



GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH MEDIA

COMMUNICATION GOALS

As a spokesperson, your mission is **to inform, educate and influence**. The biggest challenge of a media interview is **communicating specific information in a short period of time**. You must be concise and focused. Especially with television interviews, you may have as little as 60 seconds to tell your story. In a negative situation, it is essential that you use those 60 seconds to your advantage.

To be successful as a media spokesperson, it is important to know how media work and the key points that you want to make. It is imperative that as many of your message points as possible be woven into a media response whether the reporter specifically asks for them or not, and even when obstacles are placed in your path.

Your overall communication goals are to:

- Present timely, accurate information
- Be proactive vs. reactive - Lead positive interviews and manage negative situations
- Make friends as possible
- Present 2-3 key messages or points, telling your story consistently
- “Stay on message.”

MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

Regardless of whether reporters are working for television, radio or a newspaper, they have the same goal – to offer a ‘good’ story to their audience. This often translates to a ‘controversial’ story (you may recall the phrase, “if it bleeds, it leads [the news].”). So it will be up to you to make sure that you do the best you can to achieve your communications goals under the circumstances.

The way you respond to media and the authority with which you present yourself are keys to a successful response or interview. Remember, **you are the expert**. You can be in charge of an interview **if** you are prepared and **if** you know your communication goals and messages.

Following are general tips and guidelines that will help you to convey your messages and other important information in a variety of interview settings, including a press conference.

- **Know your 2-3 key messages and objective.** Know what you want to say in advance of a media interview. Key message points should be delivered as part of every interview. Always get your main message(s) in early in an interview. Try to start and end with your key point. Stay focused on your objective. Don't be diverted.
- **You cannot repeat your messages too often.**
- **Be truthful and stick to the facts.**
- **If you do not want to see what you say in print, *do not* say it.**
- **Expect the unexpected.** Anticipate the answers to those "I wish you wouldn't ask" questions and always expect the unexpected.
- **Expect reporters who are not well prepared.** Interviewers may not read your background material, know anything about the situation or even know your correct name.
- **Use simple sentences and stay on message.** Explain answers in clear, everyday language that the average viewer will understand. Do not use industry buzzwords or phrases. Be brief. Do not ramble. This is especially important with television interviews.
- **Do not talk "Off the Record."** Be very careful with reporters with information you consider private and confidential.
- **Never say 'no comment.'** If you can't answer a question, at least try to explain why. This phrase is a red flag to reporters that you have something to hide.
- **Never say 'never.'** Avoid absolutes unless you can back them up. They beg for disagreement.
- **Do not lose your temper.** Remember that news reporters have the 'barrel of ink' while you only have a pen.
- **Do not get defensive.**
- **Correct an interviewer's mistakes immediately.** Do not interrupt the interviewer to correct the mistake. Wait until he or she has finished the sentence or phrase and courteously make the correction.
 - That includes correcting a reporter if he/she makes a statement or premise that you disagree with or is incorrect. If it goes uncorrected, it may be attributed to you and even used again in its incorrect form.
- **Listen closely to questions.** Do not give 'prepared' answers to the wrong questions.
- **Do not dodge questions.** Try to respond to them, but look for ways to incorporate your message.
- **Ask for clarification if you do not understand a reporter's question.** Don't answer a question you don't understand.
- **Do not interrupt the interviewer.** A broadcast producer will only use sound bites that are clear.

- **Avoid answers of simple ‘yes’ or ‘no.’** They stop the interview and cut the conversation flow.
- **Do not try to fill a silence or silent invitation to say more than you have already.** This is frequently a ploy of broadcast reporters to learn more information. You can simply say ‘do you have any other questions?’
- **Do not speculate.** Media love this ‘what if’ game, you will not.
- **Know and be able to quote accurate, pertinent facts and statistics to support claims and statements.**
- **Pace yourself.** Articulate and speak slowly.
- **Shut off your cell phone prior to an interview.** It can cause unnecessary distractions.

NOTES ABOUT BROADCAST AND PRINT MEDIA

TELEVISION:

- **Television is an instant media** in which the 8 or 10-second sound bite rules. You have a very short time in which to relay key messages.
- **Interviews are short**, lasting no more than 3 minutes for news segments. The news story will be edited and reduced to 1-2 minutes.
- **Television is a visual package** so it matters how you look, sound, handle yourself and articulate. Your presence on the screen conveys a message as loud as the words you speak.
- **Television has the largest audience.**
- **Television news will frequently run the same story on all three newscasts.**
- **Expect any story, once presented, to go online immediately.**

PRINT:

- **Print reporters give longer interviews, and articles are more in-depth.** They will ask for more details and probe for answers to questions.
- **Expect print reporters to call you back for further details or clarification.**
- **Expect any story, once written, to go online immediately.**

RADIO:

NOTE: Radio can be more difficult than television, because you can’t win your audiences with smiles, body language or clever visuals. This means you must persuade the audience of your expertise with your voice, the inflections in your speech, and with the words you choose.

The tips and station etiquette for a successful television interview apply to radio as well. Here are a few pointers for radio interviews whether by telephone or in person.

- **Ask in advance if the interview will be taped or live.** This can make a big difference in the final product. Also check the duration of the interview and direction.

- Be ready when the call comes in or be on time if you're calling the station.
- Do not get too comfortable or casual as you respond to questions. Stay focused.
- Do not conduct the interview on a cell or speakerphone.
- Tailor messages to the listening audience.
- Stay on message.

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