By Tracy Wareing Evans

Why Framing Matters: A Review of the Basics

Framing is a key element of our theory of change, and we believe it is a ***critical shared strategy*** for anyone interested in moving system transformation in health and human services. Over the past couple of years—drawing on the expertise of framing scientists at FrameWorks Institute and the mutual commitment of partners like the National Human Services Assembly—we have deepened our understanding of why framing matters. We are learning how to develop a new narrative that more effectively tells the core story of our business—what human services is, why we have it (what is it good for), what can impede its outcomes, and what will improve it. Through this column, and our more frequent Blog posts, we will continue to share this understanding and knowledge with you, starting in this issue with a review of the basics.

What is Framing?

Frames are organizing principles that are social, shared, and persistent over time. We use them to provide meaningful structure to the world around us. We selectively respond to things we hear (e.g., news story, commercials, a candidate's speech) by cueing up the networks of associations we have stored to help us make meaning of our world. Information "feels" more true the second time we hear it, and more and more true each subsequent time. Our mind has a whole set of pre-existing patterns and we are constantly mapping new information in a way that appears to "fit" that existing mindset.

The science of framing helps us understand the dominant frames Americans use to reason about issues we care about, and then identify what frame elements might allow us to shift old beliefs and provide "thinking tools"—i.e., ways people can think more productively about issues, particularly those that involve understanding systems and structures.

What We Want to Trigger	Shared American Value	What We Don't Want to Trigger	Dominant Value
Every person has the potential to build and live a good life and everyone needs support at times in their lives to maintain well-being.	Human Potential (across the lifecycle)	I pulled myself up by my bootstraps, why can't they?	Rugged Individualism
There are common sense solutions that we know work.	Pragmatism	The problem is too big; we'll never solve it.	Fatalism
By acting early on, we can prevent problems from getting worse and costing more.	Prevention	Government services create dependency and cost taxpayers too much.	Government is Inept

What are Shared American Values?

Americans have many dominant frames when it comes to human services, poverty, government, charity—dominant frames that can overwhelm and defeat our intended messages. When we talk about our business or tell individual stories of families served through human services, we tend to reinforce these unproductive dominant frames. When we talk about human services, we want to "land in" the shared values that may not be as dominant but are more relevant to seeing the full picture. We want to "pull" those beliefs forward, letting the others recede.

To create a well-designed frame we need to start by setting up what is at stake and why it matters. We need to help our audience see themselves in the issue by connecting them to a shared value. For example, our narrative should provide practical, common-sense solutions that draw on American pragmatism. Americans want to hear what can be done—and we are more open to understanding issues when we believe something can be done. We need to avoid the stories of urgency and "doom and gloom." We all have a "finite pool of worry"—in other words, there is only so much we

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5. Use a plain-word explanation of the process of testifying in a court of law. Review and practice the questions (and answers) with the social worker, the parent(s), and especially the child if he or she will testify.

At a minimum, this short checklist will increase the quality of services to youth and their adoptive families. As the lawyer and social worker teams engage in intense collaboration in multiple cases, a natural outcome should be an increase in trust and collegiality among the professionals processing an adoption finalization.

Harvey Schweitzer, Maryland

A skilled, experienced private adoption attorney can be helpful to public child welfare agencies involved in seeking permanency through adoption of foster children and, at the same time, serve as an effective and zealous advocate for the adopting foster parents or, in some cases, the child or adoptee.

Two issues come readily to mind. First, ensure that the foster parents (and by extension the child) obtain the best possible adoption subsidy. The services and benefits embraced by a subsidy can be complex and the needs of children are so different it would seem that the agency would welcome the presence of a knowledgeable advocate who can guide the adopters during the negotiations. Second, assist the adopters and the child in adoptions of older children, when discussing "post-adoptions contact" issues, including whether to even consider it and, if so, how it will be implemented.

Another role that a private attorney can play concerns strategic planning in unusual or contested adoptions. Private attorneys can be expected to bring an outside-the-box mentality to such situations, whereas the agency lawyer may be constrained with regard to the options available. For example, in some states the law allows the agency to seek dismissal of the foster case so that the (former) foster parents can seek a private adoption. Although rare, this approach can be useful in nonsubsidy intrafamily adoptions or in situations in which the agency is pressing the adopters to accept post-adoption visitation to avoid a trial.

Genie Miller Gillespie, Illinois

As an adoption attorney representing foster parents, it is imperative to have a good relationship with the "front-line" caseworkers and their supervisors in the case. It is the attorney's job to ensure that the Adoption Assistance Agreement (subsidy)—the contract entered into between the adoptive parents and the child welfare agency—completely and accurately describes the child's background and unique needs, all current services, and the potential need for future services. The only way to do this well is to work with the family's caseworker and gather as much information and documentation as possible so any potential future needs of the child can be "tied back" to the current or pre-existing needs. This will allow the adoptive family to go back to the child welfare agency to request additional services, should the child need a service that is not covered by the medical card or available through the school. Often, the caseworker does not have all of the necessary documents (medical records, therapy reports, education plans, etc.), and sometimes does not share what they do have with the prospective adoptive parents for fear of "scaring" the adoptive parents. It is unacceptable for prospective adoptive parents to be missing any information that will help them provide the best care and be a strong advocate for their adopted child. The attorney and the caseworker must work together to make sure the family gets all of the tools necessary to make the adoption a success.

Reference Note

1. *http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport22.pdf;* This report reflects all AFCARS data received as of July 9, 2015 related to AFCARS reporting periods through September 30, 2014.

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can take in with life's stresses. If we constantly portray our work through the lens of a crisis, the default thinking of most Americans will be that there is nothing that can be done to fix it.

Effective framing leads to thematic storytelling to show how "connected communities" have better outcomes and helps us ask the right questions from the start.

What Can Reframing Do for Us?

Framing can help us provide a wide-angle view of human services that brings policymakers together and involves everyone in shaping solutions that are focused on health and well-being for all Americans. It can help create an understanding of the ecosystem that shapes the interconnectedness of systems and services in a community and connect all of us who live there (like tracks connecting a rail system). It can help us focus on the structural and systemic causes of poor health and lack of well-being and address issues of inequity. Effective framing leads to thematic storytelling to show how "connected communities" have better outcomes and helps us ask the right questions from the start—How are our children doing in school? How connected are families to their community?

Check our Blog at *www.aphsa.org* and upcoming issues of *Policy & Practice* for more tips, including how to create an effective frame. We also encourage you to check out the FrameWorks Institute website at *www.frameworksinstitute.org.*