



Short, sweet, stop: Get your message across

When it comes to media interviews, a little preparation can go a long way. Do your homework: Know your subject, your audience and enough about the reporter and interview format to get your information through to your audience. Know what others say about the matter. Be able to give the reporter concise, clear information. Even when a reporter calls for a quick phone interview, you don't need to take that call cold. Buy a few minutes to gather your thoughts. Having a few talking points will help you get your point across and stay focused.

TELL THE TRUTH

SPEAK FOR THE RECORD

Anything you say to a reporter is fair game for a story. If you don't want it reported, don't say it. Asking a reporter to go "off the record" is not appropriate. Don't ask reporters not to print something after you say it. "No comment" is a comment. Avoid it!

RESPECT DEADLINES

Reporters live by unbending deadlines. If a reporter catches you unprepared, find out what she's looking for and offer to call back. Gather your thoughts, anticipate questions, plan your response and call back quickly. Don't give a quickie response if you have inadequate information or think that such a response will do a disservice.

BE PREPARED

Doing your homework makes you a better source. Anticipate possible questions and think through answers. Ask yourself, "Is this a controversial or sensitive topic? How will my answers be perceived? How can I best explain this?" Gather background materials for the reporter that help reinforce details.

KEY POINTS

Before interviews, identify the 3 main points you want to make. For each point, develop 3 responses that support or help communicate that point. Keep that list of points in front of you during the interview. In times of crises, keep your key points cool, contained and conflict-free. On controversial issues, stick to the issue, your data or research and your viewpoint.

LEAD WITH THE BOTTOM LINE

Provide key facts or points first.

BE CLEAR AND BRIEF

Use simple, everyday language. Ditch the jargon. Work on making key points in 20 seconds or less. Don't let your message get lost in a clutter of details. Practice your answers, but don't memorize them.

MAKE IT MEMORABLE

Know how the issue you are talking about affects real people. Does it save them money, help their family, make their lives better or easier or address their economic, social or environmental concerns? Use real-life examples or anecdotes. Paint word pictures.

BRIDGE, REDIRECT, FOCUS, REFRAME

If the line of questions gets off track, use your talking points to steer the interview back to your message and the issue at hand. In bridging, you briefly and directly answer the question posed then add an answer that makes one of your three main points. "Yes, and years of research show ..." "True, however ..." "No, and that's because ..."

If faced with a question that's misleading, off-base or potentially damaging, rephrase or redirect the question in a way that is more objective and comfortable. "The larger question is ..." "Our first concern is always ..." "The real issue is ..."

STOP

Don't keep talking to fill the silence. Make your point and stop.

If you don't know your message going into an interview the audience won't know it when the story comes out.