

Salon News®

Managing the Media

The press release worked. You're about to meet the press. Now, you need to make sure you—and your message—make the right impression.

BY JULIE NAUGHTON

All those press releases, phone calls, maybe even prayers, have finally been answered. A newspaper reporter, beauty editor or the local television station wants to interview you. A little nervousness is natural—especially when there's a tape recorder or microphone staring you in the face. But you need to set that

aside and make the most of the opportunity to promote your salon.

In a word: Relax. "Don't be intimidated," advises Lenny LaCour, owner of Highland Park, Ill.'s Salon LaCour, who makes frequent print and television appearances and has just been tapped to contribute style news to *CBS This Morning*. "It's easy to think, 'Oh, CBS is interviewing me, what do I do now?'" Remember that you're the expert here and that the reporter really cares about your opinion."

Still, as well as you know your subject, spend some time thinking about what you want to say. **Joyce Newman, a top media consultant and owner of the The Newman Group**, insists on the importance of preparation. "Don't try to simply wing it in an interview," she says. "You'll be nervous, and it will be harder to get your points across. Decide in advance what you want to say. If you anticipate being asked hard questions, have answers ready."

Difficult as it may be, keep any jitters in check. "I always remind myself that my message is more important than my nervousness," says Nick Berardi, senior creative director for Vidal Sassoon's New York salons. "I remember that the exposure is great for business because people who see it will connect me with my salon."

"You've got to believe that you have something valuable to say,"

says Brown. "It's natural to be nervous. Take a deep breath, relax and do some positive visualization. Then focus on what you want to say."

Ignoring these guidelines can mean a few embarrassing—lingering—mistakes, as stylist Edwin Fontanez of Cleveland's Dino Palmieri Salon has learned. "I've found out the hard way that you have to be careful what you say, because it will be around forever," says Fontanez. "There have been times I've gotten too comfortable in an interview and talked about subjects I shouldn't have, or just rambled on."

To keep from repeating past blunders, Fontanez now formulates a list before every interview. "When the reporter calls to set up a time, I always ask what we'll be discussing, when the deadline is and who else the reporter is talking to, and plan what I want to say accordingly. I think of all of the answers to questions I think might be asked, as well as tough questions that might come up. It makes the interview go smoother and faster, and I don't forget things I want to say."

The work doesn't stop there, Newman says. "It doesn't hurt to do some research on the reporter. Is she or he new to the industry? Has she spent the last 10 years as a beauty reporter? Is she planning an expose like the *20/20* piece (a now infamous story that unfavorably compared professional salon products to drugstore brands)? Who watches or reads this person? Read something the reporter has written, or watch their show. You want to be familiar with their style."

Remember that you have a choice about the coverage. Of course, anyone would jump at the chance to talk to a network about spring hair trends, but there may be topics that won't show you or your salon off to best advantage. No matter what, keep in *Continued on page 66*

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mind that the reporter's out to tell a story with your help, says Christen Brown, founder of On Camera, a media-training company. "If you accept that, you can talk to a reporter with an angle and concisely answer questions," Brown explains. "And try to lead the reporter in your direction. You may be able to present an aspect of the issue they're not aware of."

Berardi has a little practical advice for the apprehensive interviewee: "Role-play with someone," he counsels. "Have that person drill you on easy—and hard—questions, so you don't get gun-shy with the actual reporter." Adds Newman, "Don't just offer five-word answers. Offer anecdotes and facts. Make the reporter taste it, smell it, feel it."

That's not to say you should think of the reporter as your best friend. "I can't tell you how many times people have made an offhand comment to a reporter in, say, the bathroom, and have had it come back to haunt them," cautions Newman.

Try to put a positive—and personal—spin on your comments, advises Berardi. "If you can't discuss something, don't say 'No comment,'" he says. "Say, 'I'm not able to talk about that, but here's what I can tell you,' and guide them to a similar topic."

Don't feel like you have to have every answer at your fingertips, either. "If a reporter asks you a question and

you don't know the answer, it's OK to say you will call them back," Brown emphasizes. Adds Newman, "Most importantly, don't waste a reporter's time. If you agree to a phone interview at 3 pm, be available at 3 pm. Don't keep the reporter waiting."

While certain general strategies apply to any press situation, there are definite dos and don'ts when it comes to each type of media. "Because TV is a visual medium, how you say things is as important as what you say," advises Brown. "Eye contact is very important, as is body language. Steepling your fingers, for instance, is very powerful body language." Pay attention to your clothes. "Dress basic," LaCour says. "Don't feel like you have to look like a stereotype of a hairdresser."

If you're doing hair on camera, don't take this opportunity to create the most difficult look ever, advises Berardi. "Find out how much time you'll have to work, and choose cuts that are easy to do in the time you'll have," he says. "Bring your assistants. If you're trying hard to finish one cut, chances are you won't be relaxed when the interviewer comes back to you to explain it. And make sure your kit is complete before you get on the air. This is no time to discover you're missing a piece of equipment."

"There's nothing worse than trying to ad-lib something on TV," adds Fontanez. "Either practice until you're sure, or choose another style." And keep in mind that you might not be cutting or styling under salon-perfect conditions: "What works for the

salon might not work for the camera," says Berardi. "You may be styling hair in an awkward position—be flexible."

For radio appearances, your voice is all that your audience has to go by, so make it memorable. "Speak with energy," advises Brown. "A monotonous delivery doesn't excite anyone. Vary your vocal inflections, and realize it's okay to pause."

For print interviews, on the other hand, what you say is more important, Brown says. "In print, you can use more data and statistics, because it's information the reader can clip out and go back to again."

For trade show appearances, Brown suggests "picking out kind eyeballs." Don't just look at a huge audience and start speaking, she advises. "Act enthusiastic, make lots of eye contact. Ask for a cordless microphone so you can walk around and connect with the audience."

LaCour suggests aspiring media stars tape each interview—whether it's print, TV or radio—so they can learn from their mistakes. And there's an added bonus: "The tape ensures you won't be misquoted—or if you are, you have proof of what you said."

Despite all of your preparation, you may discover that the reporter doesn't use all—or any—of your words of wisdom. "Don't be upset if you give a long interview, and you get one paragraph in the story," LaCour says. "Concentrate on being the most informative source you can be. That reporter will often use you again." ●