



MEDIAWORKS
RESOURCE GROUP

MEDIA TRAINING

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The Formula

This rule applies regardless of the media outlet, the reporter, or the subject of the interview. It's easy to understand, but it can be difficult to employ.

1st: Satisfy ***your own*** objectives

- ◆ Get your message(s) out

2nd: Help the reporter

- ◆ Give him/her a **story**
- ◆ Speak in *reporter-friendly language*



The vast majority of people who engage journalists without the proper training apply this formula in reverse, allowing *the reporter* to derive the greatest benefit from the interview.

Remember:

Anyone can answer a question.
You are there to *deliver messages*.

Interview Strategy Checklist

PRIOR to Interview:

- ◆ *Learn all that you can about the reporter and his/her media outlet.*
- ◆ *Find out the gist of the interview and the story. Do not ask for questions in advance.*
- ◆ *Prepare, rehearse, and memorize your messages.*
- ◆ *Anticipate the questions you are likely to be asked, especially the challenging ones.*
- ◆ *For TV, dress in simple, conservative colors. Avoid solid white, solid black, tight patterns and stripes, and flashy jewelry.*
- ◆ *If being interviewed at your own home or office, find a quiet location and turn cell phones off.*
- ◆ *If appropriate, give the reporter a “heads up” on interesting points he or she may want to ask you about.*

DURING Interview:

- ◆ *Relax! Try to sound natural and conversational without letting down your guard.*
- ◆ *If somebody has been hurt, express empathy at the top of the interview.*
- ◆ *Keep your messages coming!*
- ◆ *Speak in simple, complete sentences. Don't overload the reporter.*
- ◆ *Avoid jargon and acronyms. Your target audience is a reasonably intelligent teenager.*
- ◆ *Feel free to restart an answer at any time (assuming interview isn't live).*
- ◆ *If you don't have an answer for a particular question, promise to get the information to the reporter ASAP, then follow through!*
- ◆ *When being interviewed by a TV reporter, ignore the camera unless told otherwise.*
- ◆ *Remember body language. Don't lock your hands behind your back or in your pockets.*
- ◆ *A reporter will usually conclude an interview by asking, “Anything else you'd like to say?” or “Anything I forgot to ask you?” Use this opportunity to repeat your key message(s) one last time.*

AFTER Interview:

- ◆ *Politely correct any misperceptions you feel the reporter may have developed.*
- ◆ *Ask the reporter if he or she has everything necessary to write the story.*
- ◆ *Thank the reporter, and offer contact info so you can be reached for follow-up questions.*
- ◆ *Assume the interview hasn't ended until the reporter has left the room or the phone has been hung up.*

When It's Better Not to Answer

One key to media training is understanding the distinction between answers and responses. Every question calls for a response, but certain questions should not be *answered*. Here are four of them:

1

When you don't know the answer

WHY YOU SHOULDN'T ANSWER:

You could be wrong! There's nothing wrong with saying, "I don't know."

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD:

If applicable, tell the reporter you will get the information, or the right source, when the interview is over. Never guess, or even worse, lie.

2

When You don't understand the question

WHY YOU SHOULDN'T ANSWER:

Answering a question you don't fully understand is fraught with risk. You might be providing an answer for a question totally different from the one that was asked.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD:

Ask for clarification before you respond.

3

When the question would be better suited for somebody else

WHY YOU SHOULDN'T ANSWER:

It's not in your interests to speak on behalf of those who may not share your media objectives (the competition, the police, your critics).

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD:

Politely tell the reporter he or she might be better off asking that particular party.

4

When the question calls for speculation

WHY YOU SHOULDN'T ANSWER:

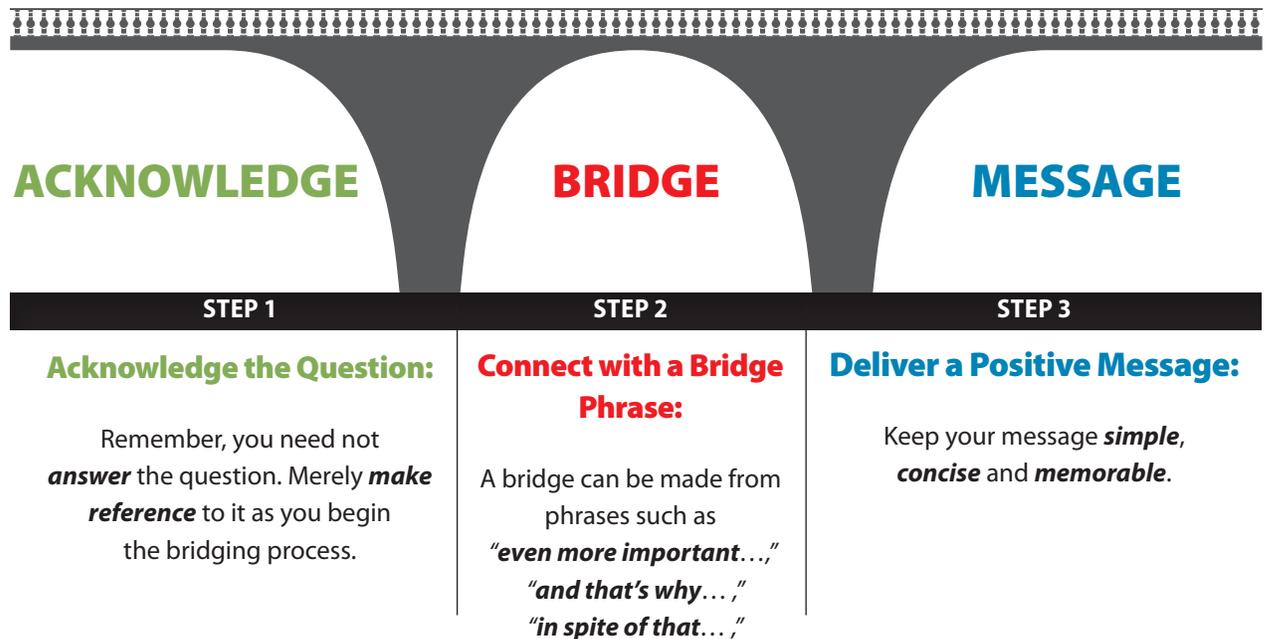
Speculation is dangerous. If you turn out to be wrong, your answer may be used against you later.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD:

Simple. Say, "I wouldn't want to speculate."

The Bridge

The single most important tactic in media messaging is proper use of The Bridge. By “bridging,” an interviewee can take a question with neutral or negative connotations and use it to deliver a positive message.



Examples:

Are you concerned by the low grades your hospital received from the state?

Assessments are very important to us. **That’s why** we are especially proud that General Hospital has been ranked number one in patient care by a private patient advocacy group.

What are the chances your employees will go on strike?

We are hopeful our employees will stay on the job. **In fact**, we have put forth a very generous benefits package in an effort to keep negotiations moving forward.

Can you see why passengers would be reluctant to fly your airline after the crash?

We understand safety concerns and we share them. **For that reason**, we have grounded and inspected every jet in our fleet.

Get the Message?

Effective message delivery is the very definition of success in any news interview. Prepare, rehearse, and memorize **three messages** before the interview begins.



An ideal message is a simple, concise, complete sentence:

"Washing your hands is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of infections."



A sentence fragment is not a message:

"Washing hands important."



Messages that are too complex will be difficult to memorize and unwieldy for the reporter:

"It has been determined that the simple act of hand washing is the single most important way to stop the spread of viral and bacterial infections. Even though it is an easy thing to do, many of us fail to wash our hands thoroughly. As a result, we are unnecessarily exposing ourselves to many types of germs."

Next Steps:

Prepare *statistics* and *examples* as elaboration or proof points for your messages:

- ◆ *"80 percent of infectious diseases are transmitted by touch."*
- ◆ *"Always wash your hands after using public restrooms, but also before preparing a meal or grabbing a snack."*

When the News is Bad

Sooner or later, most companies, organizations, and public figures can expect some kind of media crisis. Often it's not the crisis itself, but the way the crisis is handled, that matters most.

Preparing for crisis communications means anticipating the questions you will get. Fortunately, they usually fall into one of three categories:

1

What happened?

- ◆ *What is your version of events?*
- ◆ *Who has been impacted?*
- ◆ *Are there any updates?*

2

What was the cause?

- ◆ *How did this happen?*
- ◆ *What went wrong?*
- ◆ *Whose fault was it?*

3

What are you doing to address it?

- ◆ *What are you doing to fix this?*
- ◆ *What changes are you making to prevent it from happening again?*

Important: *You may not know the answers to some of these questions. Others may be inappropriate to answer. This is especially true for crises that are very recent or ongoing. In these cases, acknowledge the question, explain why you cannot answer, and then deliver a reassuring message:*

Question: Now that you've had this robbery, how will you improve security?

Response: *"Our investigation is still in progress, and it's too early to know what changes we'll make, if any. But keeping our customers and employees safe will always be our top priority."*



If somebody has been hurt or killed, always begin your media remarks with a statement of empathy, even if the reporter's first question doesn't directly call for it:

- *"Our hearts go out to John Smith, and we're hoping for a rapid recovery."*
- *"We all feel terrible about the accident, and our thoughts are with the Jones family tonight."*