

Media

Training

101

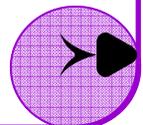


# Media Training 101

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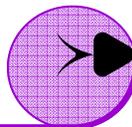


## Introduction

**L**ewis Carroll said, “If you don’t know where you are going, every road leads you there.”

This is key to remember when conducting interviews. The media is merely a vehicle for conveying campaign and organizational messages to large audiences. If you don’t have a clear sense of what you want people to know about your issue – and how the headline should read – then chances are slim that you will be satisfied with the result of the interview.

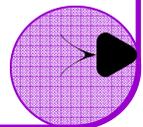
**Be prepared.** This booklet will tell you how. The bottom line is: successful interviews come from practice.



## Message Message Message

**T**o have a successful interview, you will need to know what your key messages are.

- Rule 1:** Don’t have more than three or four messages. More than that is too confusing.
- Rule 2:** All messages should support the organization’s main goals.
- Rule 3:** Messages themselves are not necessarily soundbites – they are ideas you are trying to get across.
- Rule 4:** Messages are reinforced by soundbites, phrases, statistics, and anecdotes.
- Rule 5:** Messages take time to create. Don’t rush the process.
- Rule 6:** Messages don’t change frequently. For messages to have impact, they have to be repeated over and over again.
- Rule 7:** Messages can be tailored for specific audiences, while still remaining constant. (See Rule 6)
- Rule 8:** Consistent messages should permeate all of your communications efforts, not just media.
- Rule 9:** Messages must be simple. They are ideas that can be explained in a sentence or two. If they require a paragraph or more, keep working.



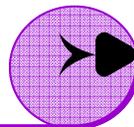
## Crafting Your Message

Following are some questions that may help you develop your messages:

- ◆ What do people need to know, believe, and care about to become engaged with your organization or issue?
- ◆ What obstacles or misconceptions do you need to overcome to get people engaged?
- ◆ What needs to happen, or what do people need to do, to meet your organization's goals or have an impact on your issue?
- ◆ If people did this, how would things be different?

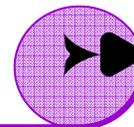
**Successful interviews are message-driven.**

To have a successful interview, you need to answer questions in a way that supports your messages. If, after an interview, the quotes included in a story do not support your main messages, then you are, what we call in the industry, "off-message." This is bad. You had an opportunity to get your message out and you blew it.



To avoid mistakes, practice interviewing using your messages. All spokespersons for your organization should be familiar and efficient in delivering these key messages. Remember, part of getting messages out successfully is picking the right spokespersons. Certain spokespersons will resonate better with your target audience than others.

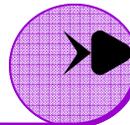
Don't let egos eliminate a chance to showcase your best spokespersons and get the most from a media interview.



## Before an Interview

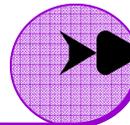
There are several questions you want answered before you agree to an interview. Some people are hesitant to ask these questions, but the more knowledge you have, the more prepared you will be. You won't lose an interview because you ask these questions.

- ◆ What's the interview about?
- ◆ What's your organization's role in the piece being proposed?
- ◆ Are you the focus or just a supporting player?
- ◆ Who else are they interviewing?
- ◆ What is the interview format?
- ◆ What outlet is it for? Is it one that reaches one of your target audiences? If it is not one you are familiar with, ask about their format: Is it a weekly, a daily, a conservative radio talk show?
- ◆ What's the format of the outlet? Print? Broadcast?
- ◆ What's the format of the interview? Is it a one-on-one? Are you part of a panel? Is it a live broadcast interview? Edited on tape? Call-in?
- ◆ How long will the interview be?
- ◆ For print pieces, do they need a photo?
- ◆ For broadcast interviews, will they need to pre-interview the spokesperson?



If you are comfortable with the answers to all of these questions, and you feel this interview gives you a good opportunity to get your organization's messages out, go for it. If you don't feel you are the right messenger for the show, consider suggesting someone else that might be more appropriate or could make a stronger statement.

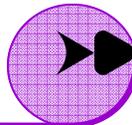
If the story just isn't on the right topic or won't give you the forum to discuss what you want to discuss, consider turning it down. Spend your time on something that will let you get your message out.



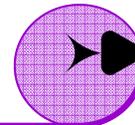
## Take Control

**T**he media is a hard vehicle to control. Here are some ways to stay in command of the situation:

1. **Know who you are talking to when you are being interviewed.** You are talking to the audience that reads the story or sees it on TV. You are not talking to the reporter who is interviewing you. Remember this.
2. **Never shoot from the hip.** If a reporter calls your office for a “quick comment,” don’t take the call right away. Ask what the subject is. Tell him/her you are just finishing up a meeting and will get right back to them. Take a deep breath, make quick notes about the points you want to make, and then call back. Also, never start a sentence with “I shouldn’t say this but…” If it starts that way, you probably shouldn’t.”
3. **Make sure staff answering the phone know the following rules:** 1) No one but designated staff are to give any information to the media; 2) If you or the designated staff are not available to take a media call, ask the media reporter for his/her name, outlet, direct line, and if they are on deadline. The deadline question is key, because if you take too long to get back to them, you may miss a chance to get your side into the story.



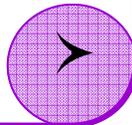
4. **Train staff to answer media calls at the office.** If you have just issued a report, held a news conference, or done something to generate news, expect media calls. This is particularly true if you are in a crisis communications situation.
5. **Take it from the top; make sure to correct misconceptions they have.** Even though you will have sent advance materials, do not expect that the reporter has read them thoroughly or really knows what your organization/campaign is about.
6. **Don’t make things up.** If you don’t know, say you don’t know.
7. **Never use jargon or acronyms.** Remember most people don’t have insider knowledge of your issue. Talk in a sophisticated but understandable way, avoiding use of insider lingo.
8. **Know your opponents’ viewpoints and have counterpoints ready.** It is rare for the media to only report one side of the story. Assume the other side will get called as well, so be sure to dismantle their arguments in your talking points.



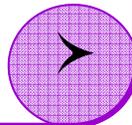
## Take Control—continued

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9. **The press are not your friends.** They may be your friends outside of work, but when interviewing you, they are looking for a story. Don't go "off the record" and don't confide things you wouldn't like to see on the nightly news.\
10. **Don't lose your temper with a reporter.** They always get the last word. They'll decide what quotes to use and which soundbites to air. Win the reporter over to your side with reason.
11. **Tape yourself in print interviews.** This way, if you have a problem, you will have a record. Make sure that the reporter knows you are taping.
12. **Don't answer personal questions.** Just say "that is personal" and move on.
13. **"No comment" rarely works any more.** Think about how you feel when you hear someone on the news say "no comment." They sound as if they have something to hide.
14. **Calm always wins the day.** Defensive and angry are signs of a person in a weak position.
15. **Support your messages.** Use anecdotes, statistics, and soundbites.



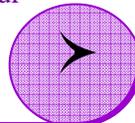
16. **Use "off-message" questions to bridge to your point.** Use phrases like "That's a good question. Before I address it, I'd like to go back to my earlier point..."
17. **Don't hop around in an interview just because the interviewer is jumpy.** If they interrupt you or barrage you with rapid fire questions, remain calm; finish your sentences; wait until the interviewer takes a breath between the rapid fire and then pick one question to answer. Don't fall for the "When did you stop beating your wife" or the "Isn't it true that" (putting you on the defensive" line of questioning. Don't start with "no" or act flustered. Merely correct the record and bridge to one of your main messages.
18. **Speak up!** If an interviewer mis-states something or has a fact wrong, don't be polite and keep quiet.
19. **Be concise.** For TV, realize your interview will be edited to fit into a very short time frame. (Network TV soundbites are typically 8 seconds long.) Likewise, print reporters will be looking for concise quotes to explain their story. Keep your answers between 10 – 20 seconds.
20. **Repeat repeat repeat.**



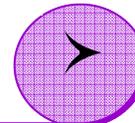
## Logistics for Radio and TV

**S**pecial rules for broadcast media interviews:

- ◆ Arrive early. Make friends with the crew and the person interviewing you.
- ◆ Use the host's first name, unless he/she specifies otherwise.
- ◆ Make sure the equipment is working. Check microphones and earpieces if you are being interviewed by satellite.
- ◆ You are always on the air. Say what you have to say, then be quiet. Don't fill "dead air." This is an old journalist's trick to get you to say something you really don't want to say, (e.g. Reagan's off-the-cuff remark about bombing Russia).
- ◆ Ask where to look at the beginning of the interview (at the host or camera) and then keep looking. Don't make faces or scratch your nose.
- ◆ If standing, place your feet with one slightly in front of the other. If you place them side-to-side-, you will rock, and it will show on camera.
- ◆ Hand movements should be small and even better if kept in your lap. If you must gesture, stay within an imaginary box that's below your chin, no wider than the inside of your arms, and no lower than your rib cage.



- ◆ If you are sharing the stage with others, particularly those who are hostile, you will need to be more aggressive. If a question is addressed to the entire panel, jump in – don't wait to be asked directly.
- ◆ When on talk radio, lead off with the most compelling fact.
- ◆ If on a panel, know the other panelists' viewpoints and likely arguments. Have soundbites ready to respond.
- ◆ For in-studio radio interviews, sit 6-8 inches away from the microphone.



## What to Wear on the Air

**W**omen: Solid, bright colors are best. Avoid all white or cream ensembles and busy prints. No heavy jewelry. Everyday make-up.

**M**en: Solid suits in grey or navy with a cream or other light-colored shirt. Be careful when choosing a tie. Check, houndstooth, and complicated patterns create optical illusions on TV and draw attention.



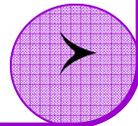
## After the Interview

**W**rite a note to the person who interviewed you, thanking them for their time and attention. Regardless of how the story comes out, you want them to know you appreciate the opportunity to talk about your campaign/issue.

**Review the coverage.** The best way to get better at interviewing is to review your performance. Then, make a list of what you'd do better or differently next time.

Ask yourself:

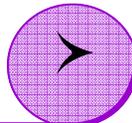
- ◆ Were you on message?
- ◆ Did you get your main points across in a concise and easy –to-understand way?
- ◆ Did your opponents have any compelling arguments that you could construct a better counterpoint to in the future?
- ◆ Was the piece in anyway inaccurate or unfair?



## After the Interview—continued

If the story is inaccurate or unfair...

If a story comes out with factual mistakes or misquotes, do not call up screaming at a reporter. Rather, point out the mistake calmly and ask for a correction. Consider contacting the editor or news director. Going over a reporter's head is a serious step and should only happen when a major mistake has been made and the reporter refuses to acknowledge his/her responsibility for the miscommunication. If you go over a reporter's head without first speaking with him/her, you will sour whatever relationship you have with that reporter, and it can come back to haunt you.



## Use Coverage to Further Goals

Use your media coverage to further your goals

While you hope that everyone tuned in or read the story about your organization, some important people may have missed it. Send the story to the with a cover note. Positive media coverage does a lot to help our credibility. Include target media outlets on our outreach list. Broadcast outlets in particular are more like to cover a story once it has been written about in a reputable print outlet.

