

Understanding Media Relations

Honesty doesn't mean *openness*.

News is there to make money, not "to get you".

News is what *they* think is news, not what you think is.

When speaking, reduce jargon. Explain something like you would tell it to your mother.

If it doesn't pass the "Who Cares?" test, then be brief and with less details.

When speaking to an audience or reporter, always remember W I I F M (What's In It For Me)
Talk to the customer in a way that interests *them*. They don't care about what interests *you*.

The concept of "home base" was the key issue to focus on when preparing your answers to a reporter.

Home Base is defined as how you serve the public. And remember to describe home base with

WIIFM – what's in it for them. An example: If asked my role at MVCC, I would say I'm a government producer making videos that lets you relive many of the events going on in your city, and videos like Centerville Reports that show you the newest developments and events you can take part in as a resident.

Answer questions with 2 steps:

1. Reinforce home base
2. Tell a story (use examples). Remember that we speak in pictures, so use visual examples

There are 3 ways to answer a question:

1. Using the home base model
2. Say, "I don't know – I have to find out" This avoids saying something dumb if you really don't know.
3. "I know, but I can't tell because _____, but I can tell you _____."

Tips:

Don't be funny – reporters are not.

Don't repeat negative allegations. i.e. "Some have called you stupid" Don't answer with "I'm not stupid"

Or else that's bound to be a juicy headline

Speak in terms of people, not an entity. bad example – "This school tax levy will help the district" better –

"This tax levy will allow your children (people) to raise their IQ's 50 points to help them get into college (WIIFM)."

In interviews with you and an opponent, go first. You can set the agenda, and the first person gets more space / time. You can even change the story focus.

Rights you have as an interviewee:

1. To know the topic and stick to it.
2. To set when the interview is going to be (always be prepared)
3. Where it is going to be. It's always best in person – you can “put a face on government” that way and
 And read the reporter's body language.
4. Always limit your amount of time available, and always give less
5. To know who is the interviewer
6. Who else is involved
7. To call them back (better than going off the cuff and giving a dumb answer)
8. To ask what the “angle” is
9. To fax or email ahead. Often their Questions may them come from your material
10. To suggest another source
11. To review your quotes – you must ask, and you must be polite.
12. To take a break
13. Until you know all the details, you have the right not to be surprised
 “Until I (speak to that person / find out more) I can't answer your question

Don't answer “What If's” no matter how persistent. “I can't say what if, only what is”

For an “Anything Else?” question, use it to reinforce home base. It'll often be the last quote of the story.