



Center for Progressive Leadership Action Network

National Media Impact Training – Thursday, January 17th

Special Tips for Veterans and Military Families Speaking Out Against War.

Sue Dinsdale was a guest trainer at the National Impact Media Training on January 17th. Sue's son Jesse served in Iraq, and her experience as the mother of a soldier lead her to become a vocal critic of the war. She's spoken at national press events with partners including US Action and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. She currently works for the Iowa Citizen Action Network in her home state.

Her perspective and suggestions may be especially useful to those concerned with ending the war in Iraq and how veterans and military families can speak out. Some of the questions she was asked and her answers are summarized below.

Q: Your son served in Iraq, and your personal experience as the mother of a soldier has been a big part of your work with the media. How do we tell personal stories in a way that helps end the war and honors those who are still serving?

When I speak out about the war, I speak from my heart. I tell my own story in my own words. That's the most important thing for military families and veterans to do. And don't be afraid to show honest emotions. I still cry when I talk about our family's experiences... it was a terrible time and while I used to be embarrassed about being emotional, now I just realize that being emotional is a normal response. I try to always have notes about what I'm going to talk about. It's really important to know who you are talking to and to have talking points, otherwise your emotions might overcome the message. If I do get talking points from a group, I make them my own. It's very helpful to have talking points, but you have to put things into your own words and tell them from your own perspective.

Q: What's a challenging question you get asked as a spokesperson, and how do you deal with it?

One other thing that happens quite a bit is people will ask me, what should we do, how do we get out of Iraq? I usually answer that question by telling them that I'm certainly not a foreign policy expert, I'm just a mom from Iowa, but there are

really smart people who know what to do to get us out of this mess in the most responsible way possible and I want them to do their job. I guess I always try to remember that my story is important and because of my family background it's credible.

Q: We've talked about framing an issue – Could you give an example of how you have framed an anti-war position to make it relevant to larger audience?

Sure. It's always helpful to know WHO the group is you are talking to so you can tailor your remarks to fit the event. For instance, if it's at a rally you want to be able to tell your story to show the people there that it's important to speak out and also to reassure them that you are not criticizing the soldiers – you are trying to get our leaders to change the policy. When I've talked about the cost of war, I tell how the war affected my family personally – how my younger son had trouble in school, how it was hard for my daughter to enjoy her senior year of high school. Things like that.

Q: A common attack on anti-war individuals and groups is that they are unpatriotic or don't support our troops. How can we respond to those arguments?

You know this is going to happen. I've been called unpatriotic more than once and honestly, it does hurt your feelings. I try not to argue with people, but I will tell them that I have as much right to speak out as anyone. I tell them my family history... my father was serving in the military when I was born, my step father was a medic in Viet Nam, my husband was in the army airborne and my son served two tours in Iraq as well as a tour in Kosovo. Nobody can say I'm not patriotic. I tell people that the best way I know how to support the troops is by getting out of this reckless, endless war and bringing them home. You just have to know in your heart that you are doing the right thing and not dwell on the people who will attack your position. And try to remember, they are attacking a position, not you personally.