



TE&CO.

Media Training Manual

TAMARAEDWARDS.CO

Introduction

A media interview can be an excellent opportunity to tell a positive story about your brand, issue, or event.

As you consider an interview, several factors will become variables in the larger key points of messaging. Things like, format, audience, time, date, and location, will determine how you prepare for your interview, but basic techniques can be practiced and learned over time.

This manual will provide you with an overview of media interview principles and techniques; from pre-interview preparation to actual implementation, to help you meet your communication objectives.



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SECTION I:

The Media Environment

THE NEWS MEDIA ARE A PERVASIVE AND POWERFUL INFLUENCE IN OUR SOCIETY

The American public can satisfy its insatiable hunger for information with a huge selection of print and broadcast news outlets, including:

- » **12+** national television networks
- » **1,300** television stations
- » **8,000** cable systems
- » **10,294** radio stations
- » **1,700** daily newspapers
- » **8,000** weekly newspapers
- » **12,000** magazines
- » Three major wire services, plus assorted syndicated services
- » Numerous online news services

In recent years there has been an increase in what is called “sound-bite journalism,” which is packaging the information into short clips. A decade ago the typical sound-bite lasted 15 seconds, today’s media has pared it down to an average of 9-10 seconds.

This is an important piece of information—even for longer form interviews. Your remarks will be edited by reporters, and may be further reduced by an editor or producer. Furthermore, their audience will likely only capture and absorb only a fraction of what is produced.

Research tells us that most people forget two-thirds of everything they hear within 24 hours—and 98 percent within 30 days.

Your Game Plan

CONFIDENCE, CONTROL AND CREDIBILITY

An effective interview strategy hinges on your ability to achieve confidence, control and credibility.

- » Confidence enables you to go into an interview situation as an equal and enthusiastic participant
- » Control enables you to communicate your own message clearly (demeanor, language, driving the talking points)
- » Credibility enables your audience to believe that message.

BASIC GROUNDWORK

Your preparation begins with answers to some basic questions, for example:

- » What type of publication/program is it?
- » Who is its primary audience?
- » Is the reporter familiar with the issue? Does s/he have an apparent bias?
- » Who else is the reporter interviewing?
- » What is the interview format?
 - Live/taped
 - In-studio “Live at 5” or talk show format
 - On-location “stand-up”
 - “Remote” interview (interviewer and subject at different locations)
 - Telephone interview
 - Listener call-in broadcast program
 - Unexpected “ambush”
 - Press conference
- » What type of story is the reporter doing?
 - “Hard news”
 - Feature story
 - Investigative report
 - In-depth background piece
 - Point/counterpoint

You may also find yourself the subject of an informal or spontaneous interview, for example, impromptu questions by a reporter who approaches you at a meeting or after a speech.

It is unusual to get the questions ahead of time, however you can ask who else the reporter is speaking with for the story. Answers to these questions will help you decide:

- » What opportunities this interview offers you to make positive points about yourself, your organization, your product or issue.
- » What factual information and other preparation you will need to get ready.

**Note: If you conclude there are no potential benefits, then respectfully decline the interview. However, most interviews will offer some opportunity to tell your story to large audiences and create a positive relationship with the media.*

DEFINING YOUR AGENDA

You cannot effectively communicate your message without some element of data or fact. Broadcast interviews, and often print interviews, are very brief and you must be able to identify the key points—called “talking points”—that are most important for the interview.

Talking points are a few concise thoughts, ideas, arguments and impressions that you most want to leave with your audience. The best way to begin formulating your message points is to identify the primary objective(s) of the interview and to know your specific target audience, and your call to action (CTA).

- » Support/oppose legislation?
- » Buy your product?
- » Buy your stock?
- » Patronize your company?
- » Take some other action?

“He’s guilty. I rest my case”—is simply not enough to ‘move’ a judge or jury. A good prosecutor would come prepared with various types of proof—motive, witnesses, fingerprints, etc.—to back up the assertion.

ANTICIPATING QUESTIONS AND CONTROVERSY

Your strategy isn’t complete without anticipating the reporter’s questions and controversies that could arise in the interview. It’s important to be mindful and prepared for these anticipated questions.

PRACTICE ... PRACTICE ... PRACTICE

To hone your message points and prepare for actual interview Q&A, **there is simply no substitute for practicing out loud.** When it comes to “life” you’ll know if your message points coming across in the right way. If your answers are concise—or do they need more support/ prep in advance of the interview.

Remember, professional athletes and actors rigorously train/rehearse before facing the public.

Message Points

Mr. Johnson is a spokesperson for Acme Chemical Company asked to defend the company against charges of groundwater pollution. During an interview with a local television station he is confronted with the allegations.

HOW TO LOSE

INTERVIEW RESPONSE

Mr. Johnson:

“That’s absolutely false. If there is any pollution, Acme is not connected with it in any way. These charges are basically a witch-hunt, and I’m not going to justify them with a reply. We’re a safe company, period. You can ask any of our employees or anyone else in this industry.”

WHAT MADE THE EVENING NEWS

Mr. Johnson:

“If there is any pollution, Acme is not connected with it in any way. These charges are basically a witch-hunt, and I’m not going to justify them with a reply.”

HEADLINE IN THE MORNING PAPER

“Acme Chief Denies Pollution, Calls Charges ‘Witch-Hunt’”

WHY HE LOST

Mr. Johnson’s goal and message points are cloudy. He asserts that Acme is not responsible for any groundwater pollution, and calls Acme “a safe company,” but he offers no facts to back up his assertion. As a result, few viewers will believe him; after all, he’s paid by the company. In addition, his harsh—and quotable—allegation of a “witch-hunt” made him sound flustered, and will steal focus from his other remarks.

HOW TO WIN

INTERVIEW RESPONSE

Mr. Johnson:

“There’s no truth to those charges at all. Environmental safety is Acme’s top priority, and our record proves it. During our 20 years in this business, we’ve never had a spill. That’s partly because every worker in our plant receives 100 hours of training each year in environmental safety. In fact, we spend three times the industry average on safety systems.”

WHAT MADE THE EVENING NEWS

Mr. Johnson:

“There’s no truth to those charges at all. Environmental safety is Acme’s top priority, and our record proves it. During our 20 years in this business, we’ve never had a spill.”

HEADLINE IN THE MORNING PAPER

“Johnson: Acme Enviro Record Refutes Pollution Charges”

WHY HE WON

- » His message point—“Acme is environmentally safe”—is clear
- » It is stated up-front
- » He backs it up with facts
- » He stayed cool, didn’t become flustered



SECTION IV:

Blocking & Bridging

The most common mistake committed in interviews is to become so fixated by the questions that you lose focus on your narrative. **Don't feel obligated to answer every question specifically.** The most effective spokespeople listen to the bigger issue behind each question, and address that issue as they choose. This is done through the technique called “blocking & bridging.”

“Blocking” means deftly avoiding an unwelcome or unproductive question. It may be a hostile or controversial question, an undesirable hypothetical situation or choice, a request for information that you can't disclose, or simply something that doesn't pertain to your agenda during a brief interview. “Bridging” means taking the discussion from unfriendly to friendly territory by making a smooth transition from an undesirable question or topic to an area that fits your agenda.

SECTION IV: BLOCKING & BRIDGING (CONT.)

Blocking and bridging are accomplished by using smooth connecting phrases, such as:

“It’s our policy not to discuss ____ specifically, but I can tell you...”

“I think what you’re really asking is...”

“That speaks to a bigger point...”

Only “block” a question completely where there is good reason to do so. Often, you can address the question briefly and then smoothly bridge to your chosen point. If you must block a question, don’t simply say “no comment,” or “I can’t answer that.” Instead, explain why you can’t answer it (e.g., proprietary information, lawsuit pending, etc.) and bridge to a topic or message point that is important to you.

For example, a celebrity gives a stand-up interview to an entertainment reporter at a fundraising event for the American Cancer Society, the celebrity’s favorite “cause.” The celebrity knows the interview will be brief and the quote that makes the news show will be very brief:

REPORTER

“Gee, it’s surprising to see you here tonight. You’ve got a new hit television show, you just released a film, and you have a new baby! You must find it hard to balance all of your activities with your family life.”

CELEBRITY

“I couldn’t miss out. Having my beautiful new baby has reminded me of how precious and fragile life is. That’s why I feel so strongly that we need to help the Cancer Society help those who aren’t as fortunate, and to find cures so we can all live long and happy lives.”

Blocking and bridging is particularly critical in situations involving controversy or crisis. The formula here is simple: **“Asked about a problem? Talk about a solution.”** In other words, when faced with questions about a problem, whether or not you address the question directly, you must swiftly bridge to the work being done to address the problem.

Finally, blocking and bridging helps you repeat your message points during the interview. You must repeat your message points if you wish them to be retained by the audience. Repetition also maximizes the probability that one or more message points will appear in an edited story.

If you view every question as an opportunity to accomplish your agenda, you will be successful in conveying your positive messages.

One way to remember this is via the formula $A = Q + 1$

...or, the answer equals the question plus one of your key message points.

SECTION IV: BLOCKING & BRIDGING (CONT.)

In a speech to a national organization, noted consumer advocate Ralph Jones says the public is increasingly being victimized by the bad advice or ignorance of financial planners. CBS-TV news wants a response. They track down Burt Smith, president of the Association of Financial Planners, for comment. The reporter asks the following question:

“Mr. Jones said abuses among financial planners have increased as much as 50 percent over the last several years. Is that an accurate figure, and if not, how much would you say it is?”

HOW TO LOSE

INTERVIEW RESPONSE

Mr. Smith:

“No, no, that’s much too high. Certainly there have been abuses and I’m sure the number is higher than we’d all like. But it’s hard to quantify. We really haven’t had a way of measuring this sort of thing nationwide. Now, we are in the process of setting up a system of being able to track this kind of data and we also have set up a monitoring system, a kind of licensing system, actually—it has been in place for several months and it’s working very well.”

WHAT MADE THE EVENING NEWS

Mr. Smith:

“Certainly there have been abuses and I’m sure the number is higher than we’d all like. But it’s hard to quantify. We really haven’t had a way of measuring this kind of thing nationwide.”

HEADLINE IN THE MORNING PAPER

“Financial Planning Chief: Abuse High, Reforms Needed”

WHY HE LOST

- » He was fixated by the question
- » He didn’t effectively block and bridge
- » His message is not stated concisely or crisply

HOW TO WIN

INTERVIEW RESPONSE

Mr. Smith:

“We have no statistical evidence to support that view at all. In fact, the trend is toward a higher level of performance throughout the industry. For some time, the industry has applied a rigid standard of licensing among financial planners nationwide. And it has been quite successful. Today, consumers can identify qualified planners in their community and use their services with complete confidence.”

WHAT MADE THE EVENING NEWS

Mr. Smith:

“The industry has applied a rigid standard of licensing among financial planners nationwide. And it has been quite successful. Today, consumers can identify qualified planners in their communities and use their services with complete confidence.”

WHY HE WON

- » He blocked and bridged
- » His message points were stated clearly and succinctly
- » He stuck to his agenda and didn’t get “question fixated”
- » He highlighted a new solution to consumer complaints, rather than dwelling on the problem

Interview Tips

GENERAL INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE		
DO	DON'T	
✓		Flag key points with phrases like, “The most important thing is...” or “I think the bottom line is...”
✓		Speak in easily-understandable terms. Avoid jargon and industry-specific language.
✓		Use facts and figures, when appropriate, to demonstrate your credibility.
✓		Use illustrations and anecdotes to humanize and explain your topic (“enough widgets to fill Yankee Stadium” is better than “575,000 widgets”).
✓		Be sensitive to reporters’ deadlines.
✓		Be engaging, likeable, enthusiastic—but not a cheerleader.
✓		Be yourself. Don’t try to reinvent yourself for an interview—you won’t be credible.
	✗	Over answer. When you’re satisfied with your reply, stop.
	✗	Be afraid to pause. Taking a few seconds to think will seem much longer to you than to the reporter or audience, and will make you appear thoughtful and deliberate.
	✗	Allow yourself to be provoked. Keep cool.
	✗	Fake an answer if you don’t know. If appropriate, assure the reporter you will provide the needed facts in a timely manner, or refer him/her to another source.
	✗	Assume the reporter knows more about your area than you do. Usually, the reverse is true.
	✗	Assume the microphone is off immediately before or after an interview. You are still fair game and it’s safest to consider your entire interaction is on the record.
	✗	Lie to a reporter. Ever.

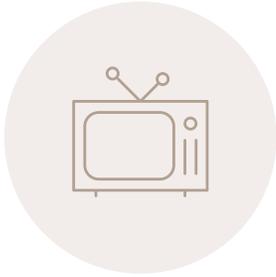


Print Interview Tips

The newspaper or magazine interview may take place in person or via telephone. The length of the interview and deadline for the story will vary depending upon the style of the publication and the reporter. While an interview for a news story in a daily newspaper may take 10 minutes, an interview for a feature story or profile in a monthly magazine may take two hours.

Keep the following tips in mind when taking part in print interviews.

- » As with all news media, don't be surprised if the reporter has to cancel the interview at the last minute, especially if it is not related to "breaking news." Reporters are at the mercy of each day's news developments and another event may take priority. Normally, you can reschedule the interview for a later time or date.
- » It is not unusual for a reporter to tape-record an interview. This can help the reporter be accurate and pay better attention to you. If you are not being taped, remember to speak slowly.
- » If you inadvertently offer misleading or incorrect information, correct yourself as soon as you recognize the error.
- » If you tell the reporter you will get back to him/her with additional information, ask the reporter's deadline and follow up in a timely manner.
- » Feel free to ask whether the reporter plans to write a story using the interview, and if so, when is it likely to run. (The reporter will rarely be able to tell you the exact running date, since editorial decisions are made on a day-to-day basis).
- » Don't ask the reporter to see the story before it runs. You do not have the right to review it or change your quotes.



Television Interview Tips

Television is a visual medium, so your physical demeanor and the style of your presentation are just important—if not more so—than what you say. However, the format and restrictions of television interviews also demand a solid command of “headlining,” “blocking and bridging” and the other communications techniques. Below are some specific tips to help you with television interviews.

DRESS

- » Dress conservatively. For men, a dark suit and blue shirt is best. Avoid loud ties or ties with small patterns. For women, wear a dark-colored outfit in solid colors.
- » Don't wear white. It casts unflattering shadows on the face and causes problems for TV lighting.
- » Men should unbutton suit jacket when sitting, button it when standing. Sitting on the back of the suit jacket will help create a wrinkle-free line.
- » Most studios are cold until the lights are turned on and then become quite warm. Mid-weight clothing is the most comfortable choice.
- » Don't wear large, distracting jewelry.
- » If you have contact lenses, wear them instead of your glasses. If you wear glasses, non-reflective lenses are preferable. Don't wear light-sensitive glasses.
- » If offered makeup, accept it. The host or reporter will have it on and you should as well. Men should consider shaving close to air time, as even the hint of a beard shows up on television. Women should apply a matte finish to avoid a shiny face, with blush and eye makeup that's slightly heavier than normal wear.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- » Arrive early at the station to orient yourself to the studio. If the interview takes place on location, arrive early to allow for lighting and sound checks.
- » Typically, a “pre-interview” precedes the actual on-camera interview. It may last 30 seconds or five minutes. This is a chance for you to set the tone, personality and demeanor of the interview, and to mention the topic(s) you would like to discuss during the interview.
- » A technician may clip a small microphone to your jacket, tie or shirt, and possibly run the cord under your jacket or other clothing. Speak naturally, and avoid brushing your hand or clothing against the microphone during the interview. Women should remove necklaces likely to swing against the microphone. Be sure the microphone is removed before walking away after the interview.
- » If a technician asks you to test the sound level by speaking, speak at your normal level and say something innocuous (e.g. one, two, three). Don’t try to be funny or say anything off-color or controversial.

BODY LANGUAGE

- » If seated, sit erect but not ramrod-straight, and slightly forward toward the interviewer.
- » If standing, stand with arms at sides or one hand in pocket. Planting one foot slightly in front of the other will help you avoid swaying.
- » Gesture naturally, but not expansively. Keep gestures small and in front of you, and avoid sudden body movement.
- » Make your expression match your words. Smile if it is appropriate. Keep a mildly pleasant expression at all times, as a neutral expression looks unhappy or angry on-camera. Practice in a mirror.
- » Avoid obvious signs of discomfort or nervousness, e.g., foot tapping, clenched fists, shifting back and forth.
- » Don’t nod your head to indicate that you understand or are ready to answer the question. Inadvertently, this may convey agreement with the interviewer’s premise when you don’t mean to do so. Remain neutral and become animated only when you begin to speak.
- » Test yourself on the above points by reviewing your training tape with the sound off. As yourself: Do I look interested? Do I appear animated and excited? Would I “tune into” this person if I were flipping channels?

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- » Remember, make your statements punchy and concise. Put your most important message up-front.
- » Whether an in-studio talk show format or a stand-up interview, talk to the interviewer or other guests, not the camera. Breaking eye contact by staring off into space or looking at the ground will make you appear “shifty.” Stay attentive even when others are speaking.
- » If it is a “remote” interview—in which the reporter is at another location and asks you questions through an earpiece—look directly at the camera at all times.
- » Don’t be distracted by the activity around you in the studio and keep focused on the interviewer.
- » Don’t overlap the reporter’s questions. Wait until the question is finished to begin your answer.
- » Hold your “interview attitude” until the interview is completely over and the camera is off.



Radio Interview Tips

All of the “non-visual” television tips on the previous pages apply to radio interviews as well. Here are a few additional guidelines:

- » In radio, your voice establishes your image. Don’t speak in a monotone, modulate your voice and try to make it as expressive as possible.
- » Speak at a normal level of loudness. Stress key points by raising your intensity level and pitch, not your voice.
- » Use words to create an image or paint a picture of your story for the audience. Examples, anecdotes and illustrations are even more important in radio than in other media. If you’re part of a news story, try to localize your examples.
- » If responding to listener call-ins, don’t let a hostile caller anger or fluster you. The most effective way to overcome hostile questions is to make your points firmly and politely and back up assertions with facts. Take the “high road” by responding to the issue behind the question, not the specific charge.
- » Avoid using words such as “mmm hmm”, “like,” and “right” while speaking on the radio.
- » Feel free to have notes in front of you to remind you of message points, key facts and figures, etc.



Telephone Interview Tips

Telephone interviews can be particularly challenging because they most often occur in the middle of a hectic workday and office environment, making it difficult to focus on the interview. This can be very hazardous. The following tips will help you handle them more effectively.

- » Buy preparation time if possible. Tell him/her you would be glad to talk, but are tied up at the moment. Find out the reporter’s deadline, and set an acceptable time to get back to him/her. Stick to it. (Even a delay of 10 minutes is sufficient to help you prepare.)
- » Establish an “interview atmosphere” by isolating yourself with the telephone as much as possible. Close the door and turn over extraneous papers on your desk.
- » Review your message points and other relevant notes. Keep them in front of you during the interview, along with scratch paper to take additional notes.
- » Since you can’t see the face of the person at the other end of the phone, occasionally ask the reporter for feedback on your comments to ensure his/her understanding.



Stage Fright & Troubleshooting Tips

It is absolutely normal to be nervous before an interview, particularly on television or radio. The “adrenaline rush” or nervous energy, if not excessive, actually helps you by keeping you alert and on your toes. Being fully prepared for an interview will go a long way toward helping to instill confidence and reduce nerves. However, here are a few helpful hints for controlling undue nervousness:

- » Arrive at the studio or location early, to get used to the surroundings.
- » “Psych yourself up” by thinking positively about your preparation for the interview and a successful outcome.
- » Even if it is likely to be a confrontational interview, don’t allow yourself to develop a “victim” mentality. If you are in control, it is your interview as much as the reporter’s.
- » Focus on the interview as a conversation with the reporter or host, not the larger audience.
- » Take several deep breaths and let them out slowly.
- » If possible, take a few minutes in private before the interview to do a few relaxation exercises, such as shaking your hands and arms vigorously, rolling your neck, stretching, and hanging over with your hands touching the ground and slowly rolling upward to a standing position.

The Ten Basic Values

In your effort to project a credible image and viewpoint, it is important to remember that people tend to believe those who share their concerns and values. Research by political organizations has revealed 10 basic values—the things that Americans care about most. It is helpful to incorporate one or more of these when crafting your message points, and every time you speak to the media or in other public forums:

1. Health
2. Financial security
3. Closer relationship with God
4. Better relationship with family
5. Planning for retirement
6. Enjoying leisure
7. Better, more satisfying job
8. College education for children
9. Buying a new home/owning a home
10. Traveling

SECTION VII:

Summary

MEETING THE MEDIA CAN BE BENEFICIAL AND EVEN AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE, BUT JUST REMEMBER...

- » View every interview as an opportunity to establish the message points about your organization, product or issue.
- » Identify goals and key message points and repeat the message points during your interview.
- » Organize your points in a concise, interesting and provable manner. Remember, time is limited.
- » Headline your points by starting with your assertion and backing it up with facts.
- » Don't be so fixated by the questions asked of you that you forget to make your own points.
- » Be engaging, likeable.
- » And above all, PRACTICE!

SECTION VIII:

Worksheet

INTERVIEW WITH:

AUDIENCE:

MESSAGE POINTS:

SUPPORTING FACTS:

GOALS:

A person is holding a professional video camera with a large lens and a microphone. The camera is the central focus, with the person's hands visible. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall image has a warm, sepia-toned aesthetic.

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