



**TREAT  
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## **MEDIA TRAINING GUIDE**

### **MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS & TECHNIQUES**

A Good Spokesperson .....	2
Before Any Interview.....	2
Top Ten Tips for Interviews .....	3
Bridging Techniques.....	4
Types of Interviews and Tips For Handling Them .....	5



## A GOOD SPOKESPERSON

### A GOOD SPOKESPERSON...

- Knows his or her audience.
- Understands the media has a job to do.
- Knows his or her messages and how to communicate them no matter what questions are asked.
- Knows how to use specific interview techniques to control the interview.
- Knows when to stop talking.

## BEFORE ANY INTERVIEW

### Points To Remember:

1. **NEVER GO INTO AN INTERVIEW UNPREPARED.** If possible, read articles by the reporter and determine his/her reputation. Some reporters are known to be aggressive; some don't have a grasp of the subject, while others ask unexpected questions. Most reporters are fair and neutral in their opinions, but always make an effort to know all you can about the interviewer.
2. **WHEN A REPORTER CALLS LOOKING FOR COMMENT, ASK QUESTIONS.** Find out what they are covering, why they called you, who else they will call, when the story will appear and what background information they have. Track answers and make notes. Review the reporter's requests before you hang up.
3. **PRACTICE ANSWERING QUESTIONS.** Before the interview, try to predict the reporter's questions and prepare answers. What questions do you least want to answer? What questions do you hope will be asked? To practice, type out the answers and say them aloud in your car, in front of the mirror or with friends or coworkers.
4. **REVIEW YOUR KEY MESSAGES.** Set the goal of clearly communicating your message, no matter what is asked.



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## TOP TEN TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS

1. **CREATE THREE SOUND BITES** (short campaign messages that cover the most important points) that capture the essence of the story. You'll need these to make a memorable impression on your audience and for use during short interviews (noon news, drive-time radio, etc.). Then, identify three-to-five brief key messages that you can use to explain your sound bites during longer media engagements. These sound bites should be attention-grabbing messages about the campaign and supported by the short messages to provide further clarification.
2. **AVOID IN-HOUSE TERMS AND TECHNICAL LANGUAGE.** Use stories or comparisons to explain concepts. Simplify your work, but don't talk down to the host, reporter or audience.
3. **PREPARE FOR INTERVIEWS.** Practice your delivery. Record yourself. Familiarize yourself with the media outlets, and if possible, review recent articles by the reporters who will interview you in advance.
4. **LOSE THE STRESS.** Relax before the interview—breathe from your diaphragm. Flex and relax your muscles. Mentally transfer nervousness to your ankle, elbow or some place else that's off-camera.
5. **CONNECT WITH THE HOST OR REPORTER.** Be a good listener so you can respond appropriately to all questions. Make and then maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Engage the interviewer and the audience.
6. **TURN IN A STRONG PERFORMANCE.** Remember that you're there to help the producer or reporter create a memorable and/or entertaining segment, talk show or article. With that in mind, show enthusiasm—lean slightly forward in your chair and vary your speech rate and volume. And be sure to keep your answers short and to the point.
7. **CONTROL THE INTERVIEW.** If the host asks a question you can't or don't want to answer, bridge back to your message points. You might say, "That's interesting, but what is really the issue..." or "I can't really address that topic, but I can tell you..."
8. **STAY COOL IF THE INTERVIEW GETS HEATED.** Even if a host gets argumentative, don't respond in the same manner. Also, don't repeat the host's negative phrases; that will only call attention to them. Try to seize opportunities to bridge back to your media points or change the subject.
9. **DON'T EVER TALK "OFF THE RECORD."** NOTHING is off the record; assume your conversation is being recorded. Beware of chitchat with reporters. You never know for sure when the camera or microphone is on and you're on the air.
10. **PLANT A SEED FOR THE FUTURE.** After the show, send a thank-you note to the host expressing your appreciation for the interview—you'll stand out as a quality guest and maximize your chance of a return invitation.



## BRIDGING TECHNIQUES

Bridging is a technique that allows a good spokesperson to get his or her message across, no matter what the question.

Remember, media interviews are not social conversation. Different rules apply. In social conversation, you're asked a question and you answer. That's not the case in an interview. You're there to deliver a message and present a point of view for your organization.

The reporter has certain goals. But, so do you. How do you meet both? It's called bridging. Here's how it works: you're asked a question. If you simply answer their question, it doesn't allow you to make your key points. To be an effective spokesperson, answer the question, and then use a bridge (or a transition) to state your organization's message.

For example:

Question: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Question: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Question: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS AND TIPS FOR HANDLING THEM

### **OFF-THE-RECORD INTERVIEW:**

Never agree to go off-the-record or give information you wouldn't want to read, see or hear. Reporters will generally try to verify off-the-record information elsewhere so they can use it.

### **TELEPHONE INTERVIEW:**

Telephone interviews are usually conducted by a print, radio or online reporter. You should assume that your remarks might appear in print, on the air, or online. A radio reporter will almost always tell you he/she is recording your comments. Prepare by using the same interview techniques that you would use if you were being interviewed in person.

### **BACKGROUND TELEPHONE INTERVIEW:**

If a reporter agrees to this arrangement, be specific about your desire not to be quoted. Your comments should only be used as background information in the reporter's story.

### **IN-PERSON, PRINT INTERVIEW:**

Unlike an on-the-record telephone interview, be aware of your facial expressions, body language and interview location when answering questions.

### **IN-PERSON, BROADCAST INTERVIEW:**

Remember to keep your answers short and direct. Stay relaxed. Wait for the reporter to ask the question.

### **RADIO INTERVIEW:**

- Many of the same rules apply to a radio interview as to a telephone interview for print.
- Be sure you understand the angle the reporter wants to take before the interview begins.
- Ensure there are no disruptions and minimal background noise.
- For early-morning interviews, warm up your voice before going on air.
- Keep your responses brief and to the point.
- Make your first and most important points as close to the beginning of the interview as possible.
- Make sure your voice reflects your message.
- Use visual imagery and colorful examples.
- Pause between points.
- Don't use complicated technical ideas or figures.



### **RADIO TALKBACK INTERVIEW:**

A radio program producer will often let you know if talk-back calls will follow your interview. However, sometimes you will not be warned.

If you are in a situation when callers are asked to call the studio and ask you questions personally:

- Write down the name of each caller and refer back to them by name.
- If you don't know the answer, promise to find out the information and report back to the program producer.
- Don't attack any nuisance callers—allow them to state their points and handle the situation with grace.
- Speak to callers with the same tone you would use with an acquaintance.
- Promise to investigate personal complaints that sound reasonable.
- Use the callers' specific points to raise general, positive points about your organization.
- When you are unsure of a caller's point, clarify by repeating the question in your own words.
- Avoid in-house or industry terms.
- Remember, you are the expert—callers want to hear what you think!

### **TELEVISION INTERVIEW:**

#### **LOCATION:**

- Choose a location you are comfortable with and one that reflects the topic of the story.
- Think about additional photo opportunities you could offer.

#### **PREPARATION:**

- Watch the program on which you will be appearing.
- Find out the angle of the story and who else will be interviewed.
- Plan and rehearse your key messages.
- Briefly talk to the journalist and camera crew while they are setting up in order to create a relaxed atmosphere and to confirm the story angle they will take.



### **EMAIL INTERVIEW:**

Sometimes reporters from online publications will conduct an interview over email. This works well for you because you can take the time to carefully craft your responses and make sure you say what you want to say. Make sure your answers address the question and are well written because the reporter may publish them as-is online. Be sure to include a website, phone number or statistics, too.

### **THE STUDIO INTERVIEW:**

- Arrive early.
- Accept makeup if it's offered.
- Chat with the researcher/producer/presenter to confirm the nature of the interview and any additional information.
- Do not give away any information during this chat that can be used as a point during the interview.
- Confirm whether the interview is live or pre-recorded.
- Look at the interviewer, not at the camera.
- Don't get distracted by the lights and technology.
- Make your first key message the first point you make.
- Don't interrupt the presenter.
- Listen to the question.
- Don't nod agreement during a lengthy question. If the tone changes, you will have to alter your body language quickly!
- Pause before answering.
- Don't extend your answer if you feel you've made your point.
- Don't slouch.
- Try not to fidget.
- Be straightforward, not aggressive.
- Ensure your body language reflects your message (i.e. if you are happy about something, smile).
- Repeat your main message at the end of the interview and thank the presenter.
- Be careful what you say while still on the studio floor—microphones pick up everything.



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