



Crafting Nonprofit Messages That Stick and Spread By Kathleen Welsh Beveridge

How "sticky" is your nonprofit's message?

I don't mean "bottom of your shoe" sticky but, rather, sticky like a great advertising jingle or an urban legend. For mission-centered messages, being sticky is a good thing.

Two excellent books can help nonprofit organizations craft stickier messages and build networks that are capable of spreading those messages. The first is *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, by Malcolm Gladwell.

The Tipping Point explores the question of why some ideas catch on and spread while others do not. Knowing this, we might do a better job of communicating and spreading our own ideas. According to *The Tipping Point*, there are two parts to spreading "nonprofit fever:"

- Crafting a "sticky" message and putting it everywhere, and
- Making "wanting to be involved with your nonprofit" contagious.

There are two important factors in the success (or failure) of a message to have impact. They are:

1. **The Messenger.** Who is sending the message? We must find people capable of spreading our message via word of mouth.
2. **The Message.** How sticky is it? **Stickiness** is about the message. A sticky message is memorable and moves us to action.

There are three kinds of people we ought to try to attract to our nonprofits, through our staff and board networks, because they make good messengers.

Connectors are people who link us up with the world. They know lots of people and their connections span many different worlds because of a combination of curiosity, self-confidence, sociability, and energy. They have the social glue to spread the message far and wide.

Mavens, from the Yiddish, are those who accumulate knowledge. They are specialists and go-to experts that have special credibility on a subject and they like to initiate discussions and respond to requests in their area of expertise. They are educators and helpers in the marketplace of ideas, imbuing the message with credibility.

Salespersons are persuaders who convince people in situations of uncertainty. They have energy, enthusiasm, charm, and likability. They are able to quickly build trust and rapport.

Ask yourself: Who in your community fits these roles? Then figure out how to approach these people and engage them with your organization. Even if you think they would not agree to be board members, they could be the key to helping you spread the word to others who may. The potential payoff is worth the effort.

Now - for the message. *The Tipping Point* introduces the concept of sticky messages, saying that the packaging and presentation of ideas matters for whether they will spread. Another book called *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* by Chip and Dan Heath makes this idea of crafting sticky messages much more concrete. It provides tips on how to craft and recognize sticky ideas.

What are some sticky messages? The Golden Rule is one that is so sticky I don't even need to write it here, I'm so sure you know it. Another you may know is "Where's the beef?" Remember that Wendy's commercial from the 1980's? Remember how it stayed in your head? Did it move you to action by changing your fast-food buying behavior?

According to *Made to Stick*, we can evaluate messages for stickiness based on six parameters that handily create the acronym "SUCCEsS."

Simple/profound. Like proverbs, sticky messages are directive statements that tell us something profound about how to live our lives in ten words or less.

Unexpected. Sticky messages get attention through surprise, hold attention through interest or mystery, and open gaps in knowledge, later filling them in.

Concrete. Sticky messages use detailed, experience-based images that are memorable, resonate with our experience, and help us focus our attention.

Credible. Sticky messages give us a reason to believe or to agree with what we are hearing. They make data accessible by connecting it to our experience.

Emotional. Sticky messages make people care. They make it personal, bringing it to individual scale by connecting to something the audience already cares about.

Story. Sticky messages get people to act. Stories act like simulations that help people to know how to act in certain situations. They inspire people and give them the energy to act.

The more of these characteristics we can have in our messages, the stickier they will be. Nonprofits would be wise to develop not only advertisements but also talking points for staff and board members that include several of these characteristics. A brainstorming exercise using these parameters as a guide could lead to much greater effectiveness in communicating an organization's purpose and importance.

Check out these excellent books and begin crafting stickier messages and building outreach networks of connectors, mavens, and salespersons that will start your messages spreading. Your bottom line will thank you.

As always, if Spark Nonprofit Consulting can be of assistance in your efforts, please contact us.

Kathleen Welsh Beveridge
President
Spark Nonprofit Consulting
1195 Dager Road
Warminster, PA 18974
www.sparknpc.com
kathy@sparknpc.com
215-262-1372