

First Do No Harm: The Top Five Communications Mistakes Nonprofits Make Every Day *(and How to Fix them)*

Massachusetts Nonprofit Network | November 1, 2017



We can be constrained by commonly used and accepted solutions in our field.

#1 Resonance

Communication Issues? Meet People Where They Are

Published on April 20, 2016



Kelly
Exec

MEET PEOPLE
WHERE THEY
ARE, NOT
WHERE YOU
WOULD LIKE
THEM TO BE



23



Meeting People Where They Are

Posted on January 11, 2016 by [Erin Hennessy](#)

Over the past 20 years, when I haven't been working in higher education, I've worked in government, at both the state and federal levels. So I'm always pretty

09.04.15 | KNOW IT ALL

6 Ways For Leaders To Make Their Messages Resonate

When you're truly invested in your message, you don't have to shout.

WHAT'S THAT
YOU SAY?

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BY
MEETING PEOPLE WHERE
THEY ARE

GROW

6 Ways To Make Your Message Resonate Better

BY LAURA ABRAR | SMALL BUSINESS



If I asked people what they

wanted



they would have said

“faster horses”

— Henry Ford



Measles: Unprotected Story

106 Degrees: A True Story

true
story

“

We spent 3 days in the hospital fearing we might lose our baby boy... We spent a week [at home] waking at all hours to stay on schedule with fever reducing medications and soothing him with damp wash cloths.

”

If you hear "106 degrees" you probably think "heat wave," not a baby's temperature. But for Megan Campbell's 10-month-old son, a life-threatening bout of measles caused fevers spiking to 106 degrees and sent him to the hospital.

"After picking our son up at child care because he had a fever," says Megan, "we went straight to our pediatrician who said our baby had a virus. Two days later, his fever hit 104 degrees and a rash appeared on his head."

The rash quickly crept down to his arms and chest. Megan and husband Chris turned to the Internet. Finding pictures of measles that looked like their son's rash, they rushed him to the local children's hospital.

"No one there had seen or tested for measles for about 17 years," says Megan. "And no one expected it in the year 2008 in the United States. The next day, an infectious disease specialist confirmed measles."



Beliefs that vaccines
have serious side
effects



Intent to vaccinate

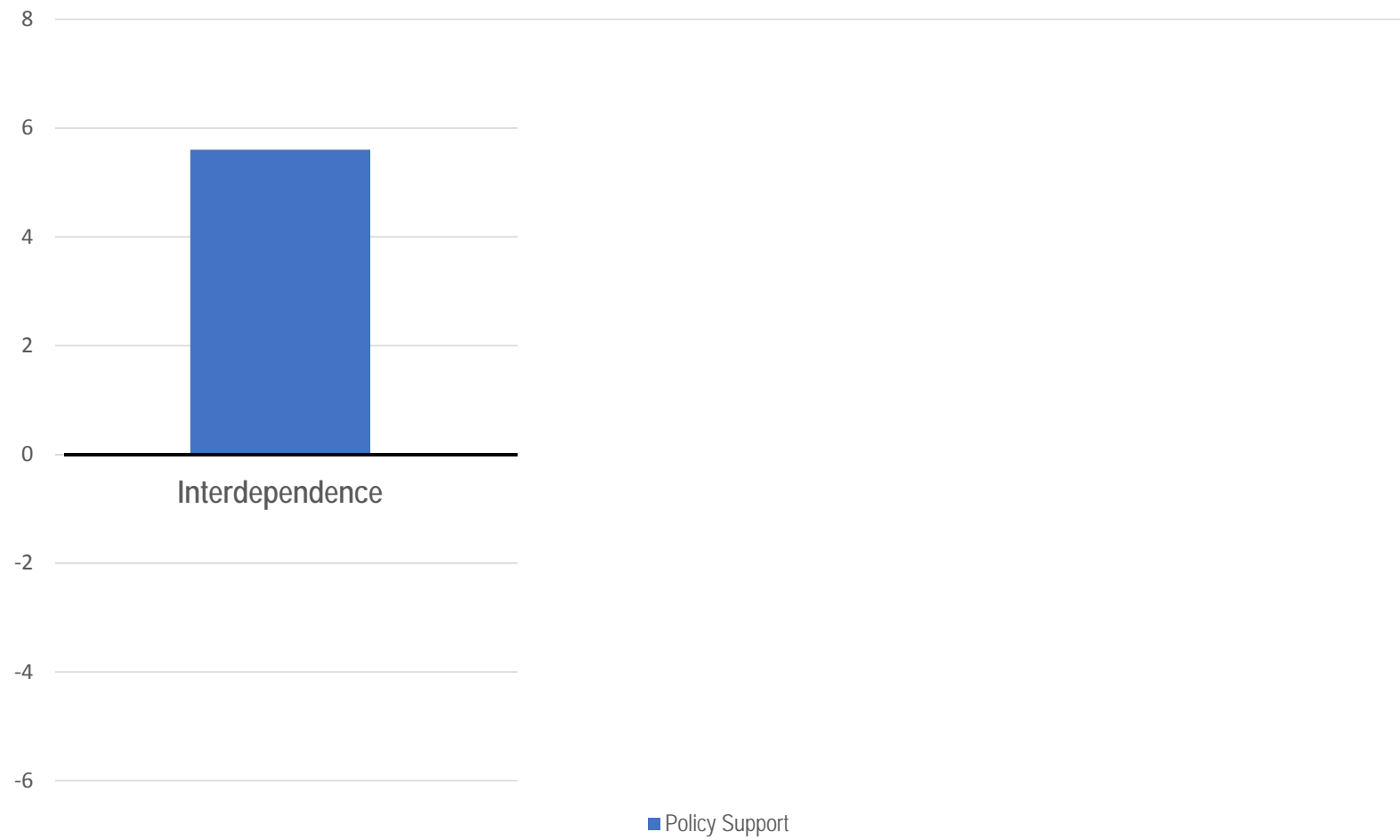
Nyhan, B., Reifler, J., Richey, S. and Freed G.L. (2014) Effective Messages in Vaccine Promotion: A Randomized Trial. Pediatrics; March 3, 2014; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2013-2365

Confirmation Bias

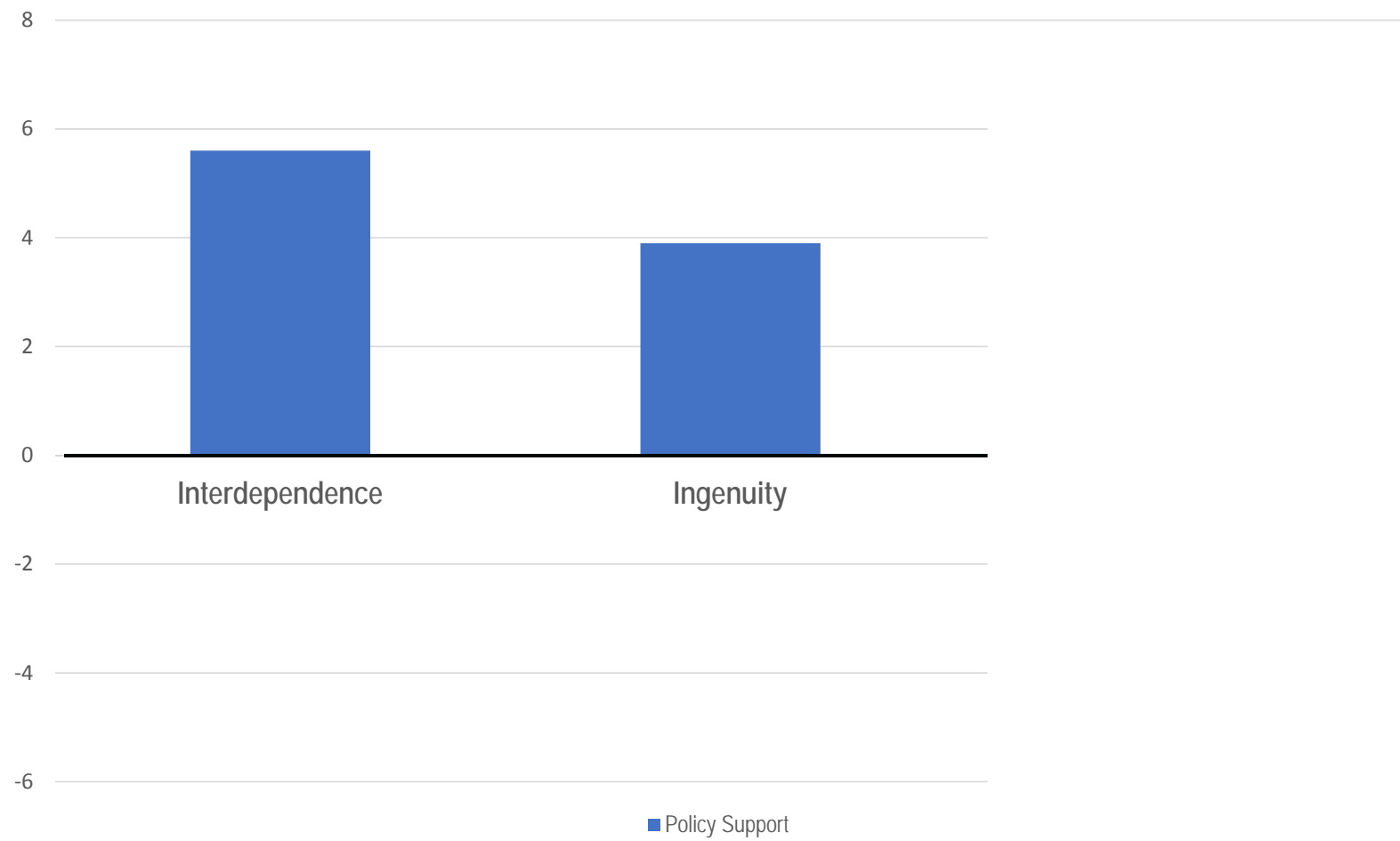
“People will resist abandoning a false belief unless they have a compelling alternative explanation.”

David Ignatius, Washington Post 2016

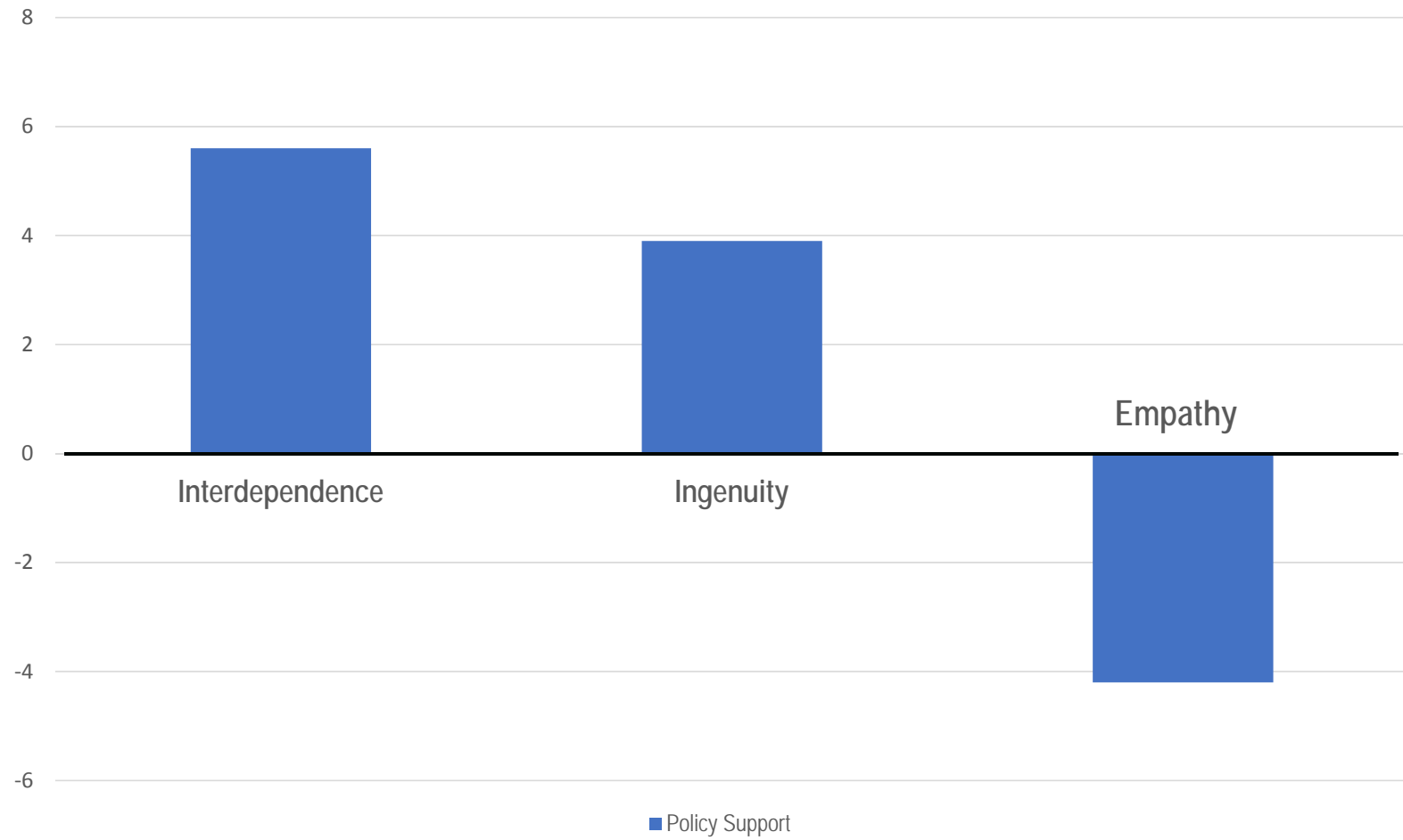
Support for Evidence-Based Addiction Policies



Support for Evidence-Based Addiction Policies



Support for Evidence-Based Addiction Policies



Student Learning

- 
- Students are passive receptacles for information.
 - Learning should be compartmentalized.
 - The goal is to get a good job.
 - Hands-on learning helps kids prepare for life.
 - Interaction among students enhances their attention.

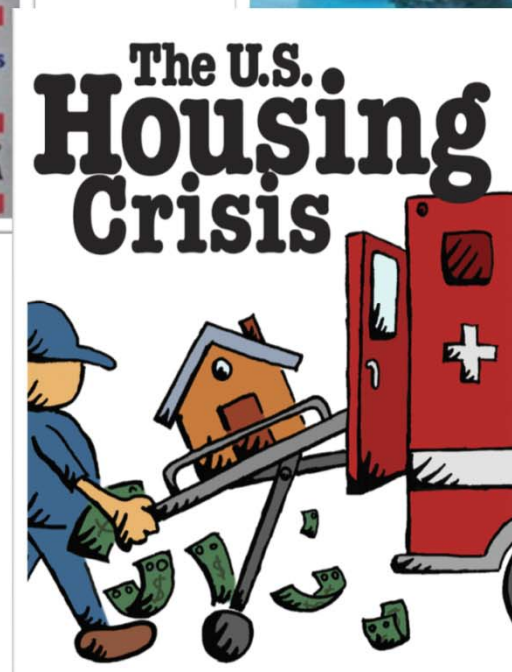
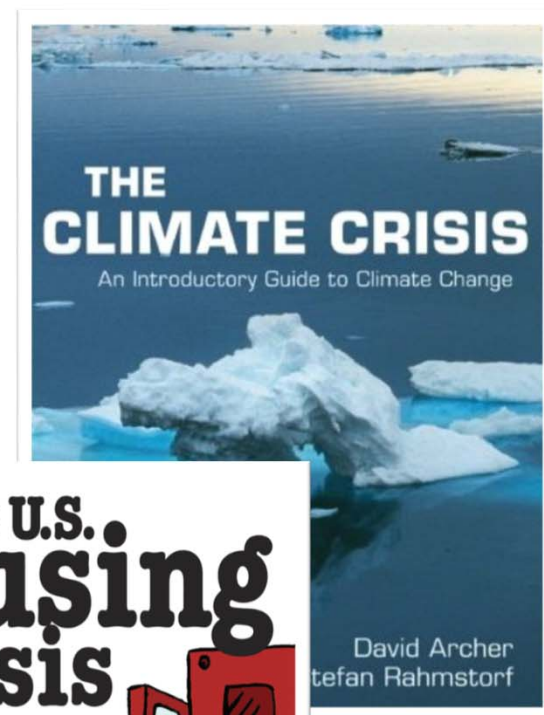
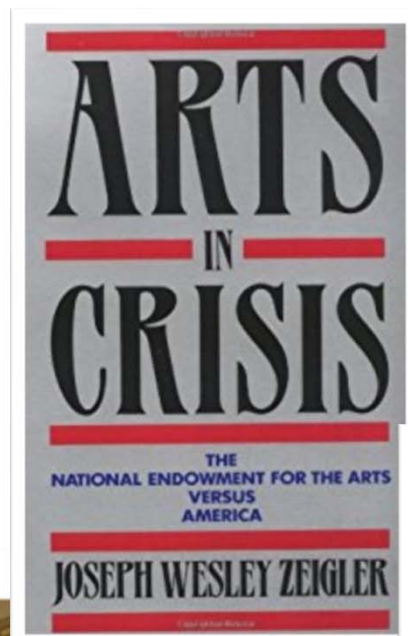
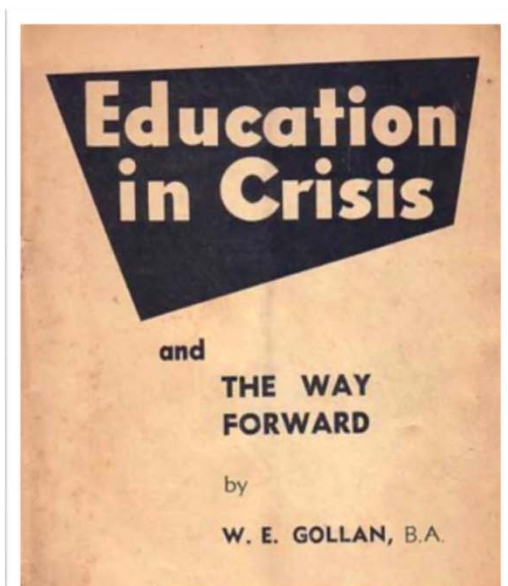
We can hold two competing frames as true.

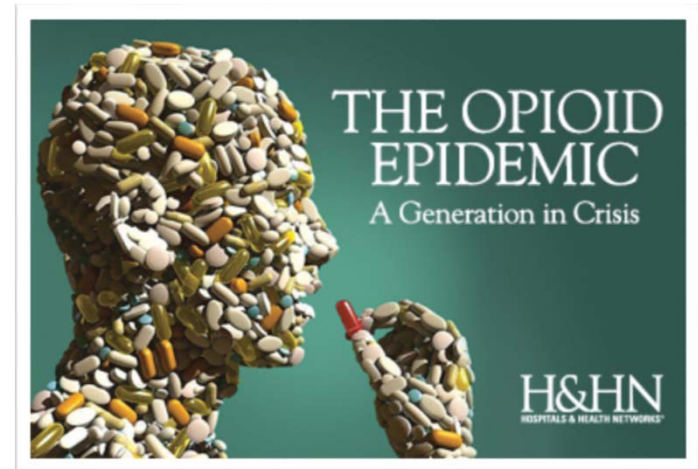
Our goal is to appeal to the more productive frame.

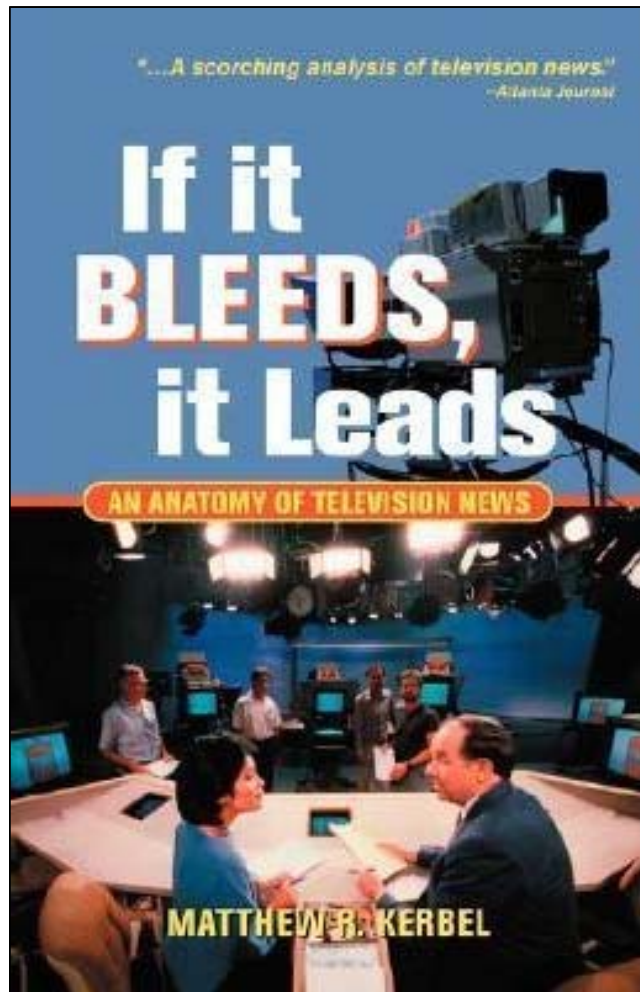
Resonate in the right direction.

#2 Crisis










“Kids running through a field. Kids running across the street. Policemen with clubs and helmets. A student pushed to the ground and handcuffed by three officers. Lots of movement. Enough to bump to second place the discovery of a woman’s corpse by a group of mountain bikers. There were no pictures of that.

And the pictures looked convincing. I mean, the police were wearing riot gear – how can you not lead with footage of riot gear?”




Crisis framing is designed to elicit a behavior change.

But it doesn't last.

The Problem with Problems

	Low Efficacy	Hi Efficacy
Low Urgency	<i>Baseline</i>	
Hi Urgency	 <i>Fatalism</i>	

The Problem with Problems

	Low Efficacy	Hi Efficacy
Low Urgency	<i>Baseline</i>	 <i>Low Motivation</i>
Hi Urgency	 <i>Fatalism</i>	 <i>Magic</i>

Communicate urgency, but don't forget efficacy.

#3 Fact checking

Flu Vaccine

Facts & Myths



Department of Health
and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention

MYTH "The flu isn't a serious disease."

FACTS Influenza (flu) is a serious disease of the nose, throat, and lungs, and it can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu. Most who die are 65 years and older. But small children less than 2 years old are as likely as those over 65 to have to go to the hospital because of the flu.

MYTH "The flu shot can cause the flu."

FACTS The flu shot cannot cause the flu. Some people get a little soreness or redness where they get the shot. It goes away in a day or two. Serious problems from the flu shot are very rare.

MYTH "The flu shot does not work."

FACTS Most of the time the flu shot will prevent the flu. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the flu shot has ranged from 70% to 90% when there is a good match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine. **Getting the vaccine is your best protection against this disease.**

MYTH "The side effects are worse than the flu."

FACTS The worst side effect you're likely to get from a shot is a sore arm. The nasal mist flu vaccine might cause nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat and cough. The risk of a severe allergic reaction is less than 1 in 4 million.

MYTH "Only older people need a flu vaccine."

FACTS Adults and children with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and kidney disease **need to get a flu shot**. Doctors also recommend children 6 months and older get a flu shot every year until their 5th birthday.

MYTH "You must get the flu vaccine before December."

FACTS Flu vaccine can be given before or during the flu season. The best time to get vaccinated is October or November. **But you can get vaccinated in December or later.**

For more information, ask your healthcare provider or call
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) Website www.cdc.gov/flu



Myths misremembered as facts



Got worse over time



Attributed false info to CDC

Myside bias

Bush assertion that tax cuts increase revenue.

“The tax relief stimulated economic vitality and growth and it has helped increase revenues to the Treasury,” Bush said in his weekly radio address. “The increased revenues and our spending restraint have led to good progress in reducing the federal deficit.”

Same message, plus data

“However, even with the recent increases, revenues in 2005 will remain well below previous projections from the CBO. The major tax cut of 2001 and further cuts in each of the last three years were followed by an unprecedented three year decline in nominal tax revenues, from \$2 trillion in 2000 to \$1.8 trillion in 2003.”

Source: Nyhan, Brendan, and Jason Reifler. 2010. “When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions. *Political Behavior*, 32(2), 303-330.

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FINDINGS

Conservatives more likely than liberals to believe that tax cuts increase revenue.

But, conservatives exposed to **myth + fact** were **TWO TIMES** more supportive of “tax cuts increase revenue” statement than those exposed to just the myth.

Source: Nyhan, Brendan, and Jason Reifler. 2010. “When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions. *Political Behavior*, 32(2), 303-330.

Human cognition is not logical.

Our goal is to offer alternative, more compelling frames, not refute the ones that don't align.

Recognize existence of misperception.

“Contrary to popular belief...”

State affirmative case

“In fact...”

Expand affirmative case

Examples, explanatory chain, etc.

Kill off misperception completely

“The data clearly shows...”

Framing Practice

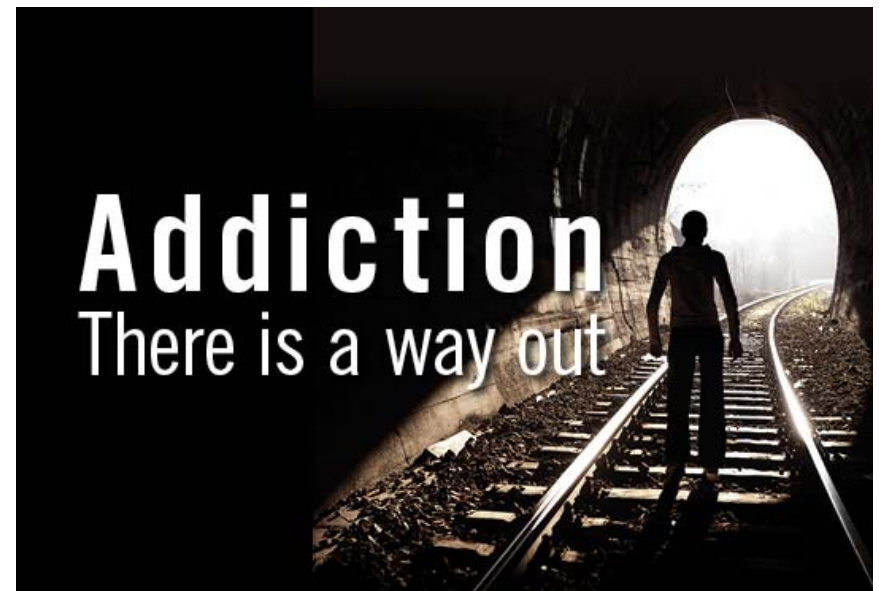
Open with a “myth-busting alert” phrase.

Continue the sentence with a clear, concise statement of what ***IS*** true.

Elaborate on “affirmative case” with more explanation, data, or example.

Conclude with a statement that “kills the myth.”

#4 Individualize



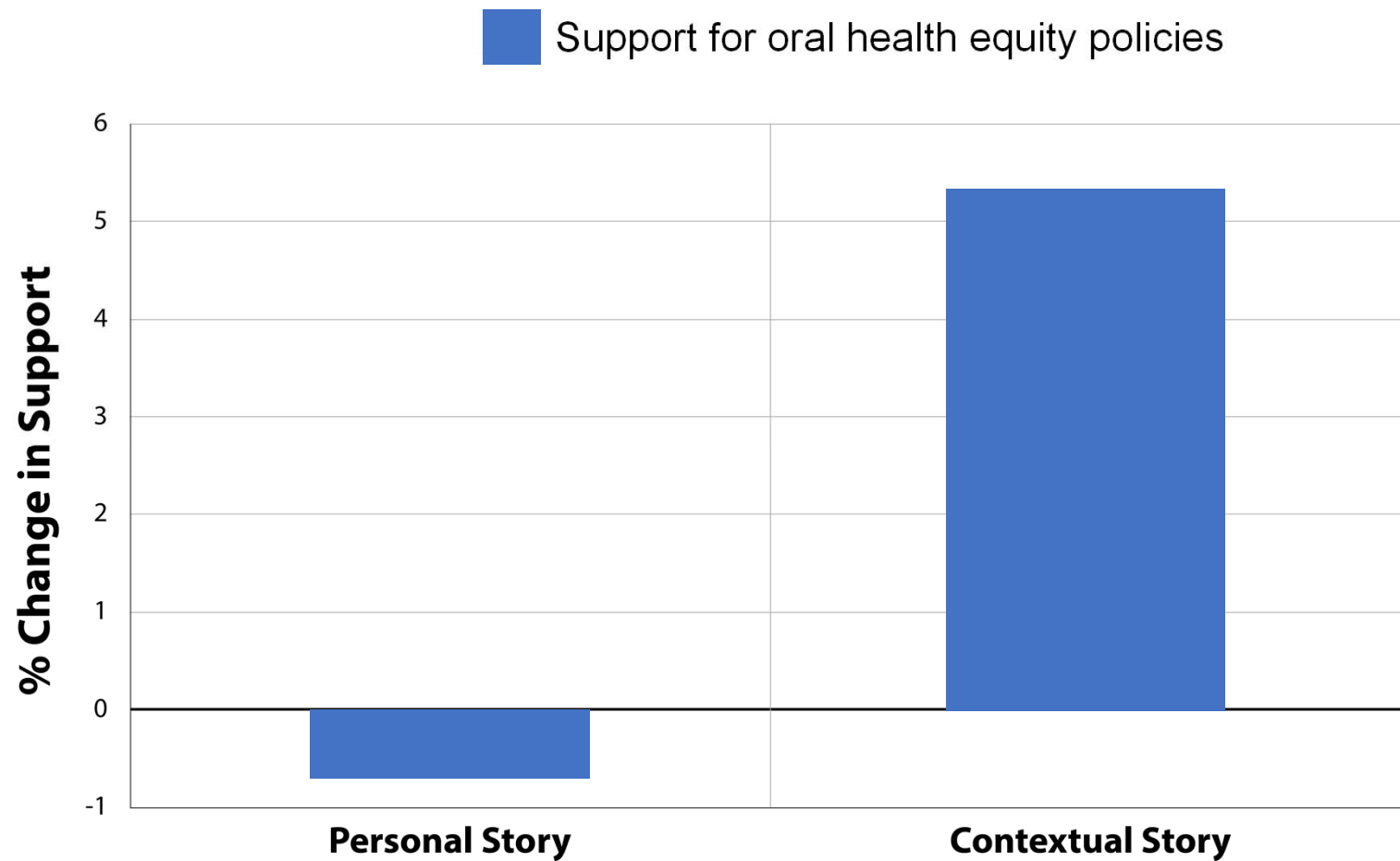


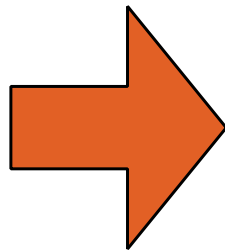
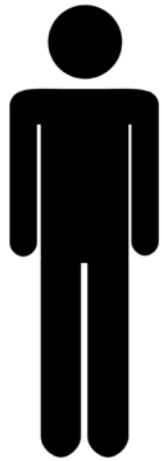


WAITING FOR "SUPERMAN"

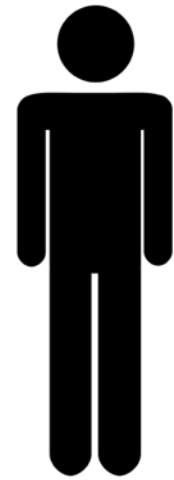
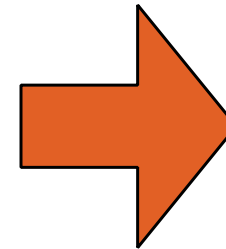
As we attempt to change a system, we use examples of individuals to prove our point, without tying the two together.

Not All Stories Are Created Equal





Cause/Responsibility



Solutions

If your cause is systemic change, talk in systemic terms.

Explicitly tie cause, responsibility, and solutions together when using exemplar stories.

Provide context, explain problems, advance solutions that apply universally, not just in individual circumstances.

Illegal aliens

Immigration

Undocumented workers

Man-made pollution

Climate Change

Atmosphere trapping CO₂

Controlling impulses

Addiction

Recalibrating the brain

Student potential

Education

Teaching and learning

Avoid language that unwittingly advances an individualistic notion of the problem.

Whenever and wherever possible, expand the audience view to the entire system.

#5 Short-Term Wins

Too often, communicators
seek to serve their short-term
interests while ignoring the
effects of a broader public narrative.

Volunteer sign-ups

Social media engagement

OpEd placement

Fundraising

Media coverage

Event attendance

Celebrity endorsement

Legislative wins

Issue advocacy is about
shifting a public narrative.

That is, shifting fundamental mindsets
that are the lens through which
people consider an issue.

Advance mindsets that impact
long-term behavior change.

Desperation



DONATE NOW or TEXT "give" to 76492 to donate with your smartphone

PLEASE GIVE

LIVING CONDITIONS ARE IMPROVING AROUND THE WORLD,
BUT OVER **ONE BILLION PEOPLE** STILL LIVE IN **POVERTY**.

YOU CAN SAVE A CHILD'S LIFE

The lives of innocent children are plagued by starvation and disease. They have no food, clean water or toilets. Their situation is desperate.

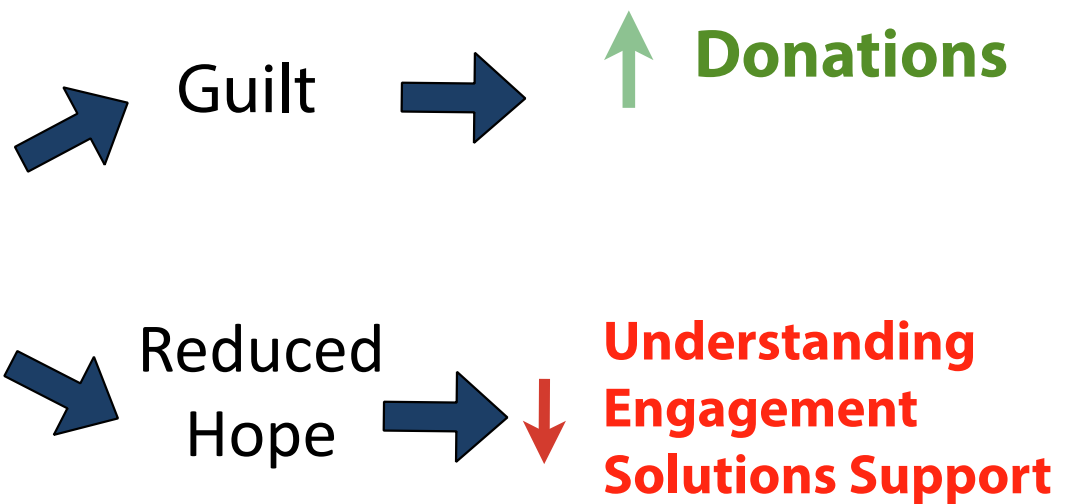
There is no one there to help them—their lives are in your hands. With your help, we can provide clean water and food to stop them dying.

Please donate before it's too late.

j a a g o
foundation

JAAGO Foundation is a registered non-profit organization. Established in 2007, we work in low income countries to improve living environments and social conditions.

Hudson et. al, 2016



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FUTURE DOCTOR

ALL OF US SHARING A LITTLE MORE CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Families in poor countries work hard to provide the same things for their children as we do. We all want to be able to look after ourselves and our families.

Amadi's parents want him to grow up happy, healthy and go to school. Amadi, like so many other children, wants to be a doctor when he's older.

Please donate and together we can educate the next teacher, farmer or doctor.

j a a g o
foundation

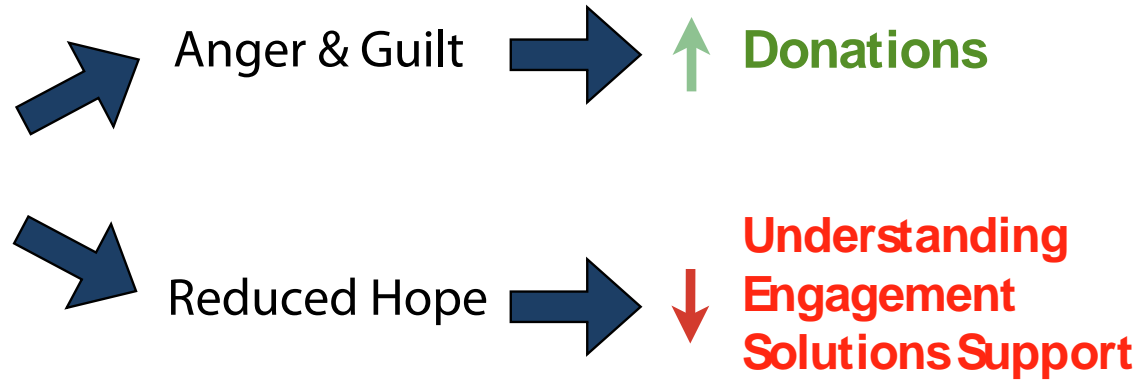
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Context
Agency
Commonalities

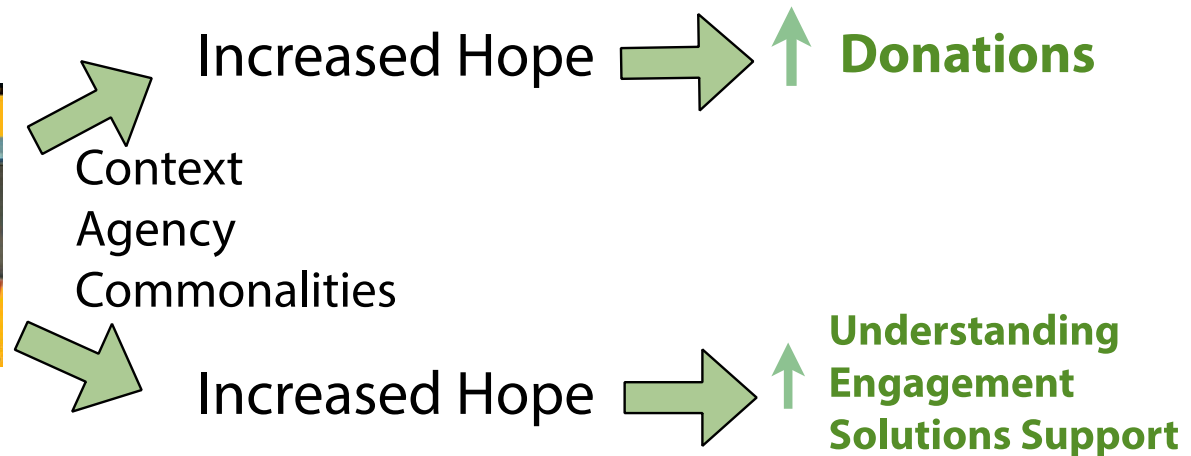
Alternative



Traditional



Alternative



AVOID

- Individualism
- Consumerism
- “Deserving” opportunity
- Low-income trade-offs
- Crisis
- Story of them

ADVANCE

- Balance people, places, systems
- Myth-busting / Fact-checking
- Intersectionality
- Explicit causes and effects
- Examples of successful policies
- Story of us

How do people think and
talk about our issue?

Messaging is not the
same as narrative.

Identifying the broad public narrative around our issue is key to avoiding triggering unproductive or short-term mindsets.

Shaun Adamec

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