

**TIPS FOR WORKING
WITH THE MEDIA**

Speaking to the Media

Before the Interview

Know what the interview is about

Ask the interviewer why they want to interview you, establish how much they know about the subject and what more they want to find out. Try to identify who else they might be interviewing on the subject and find out all you can about the publication.

Know your interviewer

The better you know your interviewer, the more relaxed you'll be and the better you'll perform. Journalists generally work at great speed and under intense pressure. They have to find a colorful angle that will attract the reader. If you can help them do that and remain true to your own organization, you have a much better chance of being interviewed again.

Say what you want to say, not what the interviewer tries to get you to say

Don't go into an interview before you've prepared some notes on the subject you'll be talking about. If a journalist comes on the phone for an immediate quote, promise to call back and spend at least a few minutes preparing your response. Remember to call back as soon as possible as new stories always crop up and you could get forgotten.

Develop a theme and three or four positive key points about the interview topic

You might have several points to make but at the very most, your audience will remember two or three. The less you say, the more they'll remember, so try to identify the issues and subjects that will appeal most to the audience. Write down key points and practice them aloud. Don't memorize them, know them and be able to expand upon them.

Preparing for a Media Interview

Remember the 3C's principle

Confidence – Have confidence in your own knowledge. You know your subject better than the journalist. Sit down beforehand and list all the advantages and any possible disadvantages of your viewpoint, service, etc.

Clarity – Write down the point of your viewpoint/service. Think of examples that show how your viewpoint/service relates to the average person. Use stories and common terms. Avoid jargon...don't say "ambulatory" when you can say "walk-in" or "outpatient."

Control – Take charge of the interview. Preparation is the key. Think of the types of questions you may be asked. Think of three or four key points you want to make during the interview. Make sure to state your key points often. Practice your comments and answers out loud. This will help you keep your answers brief and to the point. Use percentages sparingly. Say "nearly two out of three" instead of "65.5" percent.

Other tips

Give examples – A good example can be worth a thousand words. People love stories so identify a graphic example or anecdote to back up every assertion.

Use analogies – Analogies are another good way to "ring a bell" in the audience's mind. Relate abstract terms and dimensions to everyday things.

Give advice – People love to be "in the know." Therefore, where possible give the audience a few hot tips on how to get the best out of something or how to avoid disaster.

Anticipate questions – Don't worry too much about being asked a surprise question. There are a finite number of questions that can be asked on your subject and you're in a better position to know them than the journalist.

Body language – Burn in the back of the chair, lean forward and use your hands to communicate.

Don't discuss – It will make you sound too equivocal.

Don't defend – At least not in such a way to make you sound defensive.

Don't debate – This lowers yourself and your organization. Exception to this is a panel debate.

It's your show

Every interview presents a golden opportunity to communicate your position to a large number of people. In thoroughly preparing your brief you are preparing the messages you are going to get across to the audience.

Television (tips for doing a sit-down interview in the studio)

Arrive early.

Ask to meet the interviewer and the producer to discuss the line of questioning.

Let them know your general philosophy but don't give too much away.

Be careful about what you say at all times. Microphones are all around, and they may be live.

Relax and ask questions.

Expect to feel a bit nervous.

Check yourself in the mirror just before going on. If makeup is offered, accept it.

Don't get sidetracked – ignore distractions.

Concentrate on looking at the host or whoever else is talking. Don't look at yourself in a monitor while you're on the air.

Answer direct with "yes" or "no," "that's true," or "that's not true," or other appropriate phrases then add additional information. This will show that you are sincere and do not evade issues. It also will keep you on track and help you to avoid rambling answers.

If you must make a negative statement, end on a positive note.

Humanize yourself – talk about people, not percentages.

Smile when appropriate.

Use first names.

Be informal and conversational. Use short words and simple sentences.

Avoid jargon. Don't say "ambulatory" when you can say "walk-in" or "outpatient."

If you are interrupted by the host or another guest:

-Stop, listen, then pick up with "as I was saying..." and finish with "now, what was it you just asked (said)?"

-Ignore interruption, finish answer, then say "What was it you just asked?"

-Allow interruption and respond to it (if doing so is to your advantage, such as giving you an opportunity to clarify a point you were making).

-Stay cool.

Do's:

- Sit with legs together or crossed at knee (women: don't cross legs if skirt is short)
- Sit up straight and lean slightly forward in chair
- Use moderate (but not too broad) gestures
- Look interested, smile when appropriate
- Hold your head level
- Keep hands folded on lap or arms of chair

Don'ts:

- Fold your arms or make fists
- Fiddle with papers, pen, pencil, clothing, jewelry or hair
- Slouch, rock or swivel in chair
- Be overly casual/gesture wildly
- Frown or smirk

Radio

Stick to two or three themes or positive points.

Use anecdotes and analogies. Good radio communicators paint "word pictures."

Be prepared for a small studio and many distractions. Ignore them, stay alert, keep your mind on the topic and your eye on the host.

Avoid pauses when answering questions in live radio interviews. Silence on the radio suggests confusion. It's okay if there's a pause after your answer; then it's the host's responsibility.

It's okay to refer to notes, but do not read directly from them if possible. Be careful not to rattle the pages, radio mics are sensitive.

Remember that all the sincerity and enthusiasm that you are trying to communicate must come through your voice.

Use the host's first name occasionally. In a call in show, use callers' first names.

Smile. It will come through in your voice, even over the radio.

Print

Face-to-face or telephone interviews offer great opportunities. A face-to-face interview at your office is best because it's on your "turf."

When a reporter calls, ask immediately what story he or she is working on. What's the concept? Will they bring a photographer?

Do your homework. Try to cooperate.

If you are asked several questions at once, identify the question you are answering.

Don't insist on seeing the story before it is published, but tactfully suggest that you would be glad to confirm facts and figures.

Don't get upset if your quotes don't appear. Space is limited.

Provide brief answers and speak slowly so the reporter can absorb and understand what you are saying.

Be prepared for a longer interview than was requested.

Try to get relevant facts and statistics beforehand. It will help you and will give the reporter an additional source.

Take time to educate the reporter. He or she isn't as knowledgeable on the subject as you are.

Don't say "no comment" or go "off the record." Either give a complete answer or say "I don't know but I will find out and get right back to you."