

Anticipate Public Thinking

You Say...They Think

Strategic framing is about choosing communications cues that activate productive ways of thinking. The graphic below illustrates how statements that sound reasonable to an aging advocate or expert (“You Say”) may activate listeners’ unproductive, but dominant, habits of thought (“They Think”) and suggests framing strategies that can make your messages more effective.

You Say...	They Think...	What’s Triggered in Their Minds?	What Helps...
Ageism must be treated as a serious social issue so that older people can participate fully as workers and citizens.	Ageism? Is that a real thing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Older as “Other”</i> • <i>Perceived “Real” (deterioration, dependence)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the value Justice to prime people to think about our cultural commitment to equality for everyone. • Define “implicit bias.” Research shows that simply explaining what it is and how it works can be effective in reducing people’s bias against older people. • Offer an explanatory example, like workplace discrimination, to show how ageism works and how it affects us all. • Share specific Solutions to expand people’s thinking about what can be done.
Older age can be a richly creative and productive phase of life, especially if we address the social determinants that influence people’s aging process.	Sure, if you’re lucky -- or rich! -- you can get a second wind. But most people are just hoping their health doesn’t give out before their 401K does.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fatalism</i> • <i>Individualism</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the value Ingenuity to prime people to think about how new approaches and collective action can lead to better conditions and outcomes for everyone. • Use the metaphor Building Momentum to “flip the script” on pervasive, negative models of aging and explain how older adults can be a dynamic resource for our society. • Offer a concrete example of collective solutions, like Intergenerational Community Centers, to show how system-level changes can make things better.
As the number of older adults grows with the retirement of the Baby Boomers, it is critical to expand the size and improve the training of our geriatric and health care workforce.	We have three hospitals in my town, and that seems like more than enough to me!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Black Box/Cognitive Holes</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the value Ingenuity to orient listeners to help engage people in a problem-solving mindset. • Use the Building Momentum metaphor to show how taking steps to help people remain in the workforce and to thrive as they age can reduce the burden on the health care system. • Include Solutions that show the scale of the interventions necessary.
An increasing number of families are at risk of bankruptcy because of the high costs of caring for older loved ones. We need to adopt policies that can reduce this financial burden.	I wouldn’t count on Social Security. It’s been mismanaged for years. The best thing we can do is teach people how to save more when they’re young.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Zero-Sum Thinking</i> • <i>Nostalgia /</i> • <i>Threat of Modernity</i> • <i>Solution = Better Personal Choices</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Ingenuity to redirect thinking towards system-level problems and solutions and to foster optimism about our ability to address the problem. • Tell a complete story that helps people to understand the public consequences of inaction: what’s at stake, how the system works now, what isn’t working, and what can be done to improve outcomes.