



media friendly

MEDIA GUIDANCE
FOR
TV AND RADIO
INTERVIEWS

TELEVISION AND RADIO INTERVIEWS

Preparation:

1. When asked to give an interview, ask the journalist or researcher:
 - A) Their name and contact details.
 - B) The name of their media outlet, Radio station or TV station.
 - C) The subject matter.
 - D) **The deadline!**
 - E) The line of questioning.
 - F) The name of the interviewer.
 - G) The length of the interview.
 - H) The location.
 - I) The other interviewees (if any) in the discussion or programme.
 - J) The name and nature of the programme.
2. Tell them you will phone back (within thirty minutes if possible) after checking some facts and figures. Then contact your Head of Communications, Public Relations Officer, or whoever is appropriate for policy on the issue and any relevant facts.
3. You must do some preparation before any media interview. Fail to prepare, prepare to fail! We recommend an **ABC** approach for most interviews – **Answer / Address** the question, then **Bridge** (“and / however / what’s really important is ...”), then **Communicate** (one of the three key points you want to make for each answer you give).
4. For extreme **Crisis** scenarios, such as a death, we recommend a more conservative **3R’s** approach – **Regret** (try and weave in “Sorry” without admitting liability), **Reason** (the facts) and **Remedy** (actions – what you are doing about this crisis). An apology – if you are genuinely in the wrong, or where appropriate – does go a long way, but remember that you will never please all of the people all of the time. Following the 3R’s is far better than either No Comment, or being unavailable, which is tantamount to admitting guilt by default.



5. Finally, you may want to anticipate the difficult questions – **5 W's + H - What? Why? How?** (or how many / much), **Where? When? Who?** (is to blame).
6. If agreeing to proceed, dress accordingly and make a list of three bullet points before heading to the studio or awaiting the arrival of a TV Video Journalist, camera crew, or Radio reporter. You may also be asked to do a phone interview for Radio.
7. Be positive from your first dealings to your last. Offer coffee when the journalist arrives - and give yourself five to ten minutes with the reporter, possibly while the crew is setting up. While you will learn from him/her at this point, make sure you give away nothing you might later regret.
8. There is no such thing as an “off the record” remark. Unless you have absolute trust in the reporter, do not reveal information you would rather keep to yourself. If you have absolute trust - and only if you have a positive story - a little extra background will help a fair-minded reporter bring more balance to the report.
9. Check your tie is straight (using the camera lens as a mirror, if necessary), your jacket sitting properly and that your clothes are the way you wish them to appear. Accept the offer of make-up at a studio, brush your hair and dust your dark jacket (if necessary). If you think this does not matter, ask your spouse or friends whose critical eye will detect the detail which detracts from what you are saying.
10. Find a comfortable sitting position, alert, without leaning too far forward and looking over-anxious. Do not lean back either, otherwise you might appear arrogant or complacent.

Performance:

11. While “ums” and “errs” may prove a slight irritation, it is your overall fluency and confidence which will count. Remember that a worried look undermines the words you choose; as does a sneering appearance.

12. Maintain good eye contact with the interviewer (except for a down-the-line interview, when you will be instructed to look directly into the camera lens). This means that your eye contact with the audience watching at home will be good. A sudden glance away during, or immediately following an awkward question, is most damaging.

13. If the interview is being conducted standing up, try and stand still. Please do not fold your arms in front of you (defensive), or wave them around in front of your face. A little hand movement is perfectly acceptable as long as it does not go above your neck, interfering with the eye line between your face and the camera.

14. Speak in the appropriate tone - enthusiastic when extolling a virtue; regretful when announcing cutbacks; determined when outlining future policy; deeply saddened when discussing a tragedy.

15. Exude confidence without sounding boastful or arrogant. Always bear the "public sympathy line" in mind. That is, the line between you and the interviewer. If you cross it with arrogance, complacency, aggression, or rudeness, you will lose the audience support. If you remain confident, pleasant, modest, enthusiastic and, above all, reasonable, you will not lose. Let the interviewer cross it if he/she wishes. More fool them.



16. Avoid using the interviewer's name - unless in a radio interview using several contributors. It can sound patronising or chummy - to the exclusion of the audience. It may also be that another reporter "voices" the report, leaving your name-check out of place.

Control:

17. Without hesitation, answer each question by putting forward one of your own 3 key points - using a subtle bridge between the question and the answer (eg. "That may be so, but ..." or "You could also argue that...").

18. You do not have to always answer the question, but you do have to address the question. So the trick is to get one of your bullet points into an answer which is relevant to the question - that addresses it in some way.

19. Always attempt to pull answers around into areas you wish to debate or explore. You do not want to be bogged down in areas which you have no knowledge and little interest.

20. When allegations are made, always make a firm rebuttal. Knock them down with phrases like "That's utter nonsense ..." and "You know as well I do, that is simply not the case!" Hesitation and awkward glances are sure signs of guilt.

21. Never repeat the negative terminology of the question - even in a denial. If you repeat the interviewer's mischievous words, you give them credibility. So please do **not** answer the question, "Have you failed?" with, "No we have not failed! Definitely not failed!! Failure is not a word in our vocabulary!!!" (You have just used it three times!)



22. **Never, ever** tell a lie. Your credibility could be destroyed in one word - and forever! By all means avoid issues you do not want to discuss, by talking your way into a more positive area. But do not lie under any circumstances. (Sometimes a good bridging phrase is "It's too early to say, but what I can tell you is ...").

23. Remember that this is **your platform**. A lot of time and expense has gone in to getting you to this stage of fielding media interviews. So the onus is on you to get your message across as effectively as you can.

24. Stay cool, calm and collected, even in the hottest arguments. Lose your temper and you lose the argument. Let the interviewer look agitated and bad-tempered. Baffle him/her with politeness and reason.

25. If he/she interrupts your answer, raise your voice just enough to be heard, and continue. (This is your platform just as much as the TV station's.) You can then finish your positive point. If he/she interrupts you persistently, just say "You've asked me a question, please allow me the courtesy of a reply."

26. Do not interrupt the interviewer's questions. It will make you look ill at ease and anxious to limit the damage. It also reduces your thinking time.

27. Never use a negative word in your replies. "Problems" are "challenges". You are never "worried". You are "aware of the situation". Keep the tone upbeat and positive wherever possible. If you want your audience to be interested, you have to provide the enthusiasm.

28. Keep your words simple and comprehensible to the entire audience. The longer the words you choose, the more people you eliminate from understanding your point.

29. Never use **jargon** - it is only a short form for those who understand your business. You may be striving to achieve "A Reconfiguration of Services relating to the Transformation Agenda" - but what does it actually mean to the general public?

30. Humour can be a devastating weapon (though obviously not during a Crisis interview), whether to destroy an interviewer's argument, or in a self-deprecating way, to put your case into perspective. It can, in certain circumstances, be well worth showing that you know the difference between taking your viewpoint seriously, if not yourself. However, beware of being flip. What you consider funny, could cause great offence to others.

31. Do not allow the interviewer to wind up mischievously, or shout you down at the end of the interview. It will only be the end if you sit there and accept it. Challenge his/her final snide remark. This prevents you from feeling you have blown it at the last moment.

32. Thank the interviewer at the end of the interview - even if it has been heated. A smile, where appropriate, indicates you are still in control right to the end.

33. Always remember that **you are the expert**, not the interviewer. He/she has simply “cribbed up” on the subject. You are there because you are the expert. So do not let your opinion be undermined as worthless. Give your views at all costs, regardless of any attempts to devalue your comments.

34. Never lose sight of who your remarks are aimed at. It is not the interviewer, your family or friends, or even your boss. It is the watching public, who comprise your customers and clients.

35. Always remember the **three R's for Crisis Management:**

- a) **Regret**
- b) **Reason**
- c) **Remedy**

And **ABC for the majority of interviews:**

- a) **Answer / Address**
- b) **Bridge**
- c) **Communicate – 1 of 3 key messages**

36. Always sing from the same hymn sheet.





Media Training

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