

Tips for Talking with Reporters

While every interview is unique, the skills required to have a successful interview are the same. Here are a few tips for making the most of your media interview.

- **Memorize your key points.** Have answers prepared for the most likely questions, as well as the toughest questions. Prepare to move from these questions to the message points you want to communicate. It helps to know about the media outlet and the reporter before you begin, so you have an idea about what type of questions to expect. Writing things down helps fix them in the mind and seeing them written down also helps.
- **Make sure the reporter has your name, title and affiliation right.** Remember to say who or what you represent.
- **Stand up.** Doing interviews standing, even radio or phone interviews, will give you more energy and authority. Standing also helps keep you alert, and more conscious that you are talking to a reporter instead of a colleague. Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart and firmly anchored to the ground.
- **Get in the moment.** Relax, close your eyes and take three deep breaths, focusing on clearing your mind. Then visualize a moment in the past where you felt very motivated and very confident. Capture this moment in your mind and anchor those feelings.
- **Speak with increased energy.** Speak at a higher volume, range, tone and pitch than you would normally. Imagine having a conversation with someone and speaking at a slightly more animated level than you would normally.
- **Keep calm.** Reporters will fire off questions at you quickly. Their speech patterns may be intense and fast. Do not get drawn into mirroring and matching these patterns. In these situations, take a breath and speak more slowly than the interviewer.
- **Be honest and direct.** Do not guess, speculate, or pretend to know something you don't know. If you are not sure of a fact, admit it. Tell the reporter that someone will get back to him or her with an answer right away and be sure to follow through. Do not put yourself into a hypothetical situation.
- **Be concise.** Use short sentences, active verbs and simple language. But avoid one-word answers.
- **Be specific.** Back up generalizations with specifics, examples, statistics (but not too many) or facts.
- **Be "visual".** Use anecdotes or examples to communicate your point. Use descriptive words that paint a picture for the audience and reporter.
- **Stay on message.** From the moment the reporter walks in the room or calls you, you are "on." Be friendly, but always be aware of what you say. Don't be caught off-guard. Anything you say to a reporter can be quoted, even if the cameras or recorders are not running. While you may want to offer information or a reporter may offer you the opportunity to respond "off the record," it is best to remember that there is no such thing as "off the record."
- **Offer background help.** Email the reporter additional information to promote a better understanding of complex issues.
- **Check for understanding.** If the interviewer rephrases your answers, make sure they are correct. If not, correct the interviewer. This is especially important when quoting statistics, dollar amounts, dates, etc.
- **Avoid jargon and acronyms.** It may be a "shortcut" for you, but it is a foreign language to your audience – and probably also the reporter.
- **Don't be brought into conflict.** Reporters often frame their questions to bring out the conflict in a story. State your position/messages in positive terms, and don't repeat negative terms from a reporter's questions. Never say "no comment." This will prompt journalists to explore the issue further. If you are unsure of the answer or cannot discuss it, say so. There is nothing wrong with being honest and saying "I don't know," if you indeed don't know and can't find an answer.
- **Do not feel you have to fill silence.** Once you have answered the question, stop and wait for the next question. Do not volunteer information unless it supports a positive point you want to make.
- **Do not answer for other organizations or individuals.** If you are not the appropriate spokesperson, refer the reporter to someone who is.
- **Don't expect a reporter to show you a story before publication.** You can ask a reporter to repeat a point you have made, to ensure it was understood. If you are misquoted, contact the reporter rather than the editor. Don't overreact, especially if the error is minor.
- **Review, evaluate and improve.** After each media interview always review: What worked well? What could be improved? What will I work on for next time?

Adapted from these sources: [Office of Public Affairs, California State University at San Bernardino](#); Thomas Murrell, MBA CSP from [EZine Articles](#)