

Effective Spokespeople

Martha Stewart might be a great spokesperson for a home décor company, but political strategists probably wouldn't recommend using her to represent the Republican view on the immigration debate. Whether you're creating a print ad, putting a quote in a press release, or sending someone to speak on national television, you need to pick the spokesperson who will most effectively get your message across.

Your spokesperson doesn't have to be famous (although that may get you some bonus points), but they do need to be compelling and believable on your issue. Try to develop a pool of spokespersons who can speak to various audiences on various topics. If the story is about a Hispanic family, try to use a Hispanic spokesperson. If it's about religious views in the south, try to use a supportive southern pastor. If you need an expert, find an expert. If you want to show how the issue impacts everyday LGBT people, use someone who can share a compelling personal story.

Most organizations feel pressure to put their executive team out front. However, they often do this at the expense of effective messaging. Your executive director may be extremely well-spoken, but they shouldn't do the speaking unless they're the best person to convey your message to your target audience. Your organization can get more coverage—and more compelling coverage—by using the most effective spokespersons possible. Reporters will be more likely to turn to you if the quotes they get help them create a good story. And, as you get more and better coverage, donors will take notice, even if your executive director isn't always front and center.



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CASE STUDY: SERVICE MEMBERS LEGAL DEFENSE NETWORK

The Service Members Legal Defense Network (SLDN) uses compelling spokespersons to great effect. To fight against Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT), the organization maintains a database of former gay and lesbian military personnel who it can call on to speak out. These trained spokespersons then speak from their personal experience. Hearing about the harmful affects of DADT from a recently dismissed Arab linguist, or the first serviceman to be injured in Iraq, is compelling. It would be far less effective to use spokespersons who had never set foot in a military uniform.

SLDN also tries to ensure that its trained spokespersons represent a cross-section of ethnicities, military experience, and geographic spread. If a reporter in Kentucky wants to interview someone local, or if a Hispanic newspaper wants to interview someone in Spanish, SLDN consults its database and provides a reference.

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