

WHITE PAPER

A REPORT TO THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

MEDIA TRAINING

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Submitted by:

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INTRODUCTION

Why media training?

How you present yourself to the media can have a long-term effect on how you are perceived by the public. The public — including people who see you, hear you, or read about what you say — will form an image of you and your message based largely on how well you are prepared to provide information in a way that displays your knowledge with confidence, and in a manner that elicits trust in what you say.

As an authority on seeking universal truths and finding personal success *you are the message*. People will quickly form an opinion of you and your message based upon what they see and hear through the media.

We cannot control the media, the questions they ask, the biases of the reporters, nor the ultimate story they tell. What *you* can control is yourself and how you respond to questions, the information you provide, the image you project. This training can help you do that.

KEYS TO TALKING TO THE MEDIA

- Be forthright and honest.
- If you are being interviewed, listen carefully to what the reporter is saying, and answer the question while keeping in mind *the points you wish to make*.
- It is always helpful for an interviewer if, before the interview, you provide the reporter with background information and talking points you will be covering

When they call, meet reporters' needs:

- Be accessible.
- Return calls.
- You have the right to find out what the reporter wishes to discuss, so that you may prepare your comments.
- Find out their deadlines and meet them.
- Be prepared. Have your comments ready for discussion.
- Speak in simple terms, so that everyone listening (or reading your comments) is able to understand your points.

GENERAL PREPARATION

Generally, you will be called to speak on subjects based upon materials we have sent to various interviewers and reporters. So, too, generally, they will be “friendly” towards you and the subject you are talking about.

The Friendly Interview

In this case, it is good to be prepared as follows:

- Know in advance what points the interviewer (reporter) will cover.
- Have your comments prepared, based on the interviewer’s interest.
- Make sure your **key message points** are included often in the discussion. (Use the 3x rule – when repeated three times, the message is finally processed by the listener.)
- Practice your responses.

The Confrontation Interview

However, it is always a good idea to be prepared to speak with interviewers and reporters who may be cynical about your message. In this case, plan as follows:

- Know in advance what points the interviewer (reporter) wishes to cover.
- Have your comments prepared, based on the interviewer’s interest.
- Prepare a list of “difficult” questions, and corresponding answers. (We will prepare these as part of the on-camera portion of this media training.)
- Know what your key message points are – and come back to them, even if the interviewer/ reporter attempts to sidetrack you. (We also will help you prepare the **key message points** you will come back to again and again.)
- Have specific communication objectives and craft your messages around them. *Keep the communication positive, even if the situation isn’t.*

WHEN A REPORTER CALLS

Most times we will be arranging interviews on your behalf, based upon a strategic media relations plan that has been prepared in advance. However, there may be times when a reporter will contact you for an unarranged interview. You have the right to ask a reporter the following:

- What is the topic to be covered and specifically what does the reporter want to know?
- What kind of story will it be? Feature? Straight News? Business page? Part of a survey story featuring other interviewees on the same topic? If it's a TV story, it could be a "live" interview or voice-over on tape.
- What is the reporter's deadline?

Once you've gotten answers to the above, craft your message(s) based on your communication objective.

- Prepare two or three points and keep your answers focused on those points.
- Develop two or three supporting statements on your position.
- Offer concrete examples for your supporting statements.

Rehearse the interview ahead of time with a communications expert or trusted associate.

- Put yourself in the reporter's shoes to craft the kinds of questions you may be asked.
- Make sure your answers relate to your messages.
- Make sure your answers are short, to the point and easy to understand. For TV or radio, your answer should not exceed 15-20 seconds.
- It's okay to pause after the question to collect your thoughts. If you need to stall, use the reporter's name before you answer, or ask for the question to be repeated.
- Once you've answered the question, stop talking. Don't allow yourself to be drawn into a rambling response.
- Make sure the questions you rehearse are the toughest you're likely to face.
- Keep your target audience in mind as you craft your messages and respond to questions.
The reporter is not your audience.

- Research shows that what you say leaves less of an impression on your audiences than how you say it, particularly in the broadcast media. (People will remember 7% of what you say; but they will be motivated to accept your beliefs based upon how you say it and how you present yourself!)
- Be aware of your body language during the interview, particularly during TV interviews. Wide and open hand movements are distracting. Never talk with your hands in your pocket. Observe how politicians use their hands and body to convey their message. Small, simple gestures and fluid, relaxed movements.
- When seated, make sure your suit jacket does not ride up in the back, making you appear to have hunched shoulders.
- Avoid sparkling jewelry and loud plaids.
- A light blue shirt makes the best appearance on TV.
- If you're doing a radio interview, keep in mind that the audience can't see you and will accept or reject your message based solely on what you say and, more importantly, how you say it.
- With the print medium, your answers will be more detailed than with broadcast, but they are more open to the interviewers' interpretation. Make sure your message is clear to the reporter, ask if a comment needs further clarification. Try to keep your answers simple and make sure to get in your **key message points**.

BROADCAST INTERVIEWS

Television

- Use the set-up time. The TV crew consists of a videographer and reporter. When they arrive, it'll take 10 to 15 minutes to set up the camera, lights, and maybe clip a small microphone to your clothing. During this time:
- Don't say anything that the reporter or interviewer might use to try to "trip you up" during the interview. The interviewer is doing his/her job. He or she may be friendly and relaxed with you prior to the interview, but keep your wits about you – the reporter/interviewer is not your friend. Think of the reporter as a business associate and conduct yourself appropriately.
- Even though the equipment is being set up, assume the camera is running; be circumspect about what you say

- Ensure that the reporter has the information we sent prior to the interview (whether it's background information, a copy of the book, etc.).
- During the interview, don't look into the camera, make and maintain eye contact with the reporter. Continue to be mindful of your body language.
- After the interview, the reporter may make small talk, asking subtle questions about the situation. Again, assume the camera is running.
- Be careful of making comparisons in broadcast interviews; you may inadvertently cast your message in a negative light.
- Don't be clever. Using colorful or emotionally charged language will guarantee your quote gets used...for good or ill. Ditto for jokes.
- Keep your cool. In fact, the more combative and adversarial the reporter, the calmer you must remain.
- When answering a question, don't refer back to a previous answer; "As I said earlier..." This will make your response hard to edit. Every answer must stand on its own strength.
- TV is a visual medium. Keep that in mind when you pick a location for the interview. If possible, pick a location with visuals that support your message. Avoid stock shots, like the spokesperson sitting behind a desk.
- In fact, avoid placing barriers between the spokesperson and the interviewer. As a last resort, as stand-up shot with the company logo in the background will do.

THE TV STUDIO INTERVIEW

The occasion may arise in which you are requested to give an interview in the TV studio, either for a talk show or for a “live” interview as a part of the station’s normal news broadcast. Things to keep in mind:

- A studio interview usually means you’ll have more time to get your message across—a news show interview could run several minutes, as opposed to getting a 15-second sound bite; a talk show could run 30 minutes to an hour
- There will be no editing, which means what you say is what you get. So, careful preparation of your messages and answers is essential.
- If the reporter is combative, it’s difficult to extricate yourself from the situation until the interview or talk show is over

The request for a studio interview will come from a producer. That initial call is the time to ask about the topic, questions you’ll be facing and who else is being interviewed or included on the talk show. When you get to the studio, you’ll be escorted to a waiting room and the producer may, or may not, have a brief discussion with you about the interview. Usually, the waiting room will have a TV so you can watch the show. Pay attention to the “teasers” the station may be running on your upcoming interview. They will provide clues and context to how the topic will be treated during the interview.

Shortly before the interview, you’ll be escorted into the studio and an assistant will attach a small microphone to your jacket, blouse or tie. You may get a few brief comments from the anchor that will interview you. There will be a few moments before going live; usually the director, using his fingers, will give a five count to begin the segment.

Listen closely to the anchor’s intro of the interview. If the intro is inaccurate or off base, correct it as soon as the anchor introduces you. Also, once into the interview, remember that while you can’t control the anchor or his/her questions, you can control your answers. Listen closely to the questions and if they don’t provide an opening for you to deliver your messages, bridge from the question into your messages.

Once the interview is over, wait for the assistant to remove the microphone from your clothing. Make small talk with the anchor, but behave as though the camera and microphone are still “hot.”

Follow-up actions:

- Get videotapes, transcripts, or news clips of all coverage. Review the coverage to see if further action is necessary and to learn what you did well and how you could improve the next time. Also, this provides feedback on how the reporter handles stories about your organization.
- If a biased or inaccurate story appears, you may want to follow up with correct information. In extreme situations, newspapers will run a retraction. TV stations seldom do. Also, because telling a reporter they got it wrong is a delicate undertaking, make sure the situation warrants action, then proceed diplomatically.
- Occasionally calling reporters, editors, or news directors to compliment them on a good job on a significant story will help nurture your relationship.

GROOMING FOR SUCCESS

- Prior to a TV interview, check your appearance in a mirror. Make sure your hair is combed, eyeglasses are clean and you don't have food stuck on your front teeth. Attend to anything that could detract from the impression you want to convey
- You'll be in close proximity to the reporter, so if you're concerned about halitosis, brush your teeth before the interview and use mints or breath spray. Eliminating such concerns enable you to focus on the messages you want to deliver.
- Under TV lights, some jewelry can create glittering distractions
- Don't wear short skirts or sheer, low-cut blouses
- Don't wear a shirt or blouse that is whiter than your teeth. A light shade of gray or off-white is better.
- Medium-range colors work best on TV. Avoid red, green and white clothing.
- Beware of bold or busy patterns in clothing, including ties and scarves
- A little makeup for both men and women can avoid shiny faces, or a sweaty look. At the very least, just before you go live, use a handkerchief to wipe your nose and forehead.

THE RADIO INTERVIEW

Radio has been called the “Theater of the Mind,” because the listener conjures an image of the people speaking. Because there are no visual cues, it is most important to remember the following:

- Most radio interviews and even participation on talk show programs are likely to be done over the phone. Therefore, be careful to avoid an environment with distracting background noises.
- As with TV interviews, radio news stories are short, so your answers must be concise
- Avoid the use of a lot of numbers or statistics
- Eliminate space fillers like “uh” from your speech
- If you’re having trouble with a question, pause a moment before responding, then rephrase the question in a way that bridges to your message
- You should know in advance whether the interview will be live or taped. Live interviews require extra caution. If the interview is done on short notice, take a moment beforehand to collect your thoughts. Jot down three points you want to make.

THE NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW

- Interviews with newspaper reporters are likely to be longer and more detailed than with broadcast reporters
- The shelf life of newspaper and magazine articles is longer than with broadcast stories
- Reporters in the media monitor one another’s work. An interview that appears in the local daily may prompt requests from broadcast reporters shortly after it appears. The broadcast reporters will look for a new angle, or updated information to make the story appear fresh.
- Be prepared with details, statistics, photographs, charts and other evidence to support your assertions. Be prepared to accommodate the paper’s photographer.
- Use stories and favorable comparisons to support your messages
- If at all possible, put a human face on your story. Use examples and stories with people in them.
- Be prepared with the names of outside experts to whom you can refer reporters, regardless of what medium they work in

REPORTERS' BAG OF TRICKS AND TACTICS

In order to add the dimension of drama to their story, some reporters may use some of the following tactics:

- Approach you in a very friendly manner to get you to lower your guard. This is usually followed by increasingly tougher questions.
- Appear rude or angry to elicit an emotional reaction
- Continuously interrupt your answers to confuse you
- Paraphrase your answer in a distorted way
- Cite inaccurate information and ask for a comment
- Ask to go “off the record”
- Fire staccato questions to limit your time to think about the answers
- Feign confusion about your answer
- Act shocked or outraged at your answer, then “allow” you to change it
- Allow a pause to grow after you’ve answered a question to provoke you into a lengthier answer