



Talking to the media – on your terms.

Many business executives roll their eyes at the mention of media coaching. The idea of practice sessions designed to make you look and sound good in public is dismissed by many as a silly ego exercise and irrelevant to the real business of running the company.

But every time an executive looks into a camera, clips on a microphone or speaks at an event covered by reporters, the company's standing is on the line. And few executives really understand how to communicate their own expertise.

Fortunately, crafting memorable messages and turning around "gotcha" questions are skills that can be learned — assuming, of course, that you acknowledge you want some help. Read on for some media-savvy lessons and six tips from media

Never 'wing it'

The first lesson is not to wing it. Just because you're immersed in some subject every day doesn't mean you can easily put on a public performance.

It always comes down to preparation. Always invest time and effort in rehearsals. Get your spouse or partner or a trusted pal to lob questions at you. How will you respond to tough or hostile questions? Do you have a clear, honest and appropriate answer to the most negative query you can imagine?

Make sure to research your listeners and their expectations beforehand. In any interview, you're really speaking via the reporter to his or her readers, listeners or viewers.

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Shaping your message

The real difference between talking to the media and talking directly to an audience, of course, comes down to control. For a speech, you pick and choose your points and timing. But for interviews, reporters wag the dog. That doesn't mean you lean back and remain passive. The idea is to get out the message you want while still responding to questions and ceding control to the reporter.

At the outset, it helps to break the ice with reporters by asking something about them — what their interests are, what kind of stories they have covered.

Here are six tips to help you master the art of getting out your preferred message.

1. Set goals for every appearance.

Learn to prepare sound bites. Plan to hammer home your key messages. For interviews, keep answers — especially for TV or radio — to about 25 to 40 seconds each. When it's appropriate, use props or visual materials to vary your pacing.

2. Nothing is 100% off the record.

This goes for all appearances, not just interviews. Whatever you say — anywhere — can follow you around endlessly and perhaps disastrously. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Then later on, be certain to get back to the reporter with an answer.

3. Watch your body language.

Even in positive interview situations, interviewees can sometimes look tense which can have a big impact on credibility.

If there is time, do some exercises or walk around to relax your body.

4. Stay on track with your message.

If the interview goes off track, stop it. Ask for a break, a glass of water, a visit to the bathroom. It doesn't matter if the excuse seems lame — they will only use footage of you on-camera, not off.

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5. Learn how to "bridge.'

This technique allows you to deflect any attempts to derail your message. "Bridging" creates a transition so that you can move from one subject to the message you want to communicate. First answer the direct question, then transition to your message.

6. Prepare 'take-aways'.

Always plan the points or facts you want the reporter and, of course the audience to walk away thinking about. You might identify these points as the building blocks of your presentation. Narrow the focus then, to get listeners to remember you, deliver those points passionately through analogies or anecdotes to recreate the experience.

Finally, it's not over when it's over. Make sure to track the results and get reviews of your performance. Ask friends and peers how well your message went over. Be smart and brave enough to make the necessary improvements, so you do even better next time.

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