
WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

ADVANCE PREPARATION:

1. Prepare and maintain a list of all media contacts including newspapers (weekly & daily), TV, and radio. Don't neglect alternative and religious press. Your list should include names of friendly reporters as well as editors of the news desk, religion desk, etc. Make sure you have both phone and fax numbers.
2. Check out the wire services in your area – AP (Associated Press), CP (Canadian Press), Reuters. Wire services send out bulletins continually to most other media.
3. Write a press release or media alert. (See guide: "WRITING A PRESS RELEASE").
4. Fax or e-mail media alert or release to the news desk, city desk, special departments (women, religion, etc.) and specific reporters who have been friendly. The release should arrive several days before the event.
5. Think of ways to write articles for periodicals, letters to the editor, etc.
6. Several days before your event, the phone should be covered continuously.
7. Put together a "press packet" for distribution on the day of the event. Include the media alert, media release or statement, your best leaflet, and any helpful background information.

THE DAY BEFORE THE ACTION OR EVENT:

1. Telephone all media. Give a brief run-down of the action (who, what, where, when, why). Be enthusiastic and positive but not unrealistic. Stick to the purpose and underline the issue(s).
2. Be prepared to re-fax the media alert immediately.
3. Contact radio "news" stations. Many will tape telephone interviews from people at the action site and send directly to the radio station. Some will also tape 30 second spots in which you can read a prepared statement or sound-byte.
4. Make sure arrangements have been made for someone to take photos of the event. Pictures can be used in follow-up work.

THE DAY OF THE ACTION:

1. Call TV and radio stations early. Most assignments are made by 8:30 am. Make sure your group arrives and sets up for the action 15-20 minutes before the time you announce to the media so they aren't the first to arrive – a common problem.
2. Have press packets available.
3. Assign one or more persons to relate to the press and help them get good information and pictures. It is often helpful to have one or two people "hustle" the press – take initiative to greet them and direct them to the press spokespeople.
4. Keep a press log of information on who shows up.

MEDIA DO'S AND DON'TS

1. **Nothing is “off the record.”** Never talk “*on background*” or “*not for attribution.*” Just because the interview is over does not mean you aren’t still on record.
2. **Never say “No comment.”** You can say it is not appropriate for you to comment because the matter is in litigation, because it involves proprietary information, etc. You can say that you don’t have the answer but will try to find out.
3. **Don’t repeat negative words.** Reporters may phrase questions in negative or disparaging words. Don’t repeat them in your answer.
4. **Get the important facts out first.** Don’t build to a conclusion.
5. **Remain calm and composed.** Don’t argue with the reporter.
6. **Be concise.**
7. **Avoid jargon.**
8. **Don’t be defensive.** Phrase your answer in a positive manner.
9. **Be honest.** Never lie.
10. **Be prepared.**

MEDIA TECHNIQUES: How to Get Your Message Across Effectively

General Tips:

1. ***Simplify:*** keep it simple and clear, in both concept and context. Hold to one theme and two or three central, reinforcing points.
2. ***Control the Interview:*** stay on target with your message (use “bridging,” “flagging,” etc.)
3. ***Being Nervous is Normal:*** “reframe” the fear into excitement and enthusiasm. Use breathing, centering and other relaxation techniques that you know work for you.
4. ***Create a Relationship with the Interviewer and the Audience:*** use interviewer’s first name, anecdotes and succinct, colorful sound bites to connect with them.
5. ***It’s OK Not to be the Know-It-All:*** say “I don’t know” in a way that adds to your credibility instead of detracting from it (see “Bridging”).
6. ***Remember:*** your point of view is the most important thing at the moment. You are being interviewed because what you know and think is of value. Stay centered and stay forward.

Specific Techniques:

There are two techniques that are particularly effective when dealing with the media or any communication situation:

FLAGGING...

...Finding every opportunity to communicate your message in an interview.

Flagging is a way of helping someone remember what you would like them to remember. It is a way of underscoring what is important. You “plant a flag” or highlight a point by stressing that point with your voice, simply by repetition of a point throughout the interview and using superlative expressions like the following phrases:

- “The most exciting thing about this program is...”
- “The bottom line is...”
- “The key point to remember is...”
- “What I really like about what we’re doing is...”
- “The reason we’re most effective is...”

BRIDGING...

...Making the irrelevant question relevant to your message.

If you are asked a question that is not on your agenda, bridging is the effective way to respond. When you bridge, you first answer the question, but answer it briefly and then move, or bridge, to what you want to discuss. These are some very simple bridges to use:

- “Don’t know” to “Do know” – “I don’t know the answer to that question. What I do know is...”
- Time – “Historically, that was the case. Today, what’s happened is...and it’s made us have to...”
- Importance – “That used to be important. But what’s changes is...and we’re having to respond by...”
- “No, let me explain...”
- “Yes, and furthermore...”

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Body Language

Professional actors are finely tuned to their emotions, enabling them to speak with the movement of a hand. An effective spokesperson also makes use of body movement to convey appropriate emotion.

The following gestures and expressions are considered positive and convey personal interest and self-confidence:

- look people in the eye
- lean slightly forward, if seated
- make head movements that occur naturally as a supplement to what you're saying
- listen intently to anyone who asks questions

The following gestures and expressions are considered negative and convey tension and nervousness:

- inappropriate smiling, laughter
- tightly clasped hands
- hands gripping sides of chairs, tables, knees
- tightening and loosening of the jaw
- ramrod straight, unnatural posture

These movements convey impatience and discomfort:

- swinging legs
- shifting in chair
- shifting eyes

These movements convey guilt and disinterest:

- casting eyes toward ceiling
- failure to look at a reporter
- slouching posture
- closing eyes