

Starting the Conversation: How VA and Its Partners Can Be Part of Getting the Story Right for Veterans

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Objectives

- To Increase the Effectiveness of Your Communications with Capabilities
- To Focus you to be Message Driven and not Answer Driven

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Understand your Communication Requirements A Guide to Creating a Communication Plan

In creating an issue-or incident-specific communication plan, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) seek to integrate the efforts of its various offices and programs to provide proactive Veteran healthcare delivery information to key stakeholders. Proactive communication planning will enable VHA to more strategically tell its story rather than reacting to circumstances and media queries.

Successful communication plans usually include:

- Summary
- Statement (Response to Query (RTQ))
- Background
- Key Facts/Messages
- Proposed Action Timeline
- Questions and Answers
- Fact Sheet
- Veteran letters/phone scripts/employee email (as required for disclosures/mission changes)
- News Release

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**Gathering the Bottom Line
Shaping the Message**

**Facts provide information.
Emotions and Energy provide
*interpretation.***

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Audiences

- Congress
- Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs)
- Veterans
- Employees
- National News Media/Public

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**Gathering the Bottom Line
Shaping the Message
(Cont.)**

VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) Mission Statement:

To provide a structured Volunteer Program under the management of VA compensated employees in cooperation with community resources to serve America's Veterans and their families with dignity and compassion.

- ✓ Your 30 second speech will quickly define you for the audience
- ✓ Bottom Line Up Front
- ✓ Use Strong Action Verbs
- ✓ Not an Exsum or the duty description from your PD

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Staying on Message

30 Second Commercial:

Take the time to develop your script so that you are comfortable talking with anyone. Your speech should be memorable and effective and create interest on the part of the listener.

Guidelines for Creating Your 30-Second Commercial

- Use concise and clear language that isn't overly detailed.
- Sell your professional abilities and experience.
- Emphasize your strengths and link them to the needs of the employer.
- Use descriptive statements or specific examples of your acquired skills and abilities.
- State the kind of position you're seeking.
- Speak clearly and with confidence.
- Link your knowledge, skills and experience to the position and/or the employer.

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GREAT MESSAGES

ARE...

- Honest
- Relevant
- Concise
- People-Oriented
- Positive
- Simple
- Memorable

Understand that great messages can be the well thought-out message and/or the simple generic ones as well.

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GREAT MESSAGES ARE SUPPORTED BY

Examples

Figures

Anecdotes

Third Party
Endorsements

Visuals

HUMOR

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WHICH WOULD YOU REMEMBER

- “The federal funding is simply not coming fast enough”

Or....

- “The state gets its money by Federal Express, while we get ours by *Pony Express*”

Be memorable with your key messages – “snappy sound bites” & not only will it be what’s used in the story... it’ll be what people remember about the story

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The Media Covering the VA -- Do They Get it Right?

Information gathering tactics:

- Media Queries
- Freedom of Information (FOIA)
- Internal Leaks
- Word of Mouth
- Whistleblowers
- Ambushes

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TRUE OR FALSE?

- Reporters are out to get you???
- Reporters seek controversy???
- TV reporters oversimplify???
- Reporters will let you ramble, hoping you will say something you shouldn’t???

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