

Public Relations

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California Transit Association

Media Skills Training

Presented by:

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General Media Skills Techniques

In today's environment, professionals must take advantage of every opportunity to reach their target audience with positive messages about their issues and causes.

The trick is to do more than "hold your own" with the media or other people you want to impress - decision makers, for instance. You must seize each moment to voice your agenda, instead of simply answering question.

As discussed in your training session, this agenda should consist of approximately three key messages which will leave a lasting impression with the audience.

Prepare your agenda:

- Determine your key messages before each interview.
 - How do they affect your audience?
 - How can you position these messages in response to questions which are likely to be asked during the interview?

Think of your key messages in terms of short, catchy "sound bites" which can be edited down to 10 seconds, 30-40 seconds and 1-2 minutes with anecdotes or supporting information. Don't be afraid to go back to these key messages several times.


If necessary, prepare a brief information sheet which provides more in-depth information to the reporter or audience members. Easy to read graphics, logos and photos can support your messages.

You have learned a variety of techniques to bridge your key messages, and handle tricky or adversarial questions. Now, practice these techniques! Stage a mock interview with co-workers and a camera, give a presentation to a local business organization, pursue a feature idea with a reporter. You'll see how much easier each interview becomes, and how much more adept you will be at stating those key messages in a variety of situations.

Remember — every presentation and interview leaves a lasting impression. Make sure you are prepared to be persuasive, credible and relaxed by turning the techniques you've learned into action!

"If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time — a tremendous whack."

— Winston Churchill



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Broadcast Interview Techniques

In any interview situation — but especially in a television interview — where you sit in relation to others can have an effect on how you come across to the audience.

- Never sit between two interviewers. Sitting in the middle puts you at a disadvantage because you must constantly turn your head from one side to the other to answer questions. Sit to one side of two interviewers, especially if they are apt to be hostile.
- When you sit down, be sure your jacket is pulled straight, and you are sitting straight in the chair.
- Do not lean to one side or the other, or slouch as if folded in the middle.
- Avoid sudden body movements (standing up, leaning back in chair) that may take you out of the camera range, or give the impression that you are nervous.
- Look at the interviewer most of the time. Glances at the camera while you are responding to an interviewer's question will generally come across poorly.

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Print Interview Techniques

The following are additional points to consider in preparing for a print interview:

- Know who is interviewing you and why. Particulars to determine are the reporter's correct name, purpose of the story, the publication and when it is distributed. Most reporters will give you the general line of questioning if you request it.
- Anticipate questions and prepare for them.
- Work out responses. Crisp, punchy, straightforward answers are best. Do not memorize the answer, except for key phrases. Remember the two or three key points you want to make. At some point in the interview, work them in by bridging.
- Practice responses with an associate before the interview.
- Avoid "no comment." This deepens the reporter's curiosity and appears to be evasive.
- Get help when needed. If you do not know the answer, do one of two things:
 - Say you will find out the answer and call back (and do so promptly);
 - Say you will have someone with the answers call back (and make sure it happens).

In following either of these routes, ask the reporter, "When is your deadline?" Concern for a reporter's problems helps shift a reporter's concern to you.

- Don't answer hypothetical questions (What if...). Do say: "I don't want to speculate..." but then bridge that comment with a remark such as "...but I can say that we are prepared to..."
- Listen carefully to questions.
- Do not let a loaded premise go without immediately refuting it at the beginning of your remarks.
- Do not debate or spar with a reporter, but politely correct wrong facts or assumptions.
- Cite third-party experts or statistics that support your views.



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Body Language

Professional actors are finely tuned to their emotions, enabling them to speak with the movement of an arm. An effective spokesperson also makes use of body movements to convey appropriate emotion.

The following gestures and expressions are considered positive and convey personal interest and self confidence:

- Look people in the eye
- Lean slightly forward, if seated
- Make hand movements that occur naturally as a supplement to what you are saying
- Listen intently to anyone who asks a question
- Listen to what other people have to say

The following gestures and expressions tend to be negative and convey tension and nervousness:

- Inappropriate smiling, laughter
- Tightly clasped hands
- Hands gripping sides of chairs, tables, knees
- Hands toying with pencils, water glasses, buttons, microphones
- Drumming tabletop, microphone
- Tightening and loosening jaw
- Ramrod straight, unnatural posture

These movements convey impatience and discomfort:

- Swinging legs
- Shifting in chair
- Shifting eyes

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These movements convey guilt and disinterest:

- Casting eyes looking toward ceiling
- Failing to look at reporter or audience
- Slouching posture
- Closing eyes



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Personal Appearance

What a spokesperson looks like should never overshadow what he or she has to say. A spokesperson's appearance, however, can help make the message more convincing. Keep these points in mind as you prepare for a public appearance:

- Dress conservatively.
- Wear a dark suit with a solid color shirt or blouse for a business interview. White tends to reflect light onto the face of the person who is wearing it.
- Do not wear flashy jewelry.
- Keep jacket or dress free of lapel buttons or pins.
- Take out all bulky items in pockets.
- For major television appearances, use powder to help avoid shine caused by bright lights.
- Do not wear polar gray or sun glasses.
- When seated, keep jacket pulled straight to avoid wrinkles.
- Make sure collar and tie are straight and shirt is tucked in.

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Overcoming Nervousness Before a Camera or an Audience

It is natural to be nervous before going before the camera or presenting to an audience. Every professional entertainer experiences some kind of "butterfly" feelings before a performance.

What can you do about it?

- Practice a few relaxing exercises before you're on -- rolling your neck, swinging your arms, stretching.
- Take a deep breath, hold it for 3-5 seconds, let it out slowly.
- Stand naturally with your feet shoulder-width apart, your hands loose and relaxed. Then shake your hands and arms, letting the vibration work itself into the rest of your body.
- Think of nervousness as a way of projecting energy and enthusiasm.
- Be prepared for the situation by knowing your subject matter, the audience and the major points you need to make.
- Take the time to spend a few moments with the host or reporter before the program or interview begins to discuss subjects to be covered. This also provides an opportunity to calm down.
- Whether the camera is running or not, when you're in the television studio or in the presentation room, you are technically "on." Do not make comments immediately prior to the interview, during commercial breaks, and after the program, that you would not make in public.
- One final thing to remember. Reporters would rather talk to someone like yourself, who knows your industry and your issues, than the most polished looking TV spokesperson.