [VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA] will support XXX [refer to the *How We’re Doing It* section of the message platform and tailor as appropriate] so that survivors and their families get the multi-layered support they need to feel safe and protected physically and emotionally.

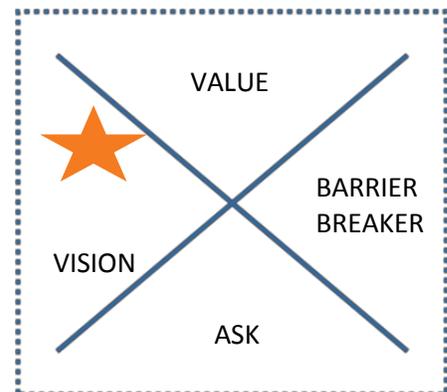
The Vision Statement – Left (West) Section

This message point echoes the value message point. It says to people: If you complete the ask, then this will be the result. It is a chance to show the bigger picture impact of your work.

Sample Message for Vision:

[Note this is derived from the message platform and works for both values identified above]

Together – as families, communities and businesses – we can create a safe and equitable Minnesota that supports domestic violence survivors and their families so they can thrive.



Next steps

We hope this memo provides Violence Free Minnesota and its members with the foundation you all need to begin tailoring the message platform for targeted messaging. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of this guidance further, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with Beth Kanter at beth@spitfirestrategies.com or (202) 448-0209.