

Strategic Response Framework

As a leader and public figure, there is one fundamental communications lesson that can help guide everything you do: *public messaging does not follow the rules of polite, social conversation*. In our personal interactions, we act and talk in a way that simply does not work when it comes to hammering home a message or dealing effectively with resistance, criticism, or attacks. This strategic response framework, and accompanying example, will help you think and talk more tactically in public settings.

SRF	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
TRUE	<p align="center">Reaffirm the Message and Amplify It</p>	<p align="center">Reframe and Explain</p>
FALSE	<p align="center">Let sleeping Dogs lie</p>	<p align="center">Reframe to Change the Impression</p>

Strategic Response Example

You are in a public forum and fielding questions from parents and community members in response to a series of school-improvement proposals. If a statement from the audience is...

Positive and true ⇨ Reaffirm the message and amplify it

Your response: *That's exactly right! And...*

Positive and false ⇨ Let sleeping dogs lie

Say *thank you* and take the opportunity to deliver or reiterate your message.

Negative and true ⇨ Reframe and explain

Sample statement: *Your test scores dropped five points from last year, and they are still below the state average. Clearly, these "reforms" aren't working and our kids aren't getting the basics.* (**Implicit messages: your school is a failure; you are failing our kids.**)

Sample response: *It's true that our test scores aren't what we would like them to be, and we are fully committed to raising those scores. Tests are important, but we need to remember that they are only one measure of success. Our students also need to know how to conduct research and write papers in college, and they need know how to use technology and work collaboratively in teams when they get their first job. Our school is taking the long view—we're building a stronger program that will equip our students with the academic and real-world skills they need to succeed in every area of adult life—not just on standardized tests. I'm confident our test scores going get better, and we're also going to produce graduates who are competent, knowledgeable, and highly skilled adults who care about their community, the environment, and other people. That's what really matters. That's what I'm here to accomplish. Next question...* (**Reframed messages: we know what we are doing; we have the courage to stand up and do what's best for your children.**)

Negative and false ⇨ Reframe to change the impression

Sample statement: *Your teachers leave at two o'clock every day, they get a month off every year and three months off in the summer, and they still get paid a full-time salary. I don't get four months off a year. Why should my hard-earned tax dollars pay for them to go on vacation?* (**Implicit messages: teachers are lazy; teachers are scamming the system**)

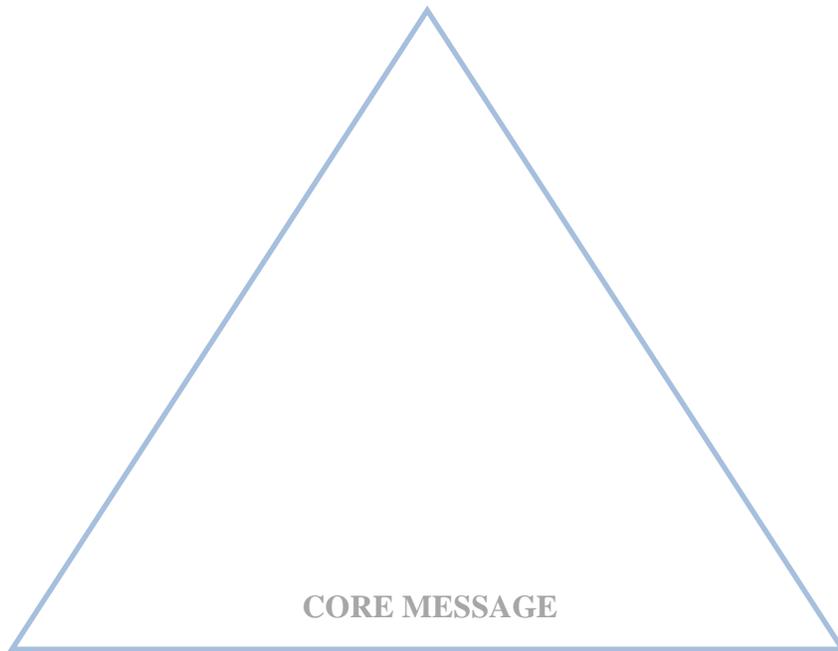
Sample response: *First of all, our teachers are here at 7:00 a.m. and they are required to be available for students until at least 3:00 p.m.—that's an eight-hour workday. They get 25 minutes for lunch, and much of the time they are on lunch duty. Our teachers also work many nights and weekends evaluating student work and preparing lessons. Every year they receive training and take courses outside of the school day, and they are here long after students leave in June and they are here in August planning for the school year. But let's put this in perspective: public schools are the foundation of our economy, our political system, and our community. Without teachers, we wouldn't have skilled workers, educated citizens, or strong leaders, and we wouldn't have half the opportunities we have in this country today. In my opinion, teachers have one of the most important jobs in America. I'm in that school every day, and I can assure you that our teachers are putting in long hours to help your children succeed in life. But I'm here today to talk about how we can improve our school, teach our kids better, and make our community stronger, and our teachers and staff are willing to work as hard as it takes to achieve that goal. Next question...* (**Reframed messages: teachers are underappreciated and work a lot harder than you think; we're getting the job done**)

Message Triangle Worksheet

A message triangle is a simple tool that communications professionals use to help zero in on a selection of core messages that need to be delivered over and over in multiple ways (through websites, emails, printed materials, and presentations, for example) and to multiple audiences (such as faculty, parents, school boards, and community members). After a message triangle is finalized, it is distributed to everyone charged with advocating, communicating, and building support for a cause. It's an easy way to help keep people "on message."

Supporting Message 1

Supporting Message 2



Supporting Message 3