

Media Interview Survival, 101: Listen and Learn Before You Leap

April 2005

By Carmie McCook
Executive Communication Coach / Business Development Manager

Talk is cheap—until you say the wrong thing. In today's warp-speed media culture, one careless remark can derail a company, organization or career.

Never before has it been so important for anyone who may be interviewed, quoted or observed by the media to know how to deliver the right message to the right audience in the right way. Yet, many intelligent people end up looking and sounding about as bright as a small appliance bulb in news stories. Why? Because most people jump into an interview without preparing. To many people, giving an interview appears so simple. The reporter asks the questions, they give their answers. Wrong.

Meeting with a reporter without adequately preparing for the experience only makes the interview process more difficult for both parties. It's much like going to your accountant for help in preparing your tax return. If you arrive without having proper and complete documentation, the process takes longer and most often you're not thrilled with the final outcome.

The most important step to giving a successful interview is preparing ahead of time. Keep these strategies in mind the next time a reporter calls:

- 1) **Never ignore a reporter's call.** Ignoring a reporter's call can establish a poor relationship between you and the media representative. Remember: There may be a time in the future when you desire media coverage. Having good relationships with reporters can be a wonderful asset.
- 2) **Ask the reporter to repeat his or her name and the name of the media outlet he or she represents.** Write it down. Research and learn about the reporter's style and to become familiar with the program or publication before you do the interview.
- 3) **Ask what the story is about.** What's the purpose of the story? What angle is the reporter going for? This information gives you an outline to follow when developing your key messages. Note a couple of interesting anecdotes, examples, or clever analogies to use when making your points. Reporters want stories that are colorful, unique and engaging. The more interesting you are during your interview, the more attention the reporter will give your story.
- 4) **Ask why you have been selected for the interview.** It's possible that you may not be the best person to give the interview, and you may need to direct the reporter to someone else in your organization who is a subject matter expert.
- 5) **Ask for a description of the reporter's listeners/viewers/readers.** Your message should always be geared toward the interest of the audience. Different media outlets attract different types of viewers, listeners or readers. Tailor your message to be of interest to each media outlet's audiences.