

Surviving the Spotlight

A Reporter's Guide to Giving Great Interviews

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS
June 29, 2005

Media and Interview Training
Presentation and Public Speaking Skills
Message Development
Executive Communications
Facilitation
Keynote Speaking
Consulting



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Focus™

F

OCUS YOUR MESSAGE

O

**PPORTUNITY TO SHARE, EDUCATE
AND INFORM**

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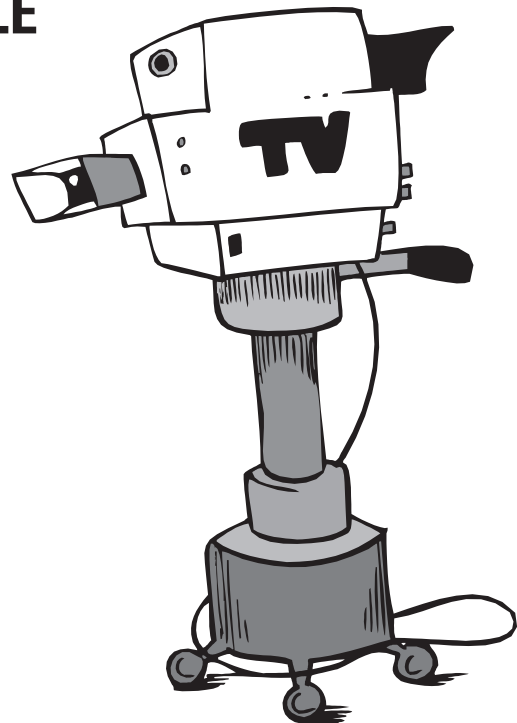
LEAR and CONCISE

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NDERSTAND THE MEDIUM

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HORT AND SIMPLE

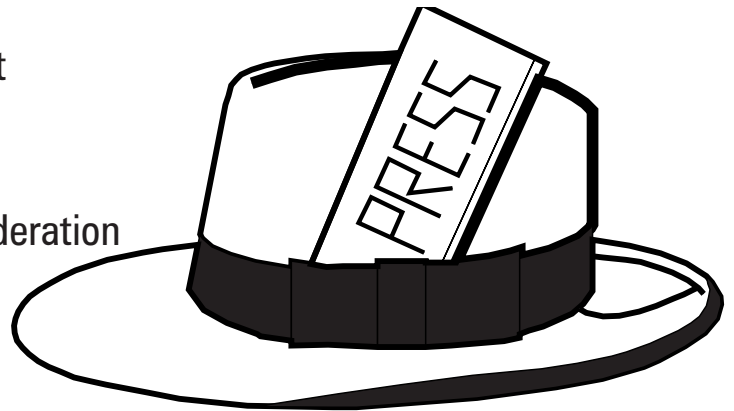


What The Media Really Wants

- **WHO** is affected or involved?
- **WHAT** happened?
- **WHEN** did it happen?
- **WHERE** is it happening?
- **WHY** or what was the cause?
- **HOW** did this occur?

Reporters are not out to get you. They don't sit around planning how to be confrontational or sensational. Reporter's want:

- A Story
- Information
- Get to the point
- Accessibility
- Deadline consideration



What Does It Mean To Me?

Most reporters pride themselves on being fair and impartial even though it doesn't always appear that way. Often when an organization says the media is biased, it's because a particular story didn't reflect that organization's bias. Sometimes, spokespeople say the reporter missed the point, but in reality, the spokesperson may not have made his or her point clear.

Conducting Effective Interviews

Make the first words out of your mouth count. It is your best opportunity to deliver your message and set the tone for the interview. Remember; an interview is a conversation sustained by questions. That's why follow up questions usually follow something you said.

Q: How do I get my main point across if the reporter doesn't ask that question?

A: Regardless of what the reporter asks, make sure your first answer includes one of the message points you want to deliver.

Q: Where should I look?

A: Always look at the reporter. Don't look up, down, around or at the camera. If you are being interviewed by remote and only a camera is present, then it is appropriate to look at the camera. Imagine that the camera is the person with whom you are speaking.

Q: What happens if the reporter doesn't ask a question about my main message points?

A: Acknowledge the question and answer it, but bridge to the message you want to deliver. For example: "It seems the important issue is...", "Let me also point out...", Always go back to your main points.

Q: What if I don't know the answer to a question?

A: If you don't know the answer, say so, but offer obtain that information or to put the reporter in touch with someone who can help him or her.
NEVER NEVER NEVER guess.

Q: How do I handle negative or hypothetical questions?

A: Don't repeat the negative statement or question, but instead, bridge to a positive message point. For example: "The important issue is...", or "Our main concern is...". Speak only to the facts and always make sure to correct mis-information.

Q: What should I do if a reporter asks for my opinion?

A: If you are representing your company or agency, your personal opinion is not relevant. Stick to your message points.

Q: What happens if the reporter keeps interrupting before I'm finished?

A: Finish your thoughts and keep delivering your message points. Don't be afraid to say to tell the reporter you can only answer one question at a time, then continue.

Q: What happens when a reporter won't take no for an answer?

A: Be nice and polite. Confrontations, loud words and running from the camera make great TV and guarantee you front page coverage. Be diplomatic.

Q: The interview was over, but the reporter quoted me anyway. Isn't there such a thing as off the record?

A: No. If you don't want the information made public, then keep quiet. Interviews are not over until the reporter has left.

Q: They want such short answers to such complicated information. How can I do that?

A: Stick to your main message points. Put yourself in the shoes of your readers, viewers or listeners. What do they care about? What does it mean to them? Use simple short phrases.

Q: What can I do to sound more interesting?

A: Act excited and enthusiastic. If you're not energized about what you're saying, why should anyone listen to you? Be direct and to the point. Avoid industry jargon and don't use big words. Limit numbers and statistics. Instead, create images and analogies that are easy for the listener to visualize.

Q: What should I do when the reporter stays silent after I've answered a question?

A: Remain silent. Don't fill in the gaps or you might end up volunteering information that has nothing to do with your message. If the silence continues, ask the reporter if there will be anything else.

Q: During TV interviews, the cameraperson sometimes takes pictures when the reporter is finished. Is the microphone off?

A: No. The photographer is taking cut-aways. These are pictures of the reporter and interviewee talking. If the interviewee says something off mike, the camera microphone will still pick it up and it could end up in the story.

Building Bridges

Interviews are not ONLY about answering questions. When a reporter asks a question, it is important to acknowledge the question and address it even if you only address it briefly. But you must then look for opportunities to bridge or transition to key points you wish to communicate.

Example: "I do not know about the program you are referring to, but I can tell you that Agency A inspects all of its bridges on an ongoing basis. In fact, to date we have..."

- **It's important for you to understand**
- **What you might find interesting**
- **What I can tell you**
- **Let me add**
- **The benefits are**
- **The way we see it**
- **In reality**
- **The truth is**
- **It's important to point out**
- **You might find it interesting to know**
- **Another important thing to know is**
- **We have learned**
- **Our organization believes**
- **Right now**
- **That's not my area of expertise, but I can tell you**
- **That's an interesting question, but the real issue is**
- **Let me tell you how it works**
- **This is what I know**
- **In fact,**

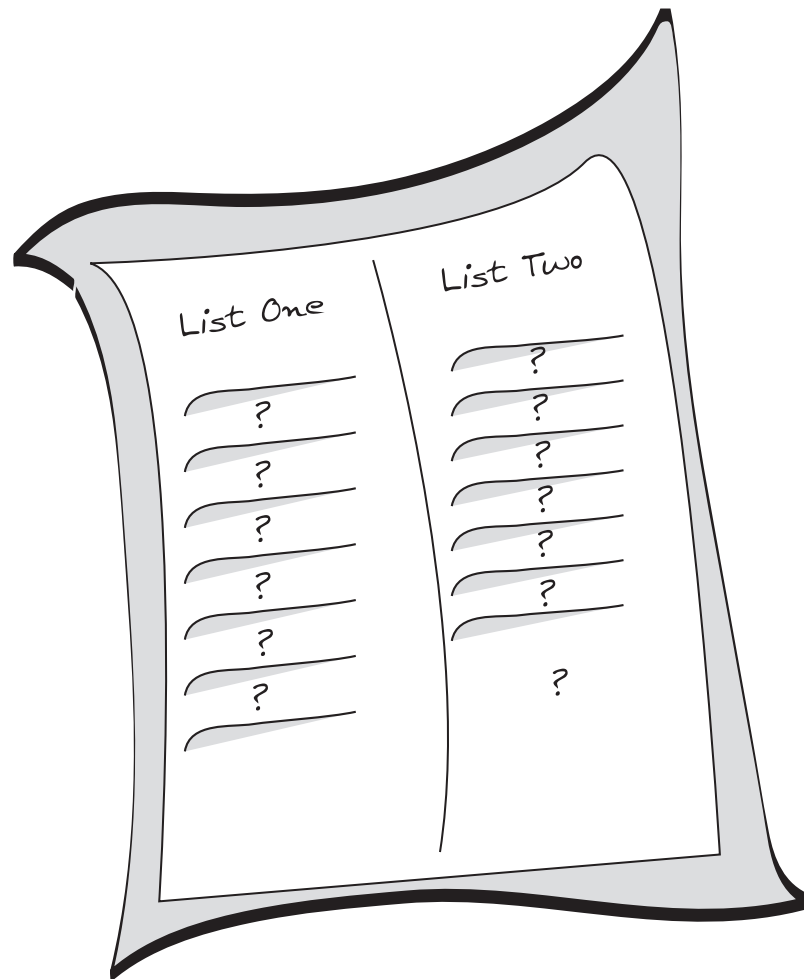


MAKING LISTS

The key to any good presentation is organization. If you know you're going to be interviewed, prepare in advance by making two lists.

LIST ONE: Anticipate every question you will likely be asked.

LIST TWO: Anticipate questions you hope you are not asked. By preparing for ALL potential questions, there will be fewer surprises.



Body Language

- ✗ **don't** rock, swing or pace
- ✓ **DO** stand or sit straight



- ✗ **don't** stare at the camera
- ✓ **DO** look at the interviewer

- ✗ **don't** fold your arms across your chest
- ✓ **DO** keep arms and hands loose



- ✗ **don't** keep your hands in your pockets
- ✓ **DO** gesture to emphasize points

- ✗ **don't** relax too far back in your chair
- ✓ **DO** sit forward and act enthusiastic



- ✗ **don't** um, huh, er, ya know, uh
- ✓ **DO** pause

- ✗ **don't** wear loud distracting clothing and jewelry
- ✓ **DO** use face powder so you won't shine

- ✗ **don't** tap pens or bracelets
- ✓ **DO** use props to demonstrate if appropriate