



**Developing the Message** It's easy to say "get your **MESSAGE** to the audience."

The trouble is, most groups do not know what their **MESSAGE** is, and some spend millions of dollars trying to flesh it out.

It really is much simpler than that, and certainly less expensive. By considering the *specific audience* you want to reach and the needs of that audience, you can zero in on your overall **MESSAGE**.

In a majority of cases for a company, your **MESSAGE** will be a *concern for the customers* and how the company is helping them. It's that simple.

Sometimes, the shareholder, employee, or community is the focus of the **MESSAGE**. Although you will find that by focusing on concern for the customers, the needs of the shareholder are, in turn, usually met.

**Developing the Message - HOME BASE** The first thing you must do before an interview is to know your **HOME BASE**. **HOME BASE** is your *main message, your single most important communication objective*. (eg. serving the customer).

**Knowing and communicating your HOME BASE** is the most important factor in conducting a successful interview.

Why **HOME BASE**? Because home is a safe place, a place where you can always comfortably go.

A question from a reporter is merely a starting point -- you don't evade it, you don't avoid it. **You address it**. Then you move on to discuss your own objectives and ultimately reach your **HOME BASE**.

**Developing the Message - POSITIVE POINTS** To just have a **HOME BASE** is not enough. Any company can say it "cares about its customers," but can this be proven? Many times it cannot.

A reporter was talking with one company executive who proudly pointed out that his company listened to its customers. The reporter then asked what changes had been made as a result of that customer input. The executive was *stumped*.

You need to develop **POSITIVE POINTS**. These are primary messages that support your HOME BASE. If HOME BASE is "we care about our customers," a **POSITIVE POINT** might be "we listen to our customers." It is a sub-message that adds credibility to your HOME BASE. Most interviews should use no more than three **POSITIVE POINTS** (although you can have many more) to support HOME BASE.

**Developing the Message - POSITIVE PROOF POINTS** Suppose that your HOME BASE is "we care about our customer," and your **POSITIVE POINT** is "we listen to our customers." The **POSITIVE PROOF POINT** could be "we've added illustrations to our instruction manuals because customers said more visual support was needed to learn equipment operations." The **POSITIVE PROOF POINT** is the addition of illustrations to the manuals. Another **PROOF POINT** for this HOME BASE might be that "when calling a customer service operator, your call is usually answered within four rings."

A few more examples of **POSITIVE PROOF POINTS**...

**POSITIVE POINT**

- We have expertise
- Product reliability
- Competitive pricing
- Assuring delivery quality
- Excellent customer service

**POSITIVE PROOF POINT**

- Average length of employee service
- Product warranty or guarantee
- Price reductions / volume discounts
- Use of quality packaging
- 24-hour toll-free product support

In establishing **POSITIVE POINTS**, you should search for **DISTINGUISHING POINTS** as well. For example, some companies might offer support services during normal business hours. Yours might be the only one offering weekend support, along with live operators, making that a **DISTINGUISHING POINT**.

**DISTINGUISHING POSITIVE POINTS** also may be “hot buttons” for the audience. Although others may offer similar **POSITIVE POINTS**, it is important that the audience knows you have them too. It might be, for example, that while fairly common, a volume discount is important to customers. If so, it belongs in the interview.

**POSITIVE, PROOF or DISTINGUISHING POINTS** are often difficult to find. Remember in searching for positives, “*what is routine to you is not routine to me.*” What this means is that something you do regularly may not seem worth mentioning to the customers or your audience. In fact, it might be fascinating to the outsider.

One man tells the story of his dad, a former telephone company lineman. It had been a stormy night in Oklahoma. His dad had been out all night in the storm repairing phone lines. When he completed his overtime shift, and showed up at home, his son told him how much he admired what he had been doing. His father, unimpressed, simply told his son that this was his job to do, and it really was no big deal. Sure, no big deal, to him, anyway. To us, an admirable feat.

So when developing **POSITIVE POINTS**, you must **look at things as an outsider might**. **POSITIVE POINTS** must also pass the “*who cares?*” test.

If an automobile dealer tells you the car you are looking at was delivered to the dealer by train, you probably couldn’t care less. However, if that fact *is* important, it is incumbent on the dealer to **explain why** (such as “more life from the engine because the car wasn’t jostled on the highway”).

The most effective way to present your message effectively is with a **MESSAGE MAP**. This maps your way from your **POSITIVE POINTS** to your **HOME BASE** in a logical, understandable way so that you can take control of delivering your message.

### Developing the Message - MESSAGE MAPS

A **MESSAGE MAP** is similar to a road map in its function. It points you in the direction you want to go (**HOME BASE**) and tells you how to get there.

Constructing a **MESSAGE MAP** is a positive experience for participants. Instead of detailing what you are failing to accomplish, you **focus in the positive side of what your organization is doing**. The challenge is to find all the things you are doing **right**.

When complete, the diagram will resemble an airline hub and spoke map. All routes lead home. From the central message, or home base, one spoke may focus on how employees help customers, another focuses on the product line, another focuses on customer service, and another may look at cost.

**MESSAGE MAPS** can be used to develop answers to questions from customers, the media, shareholders, colleagues and just about any other stakeholder. A **MESSAGE MAP** can also help organize marketing brochures and help plan a speech. A master **MESSAGE MAP** may be extensive. After developing it, use only the parts you need for any given situation.

In the end, **using a MESSAGE MAP helps you control most communication** situations by helping you know what to say while reaching your audience with what they want or need to hear in an honest, straightforward fashion.

