

Minute Message Model

Messaging for impact

“So, tell me about your school.” If these words strike fear in your heart, you’re not alone. Many schools have a tough time explaining what makes their educational approach so unique. They’re more familiar with how to launch into curricular details and statistics than with really connecting with their audience by conveying the impact their pedagogy has on the lives of real students.

Our Minute Message Model will change all that.

Developing effective messaging isn’t rocket science, and we’ve been helping great schools get better at it for decades. Whether you’ve got one minute to get your message across during a shared elevator ride, five minutes at a reception, or ten minutes while your prospective families take a tour, our Minute Message Model will give you confidence that you’re using that time well.

Message Basics

USE YOUR NAME. Your name typically conveys a great deal of information about your school in a way that an acronym just doesn’t.

AVOID JARGON. When you assume your audience knows what you’re talking about, you’re missing an opportunity for a deeper connection with them.

NEVER ASSUME. What’s the educational problem you’re addressing, and why should they care? Start there every time.

REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT. We’re bombarded with thousands of messages each day, so it takes repetition to break through.

MAKE IT PERSONAL. Your target audience’s support is critical to your success. Involve them in your messaging.

HIGHLIGHT BENEFITS, NOT FEATURES. Features are what your school does. Benefits are what happens as a result. Right-fit families need to understand why your many campus amenities contribute to something more than just the sum of their parts.

2 Minute Message

DEFINE yourself + tell **WHY** you exist

If you've got another minute with your audience, now's the time to go a little deeper. What problem does your school exist to solve? What aspect of the problem is it that only your school is addressing? You'll only have one One Minute Message, but you may have several Two Minute Messages. They lay out how your work solves specific problems and makes the world a better place.

They set the context for everything else you say about your school, and you should return to them over and over again. Your Two Minute Messages are visionary. Your goal is to build an emotional connection with your audience by defining a problem in clear, simple language. Craft your Two Minute Messages by answering the question, "What's the challenge that only my school can solve?"

5 Minute Message

DEFINE yourself + tell **WHY** you exist + describe your **IMPACT**

If you have a little longer with your audience—at an admissions open house, perhaps, in a formal presentation, or in a fundraising appeal—be strategic. Start the same way you would if you had one or two minutes. Begin with your One Minute Message and then share a Two Minute Message explaining the problem you aim to solve.

Then tell a story. Describe the impact your school has on the lives of real people—not with facts, figures and pie charts—with emotional anecdotes. Explain how real students (or teachers, or families) are actually helped by the work you do every day. Don't explain what programs you offer; demonstrate the importance of those programs by showing what happens when they work.

Most importantly, end your story by describing how only your school could have created this outcome.

10 Minute Message

DEFINE yourself + tell **WHY** you exist + describe your **IMPACT** + *then* tell **HOW** you do it.

The Ten Minute Message leads up to the “Ask.” Tailor this message to your particular audience; you’ll be in a stronger position, when the time comes, to make them the heroes of the story: “This happens because of you.”

First, introduce your school (your One Minute Message). Then, name a problem that you solve (a Two Minute Message). Next, add a story (a Five Minute Message) that shows your audience how it plays out in real life.

And then (and only then) you can get to your programmatic and academic work, explaining in detail how your programs support getting the job done. If your audience wants to hear them, your Ten Minute Messages describe the nuts and bolts of how you achieve impact and put your values into action.

Be sure to explain the benefit of the program, not just its features. For example: “We use technology to enhance student learning, cultivate digital citizenship, and foster digital literacy across the curriculum.” That’s much more compelling than “We have a 1-to-1 iPad program.”

End each Ten Minute Message by asking for what you need. If you’re speaking to donors, ask for money. Be concrete: how much, from how many, to accomplish exactly what? If you need volunteers, ask your audience to sign on. Use this moment. Ask.

CONCLUSION

No one knows your school as well as you do. Even your most ardent supporters can quickly get lost in a list of all your curricular offerings. The thing that they care most about is that you’re achieving your vision and making a difference. Every conversation, every newsletter, every annual report and news interview is a new chance to spend one minute, five, or ten reminding your audiences why your school matters and how they can be a part of it. Use your time well.

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofits and schools. We believe that nonprofits, foundations, and independent schools only reach their highest potential if people understand the importance of their work—not just what they do, but why it matters.

Every day we partner with schools like Marin Academy, Crane Country Day and Crystal Springs Upland School to help them determine the brand—or reputation—for which they want to be known. Then we help them bring that brand to life through key messages, admissions viewbooks, websites, videos, capital campaign materials, and more. As a result, our clients successfully raise more money and attract the right-fit faculty, staff and families they need to reach their goals.

Have a question? We’d love to hear from you. Write to Jennie Winton at jennie@mission-minded.com, or give Jennie a call at 415.990.9360.