

WORKING. FOR A BETTER LIFE

The job of a good message is not to say what's popular;
it is to make popular what needs to be said.

Working people deserve to make more than a decent living, we deserve a decent life. It's time America's economic policies put people and families first, instead of the interests of a handful of wealthy and well-connected corporate CEOs. A working people's movement can change these economic rules that unfairly favor the rich. We need to begin by changing the debate from "what is good for the economy" to "what is good for America and working people." People work for more than a paycheck; we work to sustain our families.

We have to recognize that currently our words do not reflect our values. We must build a way of speaking to people that reflects the values we share with most Americans. That vocabulary must reflect their lived experience and vividly express their hopes for a better life.

The AFL-CIO, working with ASO Communications and Lake Research, conducted an extensive investigation to find language that simultaneously accomplishes three goals:

- ▶ **Motivates our base and activists.** A good message works when people want to repeat it. Our messages work with our base in the general public—those who are ready to embrace our solutions as well as economic justice advocates and activists.
- ▶ **Convinces the persuadable.** Half the population holds both progressive and conservative views. A good message activates people's progressive instincts and makes our solutions seem like common sense.
- ▶ **Alienates the opposition.** Alienating the opposition exposes their core values—values with which most American strongly disagree.

What follows are three one-pagers. The first summarizes messaging principles. The second provides examples of words we should use and the words they replace. The third contains messages written in this new vocabulary. In dial tests, each of these messages scored highly with the base and persuadables while they alienated the opposition. And they were extremely popular with advocates and activists. From these messages you'll get the flavor and spirit of how we should be thinking and talking about the economy and work.

OVERVIEW AND GOAL

Our goal is to establish a long-term, aspirational narrative that generates support for raising wages and better lives, based on the fact that working people are the source of our nation's wealth.

We want to shift the fundamental beliefs and ideas Americans hold about economic issues. Therefore, our research did not test messages through the lens of partisan identity, but rather examined underlying perceptions about where wealth comes from, how jobs are created, and government's role in setting wage and other labor standards.

We seek to activate in our target audiences the recognition that all work has inherent meaning, all working people have a right to make more than a decent living, and we all deserve to live better lives. Overall, the research strongly points to using new language that is *more personal, more concrete and more active*.

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ Provide an **aspirational call** to better lives that goes beyond purely financial issues
- ▶ Embrace and lead with **progressive values** like family, freedom and fairness
- ▶ Describe **real experiences**: “can't make ends meet,” vs. abstractions: “wage stagnation”
- ▶ Assert that **human action** deliberately created problems and that only deliberate human action can fix them
- ▶ Name problems in an **active voice**—“CEOs decided” rather than identify them passively—“incomes fell”
- ▶ Focus on the **outcomes**, not the policies: “more time to care for a sick child” vs. “paid leave legislation”
- ▶ Emphasize **“helping the family”** vs. “growing the economy”

Message Frameworks

WORDS TO EMBRACE

WORDS TO REPLACE

SPEAK UP TOGETHER	instead of	bargain
ECONOMY OUT OF BALANCE	instead of	economic inequality
WORKING PEOPLE	instead of	workers
WAGES TO SUSTAIN A FAMILY ON	instead of	wages to raise a family on
GOOD FOR FAMILIES/THE NATION	instead of	good for the economy
CORPORATIONS/CORPORATE CEOS	instead of	financial industry and big banks
WE CAN RAISE WAGES	instead of	we should raise wages
GET PAID FOR THE WORK YOU DO	instead of	low pay is bad
CHANGE THE RULES	instead of	enact these policies
WORK	instead of	jobs
EMPLOYERS DENYING YOUR PAY	instead of	falling wages
ECONOMIC STABILITY	instead of	economic opportunity
RULES ARE MANIPULATED	instead of	economy is rigged

FAMILY COMES FIRST

Everyone knows—family comes first. Whether it's for that newborn you swear already smiles, your elderly mom or your spouse nursing an injury, being there and providing for family isn't negotiable. Every working person deserves to be paid enough to set their kids up for a bright future, and return the support they once received to their parents, and to speak up, with one clear voice, for a better workplace. Working people deserve to make more than a decent living; we deserve to have a decent life.

VALUE WORK

America has so much good work to be done, roads to be paved, kids to be taught, energy to be generated. All work has value and all working people have rights. But when people are given a work schedule that constantly changes or told to work more for less, the workplace isn't fair. We cannot allow anyone to be paid less than a living and left scrambling to retire. People's hard work should be recognized and rewarded. We must act together for fair wages, the right to speak up for each other and to earn paid time off when loved ones need us.

CHANGED RULES

We need a better balance between the right to profit and the rights of those who produce these profits. A handful of wealthy CEOs and politicians have rigged the rules in their favor and hard work, ingenuity and perseverance are not rewarded the way they used to be. Wages ought to reflect a fair return on work. We can create an economy where working people have a say at work, including raising wages and improving benefits. We need an economy that works for everyone. America should work for we the people, not just the wealthy and well connected.

A NEW VENTURE

America is a land of entrepreneurs. Many of us want to create the next big thing for ourselves that also would create new jobs for others. But right now many people live paycheck to paycheck, working unreliable hours, with few or no benefits. Launching a new venture requires first making ends meet today and having something left over to launch a new venture tomorrow. To restore opportunity, we need basic standards—good wages, strong benefits, secure retirement and time to be with family. Reaching for the stars first requires standing on a secure foundation.

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