Root your messages in reality not ideology

Every organization (business, nonprofit, political, association) should have a list of key messages.These key messages should be updated frequently (no less than once a year). If yours doesn't, it's time to start creating a list of key messages. Key messages form the basis of your speeches, press releases and other communications materials.

Key messages should include facts about the organization, the organization's mission and philosophy, organizational goals, how the organization operates and other important information you want your audience to know.

Your key messages should be genuine, and stand up to scrutiny. Some organizations end up with key messages that are not reflective of reality, but rather are ideological. This is especially true with political organizations.

I came across a great example key messages that don't accurately reflect reality in yesterday's Washington Post. In a story written by Dan Eggen on page A7, entitled "McDonnell says stimulus aided Va. —but only in the short run," the first paragraph says:

> *Virgina Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R) wandered off script somewhat Sunday as a surrogate for the Mitt Romney presidential campaign, conceding that President Obama's stimulus measures had helped his state weather the economic crisis.*

Of course, the Romney campaign has been arguing that Obama's stimulus hurt the economy, and did not create jobs—*because stimulus goes against Republican economic ideology.* Governor McDonnell was reflecting the reality on the ground in his

remarks—that indeed the stimulus has helped Virginia. He “went off message” because instead of being ideological, he was being factual, rooting his comments in the reality of his state.

A similar situation occurred last week when Cory Booker said that he was sickened by the attacks on Bain Capital. The Obama campaign’s key messages about Romney’s tenure at Bain were more ideological than factual. Booker was simply reflecting facts that private equity firms are not the way they were being portrayed by the campaign. Booker was roundly criticized for “going off message.”

When key messages IGNORE reality and facts, and simply reflect ideology and beliefs, they are open to attack and leave spokespeople with the opportunity of “wandering off script” or “going off message.”

Most people have a hard time lying when asked a direct question. If your key messages are ideologically but not factually correct, they will not stand up to scrutiny. You don’t want to ask spokespeople to lie, so inject some honesty into your messaging!