

## Framing Skills: Critical Success Factor for Demonstrating Value

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

Framing skills are critical to demonstrating your organization's value because they define the context in which people view a given situation.

“Framing” means to define a situation or paint a mental picture of it. Think of a physical frame around a work of art: it affects the way we see what's within its boundaries. A good frame highlights colors or brings out things we wouldn't otherwise see or consider. Changing the frame may make different colors pop out, causing the artwork to look different even though the picture itself remains the same. Similarly, a mental frame influences our view of a given issue or topic. Proposing a different frame changes the context within which we think about the issue, even though nothing else has changed.

Framing skills are critical to demonstrating your organization's value because the context within which issues are presented sets the stage for the subsequent discussion. Specifically, the context informs the questions that are asked, which point people in the direction of the answers they seek. Those answers help formulate beliefs about the issue, which shape the actions that people take. In short, framing is a very powerful tool.

Here are two examples of the dramatic difference that framing can make:

- Kodak's revenues shot up after the company changed its characterization of its business from “selling film” to “preserving memories.”
- After shocking themselves and others by “only” winning the bronze medal in the 2004 Olympic Games because they saw themselves (and thus played) as a

group of individual superstars, members of the U.S. men's basketball team won the gold medal in the 2008 Games by re-defining themselves, and playing, as Team USA.

In the public safety arena, the questions that are asked frame public discussions about resource allocation. Consider these options:

1. “How much should we cut from the public safety budget?”
2. “What level of public safety do we want to provide for our community?”

Question #2 focuses the conversation on public safety, which enables the community to reflect on what it wants and needs from its first responders. This opens the door for public safety professionals to educate the public about the value they provide.

In short, framing skills are a very powerful and effective tool for demonstrating value. Their use is especially important when the stakes are high, emotions are strong, or there are multiple perspectives and/or options.

How will you use this tool to help improve the level of public safety in *your* community? ➔

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Note: This article is an adaptation of "How Framing Dramatically Influences Lives and Outcomes" published in *Business Solutions* in March 2011.

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