

Media Training Tips the Scales for On-Air, In-Person Media Appearances

Preparing for media interviews — regardless of the medium — can provide an excellent opportunity to communicate an important message to your key audiences. Understanding the subtleties of the various types of media interviews can make a real difference in your success.

One basic rule applies to all media interviews: *do your homework*. Get to know the reporter's style by reading, listening or watching previous interviews conducted by the reporter. Does she generally provide fair and balanced stories? Is he friendly and informed? Is the reporter usually hostile? Uninformed? (Or, heaven forbid, hostile *and* uninformed?) Do you sense a journalist who has already written the story and is just filling in the blanks? A smart reporter will do as much homework on your company or client as you do on him. Try to determine how much the reporter knows and anticipate the questions she may ask. Have your key messages prepared.

While you're not obligated to answer every question a reporter poses, you are obliged to respond. Merely saying "yes" or "no" is not an option — this is not a court deposition. While you can't control the reporter or the presentation of a story, you can — and must — control your input. Determine your own agenda before every interview and use it to drive your responses.

Telephone Interviews

Like your emotions, your voice changes throughout the day. Learn to use your voice to your best advantage and convey information in ways appropriate to the interview. Tape *your* end of the conversation to use later as a tracking tool and to review your own performance. Consider these tips to gain focus:

- Make sure your office is quiet; close the door.
- Control your voice to sound authoritative.
- Stand up when giving the interview.
- Have key message points handy.
- Use a speakerphone, so your hands are free to review notes or to gesture.

If you're caught off guard by a request for a telephone interview, make an appointment to talk later. Try to find out whom the reporter is interviewing and the angle of the story.

Radio Interviews

As a rule, assume you're on the air from beginning to end, and follow these tips:

- Listen to the reporter ahead of time to get

a sense of his or her style.

- Use the reporter's name to ensure a conversational tone.
- For interviews in the studio, bring props. Even though the listener can't see them, referring to a prop can launch a more descriptive conversation.

Print Interviews

Some people feel more comfortable doing face-to-face print interviews, as opposed to TV or radio. However, don't become complacent — you may say more than you need to and end up suffering from "foot-in-mouth" disease.

- Read what the reporter has previously written.
- Use questions to make key points on your agenda. Don't drone on; you may say things that do more harm than good.

Television Interviews

TV feels threatening to most people, because you have to look *and* sound good. The best way to overcome fear is practice — often — in front of a camera. Remember to focus on your message and make your most important point first. Be positive, authoritative and in control. TV tips that will boost your performance:

- Watch a tape of the show and check the style of the host; know what kind of show it is: one-on-one; panel; call-in; or "couch."
- Find out if you'll be the first or last guest — this affects the time allotted for your interview.
- Beware of hot microphones — you're on the air until you're off the set!
- Know how the reporter will begin. If the first question doesn't offer a way to make your key point, try to make it anyway; then answer the question.
- Come out of the gate with something that grabs the viewer's attention.

(Don't use your "grabber" during the pre-interview — the producer may use it to promote your segment and you'll be left with nothing!)

- Appear as though you've got a relationship with the reporter; use his/her first name.
- Keep your eyes on the reporter, even if he or she is looking elsewhere during the segment.
- Appropriate gestures help make your point and give you confidence.
- Don't use industry jargon — complicated topics can be explained using analogies.
- "Bookend" your message. Practice your opening and closing and make them the same.

Media Training



Joyce Newman

Joyce Newman, a New York-based media trainer and a principal of The Newman Group, specializes in media training and customizes training sessions on presentation and speaking skills. Contact her at 212/838-8371 or joyce@newman-group.com. See www.newmangroup.com for more information.

Speak to Critical Acclaim

President Bush recently held the nation spellbound as he addressed a Joint Session of Congress. His TV speaking style was remarkably changed from his stump speeches as a candidate. Note his great strokes:

— Bush began with a *masterful opening*. "Presidents come to this chamber to report on the state of the union. Tonight, no such report is needed — it has already been delivered by the American people."

— The President humanized the tragedy. In so doing, he brought us all together at the outset.

— His speech, exceptionally well written, had many memorable lines, each consisting of short sentences and no tentative words; each made powerful with long pauses to allow us time to ingest his words. Had he raced to the next thought (as many speakers do) his eloquence would have been lost.

— Bush used the Teleprompter well, staying on one and moving to the other only when he was ready to change thoughts. This translated into powerful eye contact with the audience, enabled him to drive home his thoughts and, seemingly, to speak to one person at a time rather than to millions at once — a powerful and empowering technique.