

Blue Jean Nation "Messaging isn't half the solution"

Written by Mike McCabe, Blue Jean Nation

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Messaging is a popular buzzword in today's political circles, but real leading is done by example. When people see public service treated as preparation for cushy jobs on K Street or elsewhere, actions speak louder than words.

ALTOONA, WI - In this post-truth, alternative-fact world, "messaging" is a popular buzzword in political circles. Those who win are convinced superior messaging is the secret of their success. Those who lose are convinced that faulty messaging was their downfall and all they need to do to win is get better at it. There are messaging gurus on both sides. They get a lot of attention and make a lot of money doling out advice.



Messaging has become something of an obsession, especially on the Democratic side. To hear Democratic insiders tell it, bad messaging is why their party has lost power all across the country and improved messaging will bring about a Democratic resurgence. It won't. At least not on its own.

Don't get me wrong here. Effective communication is pretty darned important in politics. But if you stand for nothing, it doesn't matter how clever and polished your messaging is. Your message is still about nothing. If your ideas have gone bad or your steps take you in the wrong direction, sweet words can't rescue sour thinking or rotten actions. If the messenger isn't trusted, the message will be rejected no matter how artfully it is expressed.

As recently as a generation ago, public service was widely seen as noble. Many if not most Americans no longer think of public service that way because they have a hard time seeing today's elected officials as public servants. The best imaginable messaging can't change that. Saying over and over again that public service is noble won't make people think it is. They've seen too much evidence of self dealing and ladder climbing and nest feathering. They've seen too many public offices used as stepping stones to far more lucrative gigs. They see the revolving door. They see career politicians holding some office one day and then trading on the

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connections they've made the next to pull in \$250 or \$300 an hour or more as lobbyists or campaign consultants.

It does no good to tell people of the value of public service. They have to be shown. Leadership is required. Messaging is a lot of things, but it is not leadership. Real leading is done by example. When people see public service treated as preparation for cushy jobs on [K Street](#) or elsewhere in the

[political industrial complex](#)

paying six- and seven-figure salaries, that example trumps any messaging to the contrary. The only way to restore faith in public service is to replace countless self-serving acts of "me politics" with public-spirited acts of "

[we politics](#)

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No matter how much the messaging gurus are paid to persuade us to think otherwise, what generations of parents have been teaching their children still rings true. Actions speak louder than words.

— *Mike McCabe*