

## Getting to the Heart and Mind of the Matter

### Science Media Literacy

#### Case Study:

Case study of a worst-case scenario. what tools could you use to 1) prevent this scenario and, 2) if necessary, operate within it?

Article from The Washington Post: [In a thriving Michigan county, a community goes to war with itself.](#)

This news story about a county in western Michigan illustrates the worst-case challenges for health educators trying to operate in situation of political polarization and misinformation. As you read the news story, think about how the techniques of motivational interviewing, science media literacy and brain-friendly communication might help the health department anticipate and manage this crisis.

Here is a summary of what happened: Eight ultra-conservative, anti-vaccination members were elected to the 11-member county board of commissioners and began to fire many experienced managers they considered disloyal to their goal to “thwart tyranny” with a vision to unite county residents around America’s “true history” as a “land of systemic opportunity built on the Constitution, Christianity and capitalism.” This included the head of the county health department.

- First, the head tried to respond to the new board with facts. As often happens, this approach backfired.
- Then she issued a fact-based press release that was called a lie and was told to retract it.
- Then she filed a lawsuit alleging the board micromanaged the department and illegally attempted to dismiss her without cause.
- She repeatedly invited the commissioners to visit the health department, but they declined.
- Then, in her appearances before the board, she tried to explain what made the department’s work meaningful. As the newspaper summarized:

She described how the department’s communicable disease specialists had been the first in Michigan to spot an E. coli outbreak in 2022 that caused four deaths and sickened hundreds in six states. She talked about the department’s mobile dental teams, which offer free cleanings to children whose parents could not afford care. And she showed board members a photo of the garden that the department had built as a final resting place for the cremated remains of those who were indigent and alone. “We strongly believe that every person’s life

matters,” Hambley told them.

To Hambley, the value of county government lay in its closeness to the people it helped. She wanted Moss and the other commissioners to see her workers as neighbors and public servants, driven by a professional ethic that required them to set aside their political beliefs, suspend moral judgment and care for everyone in the community.

Here are a few questions for reflection:

- What steps could you have taken *before* the election consistent with a motivational interviewing approach?
- Once a situation is inflamed, what role can science media literacy play to help you in your work?
- What brain-friendly communication might you try *instead of a press release*
- If you are dealing with this new board as an Extension Professional, how might you utilize neuromarketing tools to share impacts or work being addressed in local communities?
- If questioned on the value of work you are doing for families, what motivational interviewing techniques would you utilize in those conversations?
- Our three-pronged approach of motivational interviewing, science media literacy, and neuromarketing are communication tools to help you with the "how" of communicating (especially on politically charged topics). Given that any of these communication tools are going to have varying levels of impact, what might be different levels of success or expectations to keep in mind when applying these communication tools?

