



Breaking Through the Clutter:

Tips for Talking to the Mainstream Media About Economic Opportunity and Inequality in America

The mainstream media is a frustrating, but necessary, means of getting our ideas out to people who might support and join us. Here are a few ideas for getting beyond the distortions and clutter to reach everyday Americans:

Lead with Values. Most communicators agree: people don't change their minds based on facts alone, but rather based on how those facts are framed to fit their emotions and values. The Occupy movement is well-suited to engage people on this level, underscoring that our economic policies should be propelled by the values of accountability, economic security and mobility, and opportunity for all, not greed, privilege, or the interests of a few.

Answer the Question You Want to Be Asked, not the Question You *Were* Asked. Reporters often have a pre-framed story in their heads and ask questions designed to get answers that fit that frame. But we don't have to answer their exact questions. No need to be evasive, but there are ways to pivot from their questions to the answers we want to share. An example:

Q: This movement doesn't seem to stand for anything. Aren't you all just needlessly wasting taxpayers' money on police overtime?

A: We stand for protecting taxpayers and making sure that our shared resources go to building an economy that works for all of us, not just wealthy banks and corporations.

Remember Your Audience. When talking to the media, your audience is not the reporter, but those who will see, hear or read the reporter's story. It's important to know whether your audience is a supportive one that needs inspiration to act, or a skeptical one that needs more measured persuasion. When it's not obvious, ask reporters about their news outlet and whom it serves. When time allows, Google them and find out for yourself.

Tell *Your* Story, Not Your Opposition's. Cutting through the clutter is about consistency. This doesn't mean saying the same words over and over again, but it *does* mean having a couple of main points or themes that permeate our interactions with the media. And be careful not to repeat the opposition's story. Opponents of the Occupy movement are telling a consistent, negative, and inaccurate tale about us: that we offer no solutions, are protesting for the sake of protest, and are a public nuisance. The best way to overcome that echo chamber is with a positive drumbeat of our own that avoids repeating the false claims of others.

Be Honest and Accurate. One of the great strengths of the Occupy movement is that it is genuine, straightforward, and truthful. Protect that moral high ground, which distinguishes us from many of those who oppose us. If a statement is your opinion or belief, say so. And take the time to check your facts.

Say What You're For, as Well as What You're Against. While the diverse participants in the Occupy movement may not share a single list of policy demands, we can and should paint a positive picture of the society we're trying to create. Most people already have a lot to worry about, and are in no mood for problems with no solutions in sight. In order to cut through the clutter of stories about how bad things are, we need to paint a picture of what our country should look like. For example, one that embraces and promotes:

- **Opportunity** - for honest work that pays a decent, living wage.
- **Accountability** - with fair rules, enforcement, and prosecution where appropriate of the corporations and individuals who lawlessly wrecked our economy.
- **Fairness** – including a tax system in which the wealthiest companies, millionaires, and billionaires (the 1%) contribute their fair share to the nation that gives them so much.
- **Voice** – a political system in which every American's voice and vote are equal, and large sums of money are not allowed to corrupt the democratic process.
- **Economic Mobility** - access to an affordable college education for everyone who has the ability and desire to attend, without the crippling burden of loan debt.
- **Economic Security** – including a halt to unnecessary foreclosures, the restoration of devastated neighborhoods, and reductions in mortgage payments to fair, realistic levels.

Build a Strategic Message. One formula for building an effective message is Value, Problem, Solution, Action. Using this structure, we lead with the values that are at stake, outline why the problem we're spotlighting is a threat to those values, point toward a solution, and ask our audience to take a concrete action.

Value: This country is built on the idea of opportunity for all Americans, regardless of where you come from or what you look like.

Problem: But that's far from what we're seeing today, with working Americans' living standards declining and the richest 1% holding 40% of the nation's wealth.

Solution: Reclaiming the promise of opportunity means demanding an economy that works for everyone, not just the richest 1%. The banks and corporations have to help fix the disaster they caused, pay their fair share, and work with the rest of the country to make this better.

Action: Join us by [include a concrete action that your audience can take].