Take Back the Immigration Narrative:
How to Talk About Immigrants and Immigration
The Immigrant Learning Center
February 23, 2017
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What is a Frame?

Frames are sets of choices about how information is presented:

What to emphasize, how to explain it, and what to leave unsaid.
Given the importance of free speech, would you favor allowing a hate group to hold a political rally?

85% in Favor

Given the risk of violence, would you favor allowing a hate group to hold a political rally?

40% in Favor

Sniderman & Theriault, 2004
Framing is an empirical process
The way you communicate shapes what people think and do

Policy Support relative to control

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Interdependence</th>
<th>Ingenuity</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support for Evidence-Based Addiction Policies</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
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N=6,000
“Them”
- Law Breakers
- Illegal Mexican/Highly-Skilled Asian
- Takers
- Immigration Nostalgia
- Security and Control

Zero Sum
- Job Competition
- Drain on the System

Punitive
- Secure the Border
- Set an Example–Rational Actor

What’s in the swamp of...

Immigration

“Us”
- Humanist–People are People
- Nation of Immigrants
- Celebrate Diversity

Fatalism
- Immigration Surge
- Money Talks
- Politics as Usual
- System Too Big and Screwed Up

Black Box

Pragmatism
- Economic Fit
- Make it Work
Cultural Models As Basis For Strategic Communications

Multiple Models Available

Some More Productive than Others

Choose the Cues that Activate them
Correcting their “mistakes” doesn’t work

In a study of the effects of myth-fact communications:

- People misremembered the myths as true.
- Got worse over time.
- Both older and younger readers made mistakes.
- Attributed false information to the CDC.

Avoid the Broken Immigration System
What is this about?

We value shared prosperity. To maintain and expand prosperity, it requires improvements to the way people become part of our country.

Why does this matter?

“We need to treat everyone with the compassion they deserve as human beings. No matter where we were born, we are all people and are all entitled to the same basic respect.”

“We need a common-sense, practical approach. Solutions should come from carefully considering all possible ideas, and then moving forward with the ones that have the best chance of improving our country.”

FACTS

How, exactly, would immigration reform enhance our prosperity?

There are several ways that improving our immigration system would move our economy forward. For example...

We need better policies to ensure that the US economy has full sails. One thing we could do is...

[provide a practical way for people living here without documentation to become citizens/rethink our policies for admitting new immigrants to add the skills and energy we need to thrive.]
Rights Need to be Explained, Not Just Asserted

One of the most basic American values is the belief that all people are created equal. No matter where we were born, we all deserve to be treated with kindness and respect, and we should all be able to live with dignity. In order to live up to this basic American ideal, we need to improve the way people become part of our country.

One of the most basic American values is the belief that all people are created equal. No matter where we were born, we should all be guaranteed basic rights and to have our freedoms respected. In order to live up to this basic American ideal, we need to improve the way people become a part of this country.
We need to treat everyone with the compassion they deserve as human beings. No matter where we were born, we are all people and are all entitled to the same basic respect.

Our country should not keep family members apart or deny people basic assistance.

Treating all people with compassion should be the goal of immigration reform.

- Reference shared humanity and common interests: “We need to treat everyone with the compassion they deserve as human beings. No matter where we were born, we are all people and are all entitled to the same basic respect.”

- Demonstrate how current system does not recognize immigrants’ humanity: “Our country should not keep family members apart or deny people basic assistance.”

- Connect reform to ability to fulfill our moral obligation to other human beings: “Treating all people with compassion should be the goal of immigration reform.”
Pivot to Pragmatism when faced with opposition

FrameWorks researchers found that in contentious communications situations, appealing to Pragmatism worked to undo the damage of an opposing message and regain people’s support for reform.

1. Exposed to a Moral Argument appeal, people’s support for immigration reform went up.

2. But when that message was countered with an opposing message, support dropped.

3. An appeal to Pragmatism showed the strongest ability to regain some of the lost support.
We need a common-sense, practical approach. Solutions should come from carefully considering all possible ideas, and then moving forward with the ones that have the best chance of improving our country.

It wouldn’t make sense to send all the people that are in the country without documentation back to their country of origin — this is impractical, and wouldn’t help the situation.

We need to focus on taking reasonable steps toward solutions, rather than adopting impractical measures that don’t have the potential to work.

- Appeal to common sense and practical measures:
  “We need a common-sense, practical approach. Solutions should come from carefully considering all possible ideas, and then moving forward with the ones that have the best chance of improving our country.”

- Point out how alternative proposals are not practical:
  “It wouldn’t make sense to send all the people that are in the country without documentation back to their country of origin — this is impractical, and wouldn’t help the situation.”

- Highlight feasibility of reform:
  “We need to focus on taking reasonable steps toward solutions, rather than adopting impractical measures that don’t have the potential to work.”
Avoid these swampy frames:

Getting out of the shadows
Worthy, deserving immigrants
Broken immigration system
These data speak for themselves
This is about immigrants’ rights
This is a problem for population x
Solution?

And substitute these instead

An outdated immigration system
Creating an immigration system that optimally utilizes the energy and contributions of us all
Change is possible, feasible, practical
These data suggest immigration reform will move us forward
This is about our shared humanity
We all need a solution to this problem
SOLUTION! SOLUTION! SOLUTION!