

Media Interviews 101

It takes careful planning to reap the rewards from a talk with a reporter. To maximize your chances of a favorable outcome for your story, you must be very clear on what you want to accomplish concerning the topic of the interview.

1. Keep it short, simple and to the point. TV quotes last somewhere between five and 10 seconds. Quotes found in print stories are seldom more than 15 words, with the exception of an article on the person that is being quoted.
2. Remain focused while keeping your comments brief. In preparing for the interview, select the three most important facts you would like your audience to know. Keep your facts simple, preparing for each a declarative sentence containing 8 to 15 words. Think about the type of quotes you remember from the media and try to emulate them in your own style.
3. Remember who you are dealing with before the interview starts. A reporter may be friendly; however, he or she is not your friend. It is their job to talk to you and the interview is a business discussion that is important to you. Stay focused on the task at hand whether the reporter is funny, or seems to be on your side. And remember, a microphone is always live.
4. Make your answers plausible. Acknowledge, when asked, any past problems and explain what you've done to correct them. Or, simply state that you have discussed the issues thoroughly in the past and you have nothing more to add at this time. Fight off the temptation to volunteer too much detail in an attempt to maximize the potential for a positive story. Too often, a deluge of information confuses a reporter. A reporter is then likely to produce a story that is interesting to viewers or readers but misses your points.
5. Be confident. Remember the reporter came to you as an expert on the topic. The reporter might seem to be in charge, but do not shy away from inserting your key talking points into the interview by telling them what's important and why.
6. Reporters will question your assertions. Have backup information that explains your projection; be prepared to do so without revealing confidential data. Wait for the reporter to ask before providing the backup. Emphasize what is important while giving them the information they need.



7. Have your three talking points in front of you if conducting a phone interview. Having a list of possible questions and proposed answers will also help keep your goals clearly in front of you. Remember to be engaging during the interview, the reporter is looking for information, not a hard time. You can almost always expect them to ask questions that are off the topic. When they do, smoothly steer them back to your main talking points. Good “bridge” phrases for this include: “What’s important here is,” “What I can tell you is,” “There is something else to consider,” “I’d also like to add,” “Something we haven’t talked about that’s important is,” and “What we know is.”

Be realistic about the possible outcome. Getting even one message into a news story is a terrific outcome. With some planning, it could be the point you want to make. Reporters are doing their job and so are you.