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media training white paper



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Have you or anyone on your staff had media training ?

You are there to tell your side of the story. While the reporter is there seeking information for their audience and accordingly poses tough questions. You must speak through the reporter to the audience. but is your audience the media itself, local elected officials, regulatory officials, the public, or all of the above? Media training will show you how to target your audience so that your message is delivered accurately.

Non-verbal communication comprises a majority of your message, you have to know what you're "saying" with not only your voice; but your body as well. At a public presentation, non-verbal communication may speak louder than your words. Crossed arms, leaning away from the interviewer, frequently shifting eyes, tense voice, and looking down at your notes may hide or distort your message from both journalists and your audience. Media training will show you how to sit, stand, dress and compose yourself during an interview.



Do you know the seven C's of effective communications?

Caring

When addressing the media, it is critical for a spokesperson to establish that the organization is sincerely concerned about their audience. Neither the media or the public will favorably regard an organization that does not show they care about the subject or those affected.

Clear

A spokesperson must speak in a language that ordinary people can understand. Avoid using industry jargon as it can confuse or annoy the public, and result in the impression you are “talking down” to them.

Concise

When working with the media, saying more than needed can often lead to a whole new line of questioning which you prefer to avoid. If a spokesperson does not communicate the major points briefly enough to fit in a reporter’s writing space, the reporter will choose which statements to use and discard everything else.

Compelling

While dealing with reporters, you must ask yourself “why does this matter to the audience?” It is your job to explain how an issue or matter may personally affect them, and how your organization is working to minimize those impacts.

Competent

In addition to speaking slowly and concisely, a spokesperson should always be prepared for an interview. They should know the key questions that will be asked and be ready to answer them—accurately and completely. Approaching an interview with the belief that you can just “wing it” is asking for disaster. Unexpected questions can lead to misstatements and conflict, and present an image of incompetence.

Confident

You must show your audience that you know what you’re talking about. If you are not confident in your knowledge and abilities, your audience will not be confident in your organization’s ability to address the issue at hand.

Consistent

A spokesperson should not backtrack on statements; rather, a spokesperson should give the audience information based upon verified facts. By doing so, you, as well as the organization will convey consistency. Your organization should speak with one voice, choosing one spokesperson. Multiple spokespersons should be avoided in most cases, but if necessary they should all be briefed up on the same material and provided with the main talking points.

What are the common mistakes in dealing with the media?

Burying your head in the sand

A common mistake is to imagine that it’ll go away. Besides, who cares? So you do nothing and say nothing. You don’t prepare; rather, you think you’ll have time to react when and if necessary with little to no preparation.

Waiting for the other shoe to drop

Now that you’ve responded to reporters, you have time to put together a statement. Or, you’ll do up a statement when you see fit.

Letting your reputation protect you

You have a relationship with the media or a specific reporter. You think that he/she won’t ask tough questions or publish anything that would hurt you or your organization.

Treating the media like the enemy

Thinking that reporters are out to get you will only result in a backlash. You tell a reporter how they have done a terrible job of reporting on you and that you’ll never speak to them again.

Reacting, rather than acting

You take a call from a reporter and let the reporter know what you think without having the facts.

What are the essential elements of a good spokesperson?

How do you deal with an aggressive reporter?

If a false statement is made, correct it

Reporters may ask questions based on false premises. If you let this part of the question go unchallenged, the media as well as your audience will think that it is factual. Before answering such question, a spokesperson should always identify the inaccuracies of the statement and explain why.

Clarify multi-faceted or confusing questions

When reporters ask questions in one long, quick breath, the interviewee can be overwhelmed. Pick out questions to which you have the best answers and let the reporter move on or ask other questions.

Don't let reporters put words in your mouth

The reporter asks you a question and you answer. They then state "what you're saying is..." while adding false or mistaken information to what your statement. You must challenge such inaccuracies immediately and provide clarifying statements.

Defuse the bomb

Exert as much self control as you can muster. While the question may be argumentative, it is up to you to defuse or contradict their assertion. You are there to address the issue at hand, not engage in speculation or debate.

Answer the question

Always provide clear, concise and positive answers to a reporter's questions.

Superior communication skills

A spokesperson must have superior written and verbal communication skills. They must be able to quickly craft clear, logical written statements, and be able to verbally express those statements and answers to questions.

Exceptional organizational skills

The spokesperson should excel at multitasking and prioritizing.

Able to work under pressure

A spokesperson must always remain calm under fire.

Prime interpersonal skills

Spokespersons should be gregarious and outgoing with others, whether in the office, dealing with the media, or addressing other stakeholders.

Able to grasp complicated issues

Being able to 'translate' complicated issues into simple, easily understood answers and statements enhances your ability to positively influence your audiences.

