

# Understanding Strategic Communications

Jon Haber, Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy

Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education

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# Strategic Communications Defined

- Planned and intentional use of communications by an organization to fulfill its mission and goals
- Use of information, imagery, symbols to persuade and influence audiences to do something, feel something, create something, generate good will, etc.

# Importance

- Impact passage of legislation or adoption of regulation
- Impact effectiveness of elected officials, candidates, ballot initiatives
- Build/grow brands
- Sell products
- Build movements
- And more

# Strategic Communications Primer



# 1. Goals

# Goals: Define Communications Success

- Planned and intentional use of communications by an organization to fulfill its mission and goals

Not This



# Clearly Define Communications Success





# Defining Success

## Not Clear

- Increase visibility among customers
- Generate more news coverage
- Get more public support

## Clearly Defined

- Increase sales to current customers by 10%
- Generate news coverage that contains our messages
- Pass legislation in Congress

# Goals & Objectives

- **Goals:** one-sentence statement of the end to be achieved.
- **Objectives:** Specific, achievable, measurable and time-bound markers

**What is Success?**

## 2. Audiences

## 2. Who Is Your Audience



# Audiences/Stakeholders

- Audiences are the individuals, groups of people or entities that enable your organization, candidate, elected official, etc. to achieve your communications goals
- Terms “target audiences” and “stakeholders” are interchangeable
- General rule: Identifying key audiences is a critical building block in all communications efforts

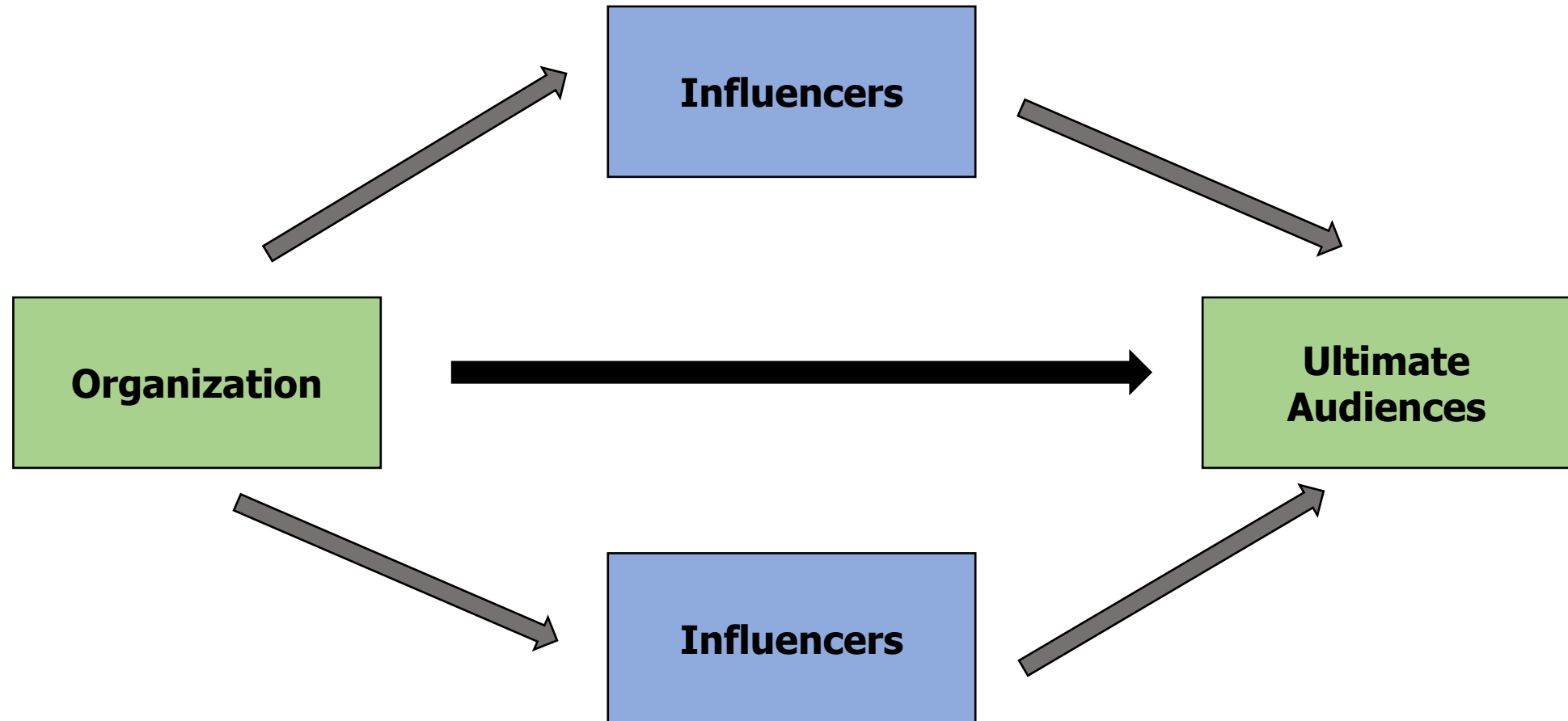
# The Deciders



# Ultimate vs. Intermediate Audiences

- Ultimate Audiences
  - “The deciders”
  - They are key to achieving your goals/objectives
- Influencer Audiences
  - They influence the Ultimate Audiences

# Ultimate vs. Intermediate Audiences





# Not the Chattering Class



# And Not...



# Almost Never the General Public...



# It's This: Key to Achieving Comms Goals



# 3. Messages

# 3. Strategic Messages

- Strategic message = set of statements that prompts targeted audience to take desired action
- It's what you want to say
  - **IN A WAY THE AUDIENCE CAN HEAR IT**

# Everything Communicates

- Words
- Tones
- Images
- Personal appearance
- Colors
- Symbolism
- **Silence**

# *Blink:* In an Instant

Conversations are born – and die – in first minutes of contact





# Core Principles of Strategic Messages

# Focus on the Desired Action

- Know what you want to occur as a result of your message
  - Begin with the end in mind
  - What are your goals/objectives?

# Desire Trumps Need

- People have needs. People seek wants.
- Focus on what the target audience wants, not needs.
- Most NGOs focus on needs, not wants
  - They tell their stakeholders what they should do (instead of asking them what they want)
  - Ex: social service agencies (eat healthy, exercise more)
- I need spinach but I want chocolate

# Determining Desire

- Identifying what motivates a target audience is as much an art as a science
  - Polling and focus groups can help
- Cluster people based on their common desires – rather than on their demographic or lifestyle factors



# Most Effective Messages

- Focus on impact, not process
- Focus on the heart, not the brain
- Easily understood; simple language
- Without jargon
- Convey a strong mental picture

# Less is More

- Initial window
  - We have 15-20 seconds to capture a listener's attention
  - That's 25-30 words
- Most successful strategic message contains no more than three major points
- Less is more – fewer words, fewer audiences, fewer points equal more success

# Five Steps to Messaging



# 5 Steps of Messaging

1. Identify action desired
2. Identify target audiences
3. Identify audience desires
4. Find the mutuality
5. Express the message

# Case study



# ATLA's Situation Analysis

- ATLA was on the defensive
  - Trial lawyers called greedy
  - Blamed for driving "good doctors," "small businesses" out of town
  - Blamed for driving up the cost of healthcare
- ATLA would say:
  - We're not greedy
  - There are more doctors today than there were x years ago

# ATLA's Goal

- How do we get off the defensive?
- How do we fight back?
- How do we change the narrative?
- How do we stop tort reform legislation?

# 5 Steps of Messaging

1. Identify action desired
2. Identify target audiences
3. Identify audience desires
4. Find the mutuality
5. Express the message

# 1. Identify the Action Desired

- What is the action the organization desires?
  - What action is the organization trying to bring about?
  - Creating awareness is rarely an action
- What is success?

# 1. ATLA: Identify Action Desired

- How do we get off the defensive?
- How do we fight back?
- How do we change the narrative?
- How do we stop tort reform legislation?

## 2. Identify the Target Audiences

- Who is the target audience?
  - Target audience(s) are those you need to act if your goal is to be achieved
- Who are your important audiences?



## 2. ATLA: Identify Target Audiences

- Ultimate Audiences
  - Yes: Moderate Democrats/Winnable Republicans in U.S. Congress
  - No: Liberal Democrats or non-winnable Republicans
- Influencer audiences
  - Interest groups
  - Media

# 3. Identify Audiences' Desires

- People listen to messages that speak to their self-interest
- People are motivated by desire more than need

# 3. ATLA: Identify Audience Desires

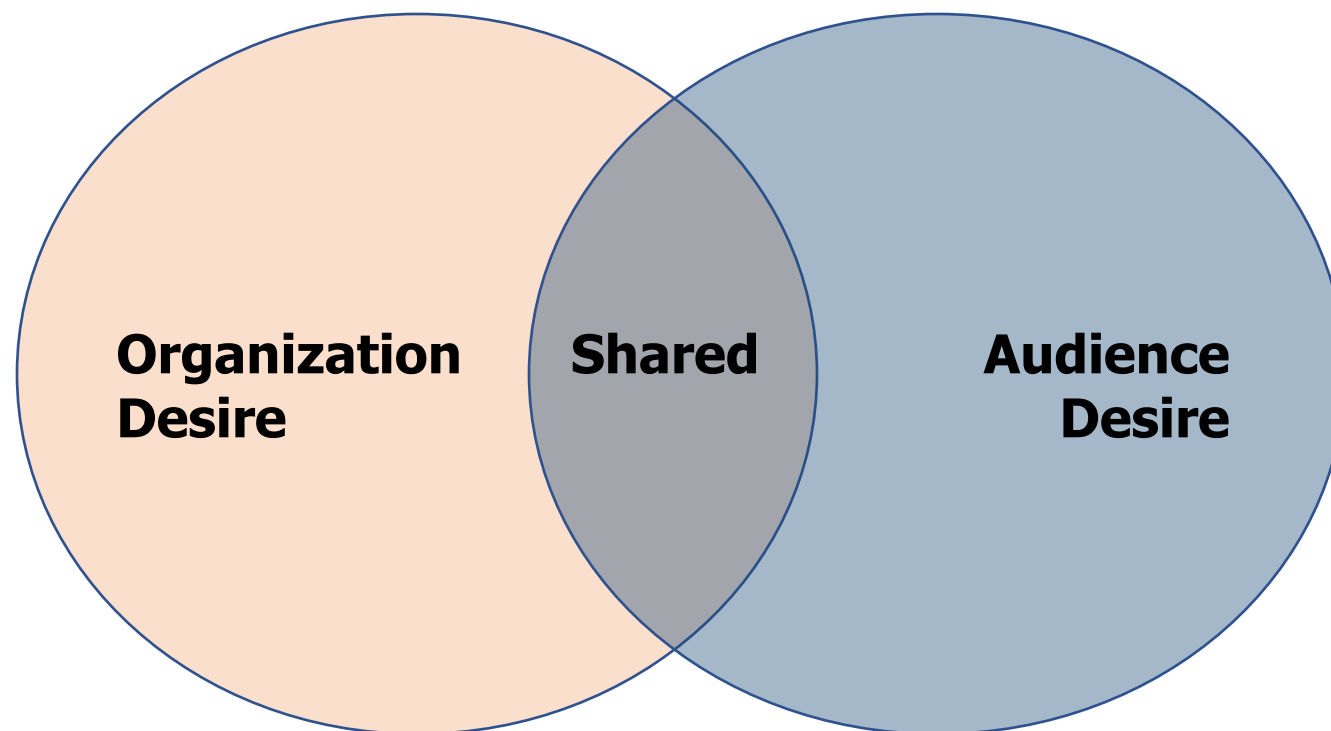
- Protect constituents against “greedy” and “out-of-control” special interests
  - e.g., tobacco, chemical, oil companies, etc.
  - Focus on greedy CEOs
- Check on CEOs and bad corporate behavior
- Want justice and a fair system for people

# 4. Find the Mutuality

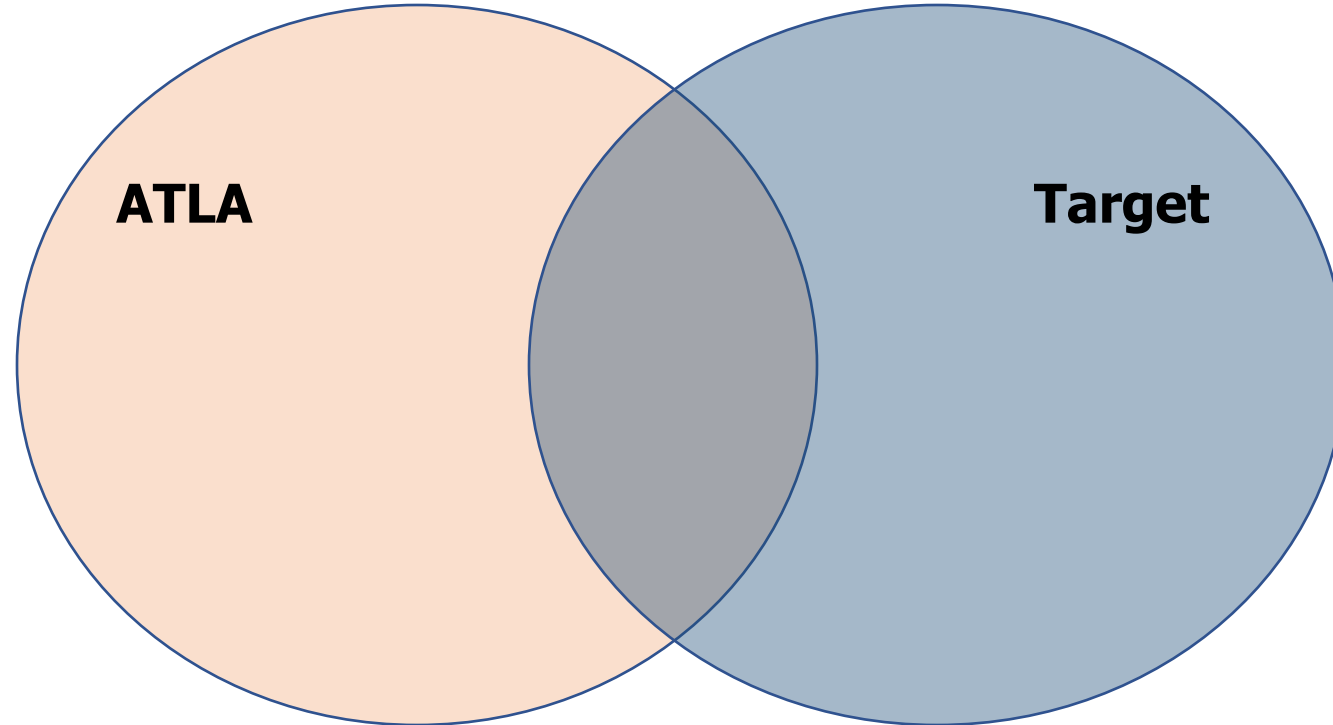
- Success is mutual satisfaction of desire
- Seek mutual satisfaction, not mutual desire
  - Organization and its target audience may support the same action but their reasons for doing so may differ
- This overlap is the essential ingredient for an effective message

# 4. Find the Mutuality

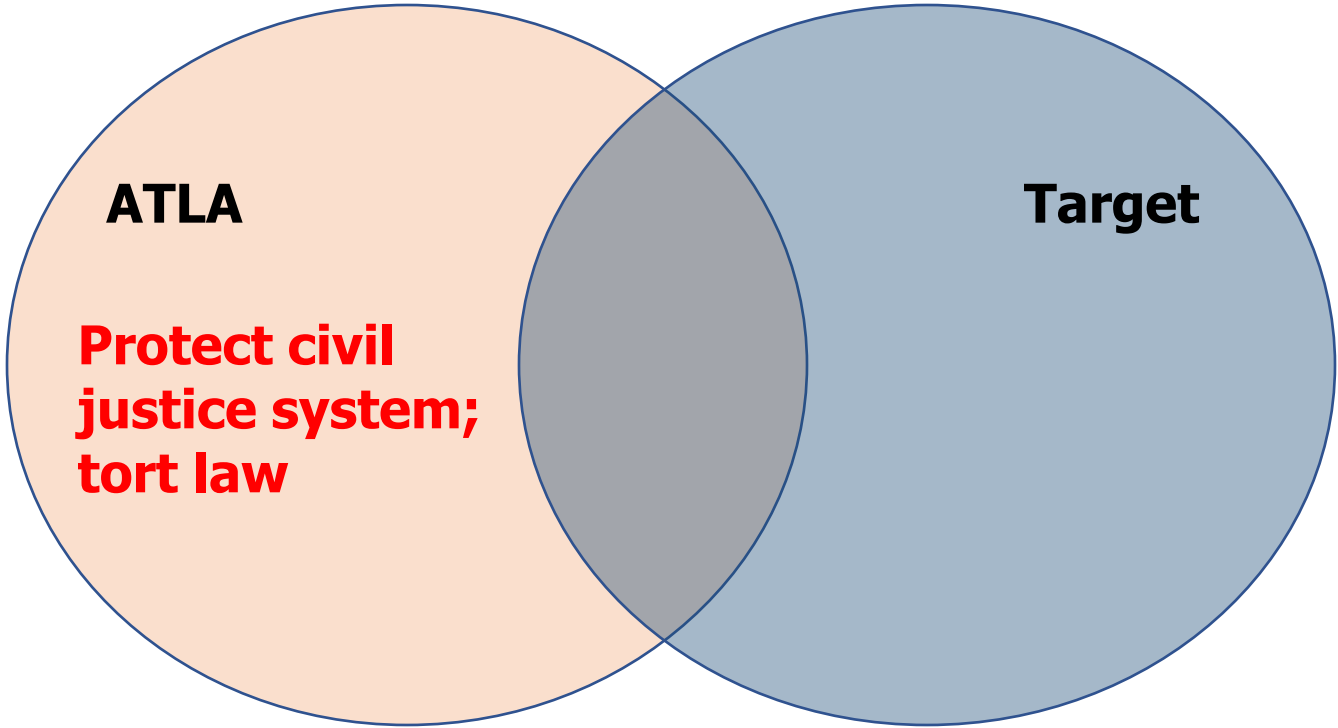
Mutual satisfaction of desire is secret to success



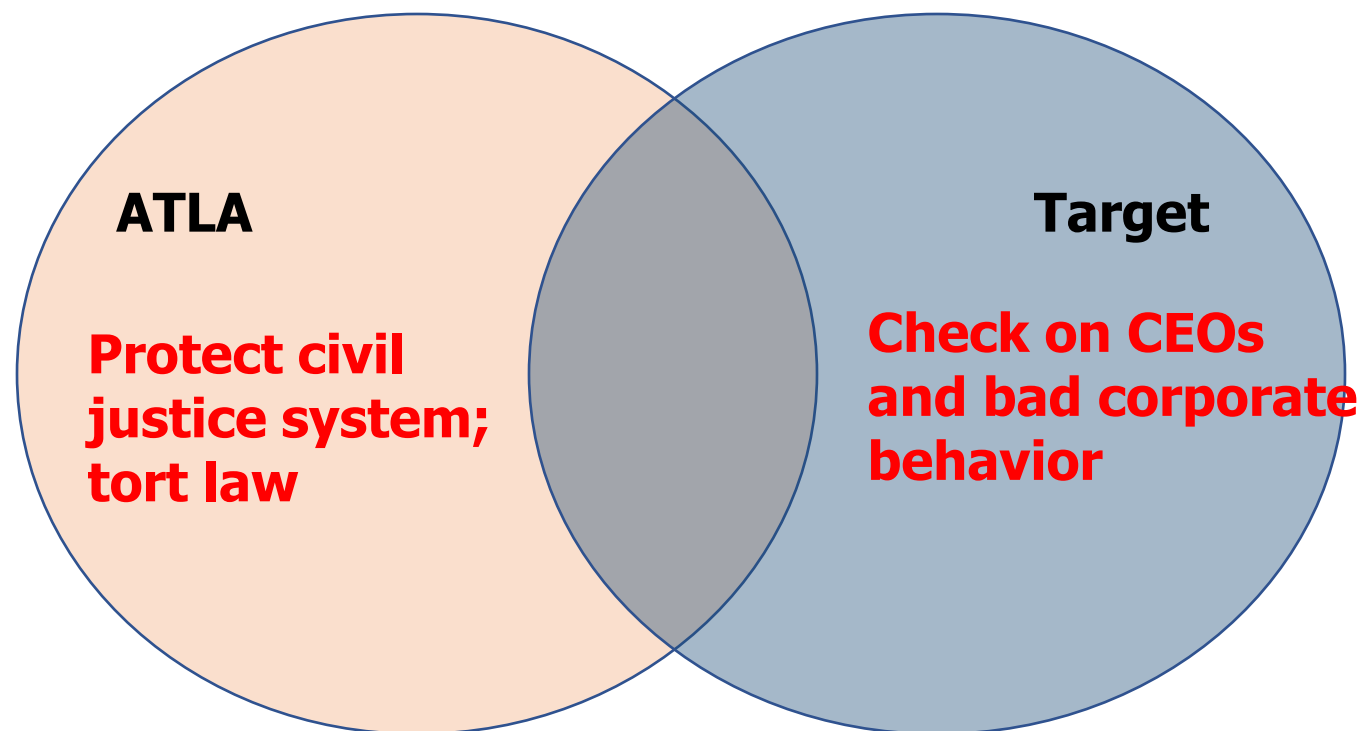
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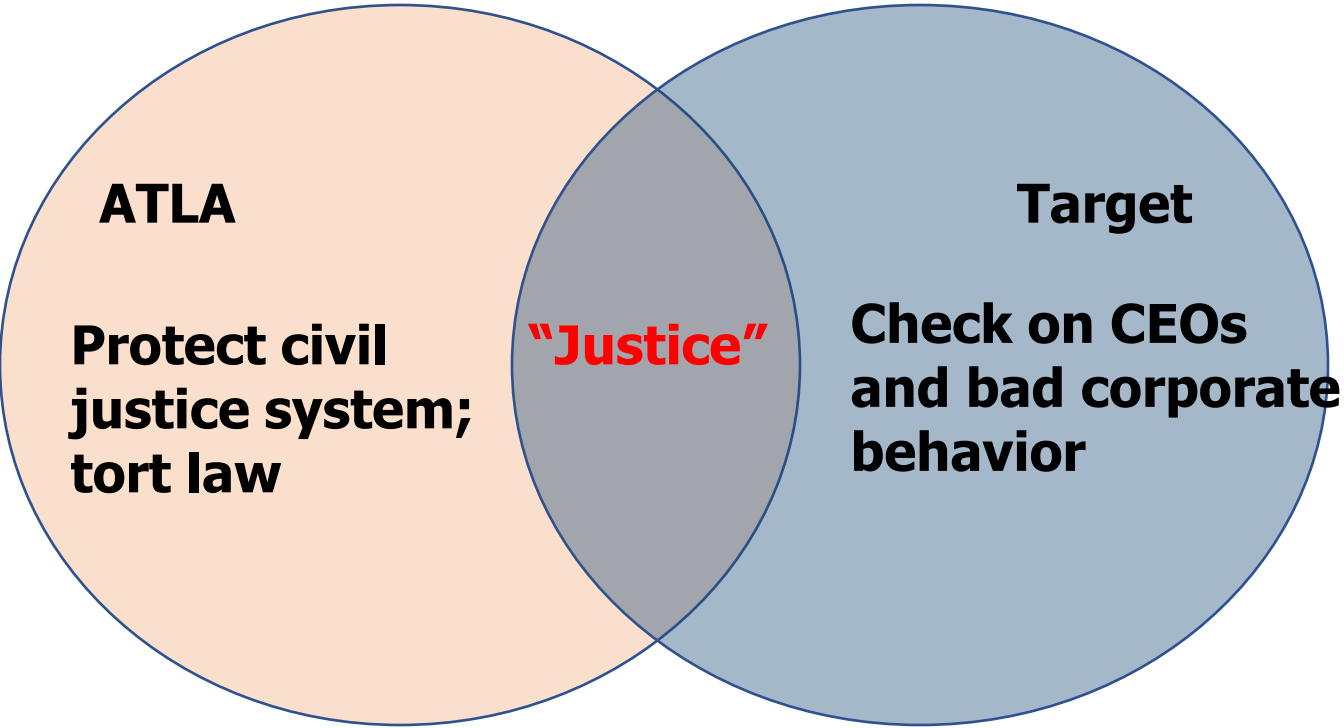


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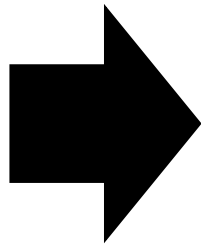
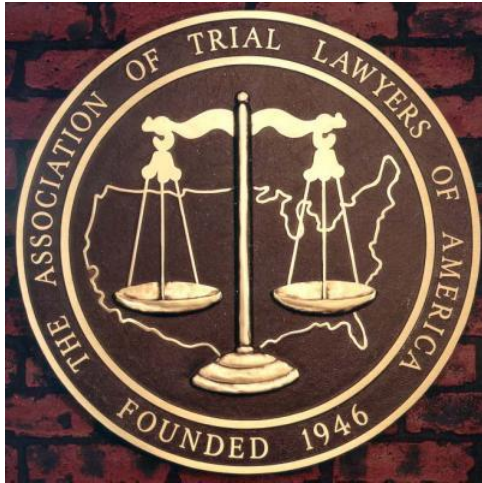


# 5. Express the Message

- Convey it in a way that your audience can hear it
- Requires writing and speaking from their perspective, not yours
- Use familiar words, not jargon
- Limit ideally to 25-30 words

# 5. ATLA: Express the Message

- Make the fight about justice (not about ATLA)
- Change the organization's name



# 5. Express the Message

We work to make sure people have a **fair chance** to **receive justice** through the legal system when they are injured by the negligence or misconduct of others.

# 4. Strategy

# 4. Strategy Drives Tactics

- Goals/Objectives = WHAT needs to be done
- Strategy = HOW to get it done
- Tactics = TOOLS to make it happen

Burning of Notre Dame  
4/15/19









# French President Emmanuel Macron

I'm telling you all tonight — we will rebuild this cathedral together. This is probably part of the French destiny. And we will do it in the next years. Starting tomorrow, a national donation scheme will be started that will extend beyond our borders.

Queen Elizabeth  
4/5/20



# Queen Elizabeth

Together we are tackling this disease, and I want to reassure you that if we remain united and resolute, then we will overcome it. I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge, and those who come after us will say the Britons of this generation were as strong as any, that the attributes of self-discipline, of quiet, good-humored resolve, and of fellow feeling still characterize this country. The pride in who we are is not a part of our past, it defines our present and our future.

# Message in Photos

# Everything Communicates

- Words
- Tones
- **Images**
- Personal appearance
- Colors
- Symbolism
- Silence













# Biden gets emotional during visit to Arlington National Cemetery after announcing Afghanistan withdrawal



# Reagan (1984)











# George W. Bush (2001)



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