

## The press relations

### THE INTERVIEW

The Interview is a good opportunity for a journalist to have access to information that is personalized or tailor-made on a one-on-one basis. For the interview subject there is often a fear of being “caught in a trap” however, the other way view this interaction is as o an opportunity to build relationships. What’s important is to be prepared for the interview and to avoid accepting to do an “impromptu” interview (aka “off the cuff”).

If a journalist requests an interview, first ask what his / her angle for the topic is. If you are the one requesting to meet with a journalist first determine the purpose of the meeting and the topic to be addressed and make sure it is of interest to the journalist.

Below are some tips that are applicable for when it comes to doing an Interview and also for during a Press Conference.



#### Pre-interview preparation

- ▶ Study the media, its target audience. Read articles on the same topic, including those written by the journalist who will conduct the interview. Get information about the journalist’s background.
- ▶ Prepare 2-3 themes or key messages that should be shared as soon as possible. Think about the possible answers from three levels: Factual Information, An Argument; an Example to illustrate.
- ▶ Prepare a plan, ideally with transitions in mind. These transitions may allow you to ‘slide’ the discussion towards the topic that you want to focus on.
- ▶ Anticipate Questions: Make a list of potential “Questions/Answers” and imagine the counter-answers for each. Certain questions are frequently asked by journalists, for example, regarding funding, interests, the “hot buttons” (i.e., past problems,).
- ▶ “Arguments” can also be written: these are brief documents, arranged by theme, made up of three sections: The Key Message, The Key Questions/Answers, and Data, supported by examples that provide credibility to the words. The document includes the name of the author and the date. It should be updated regularly. This will serve as a base of knowledge when it comes to speaking or writing press releases about certain topics.
- ▶ Practice until you get good at it. If necessary, get some coaching or training based on the prepared Questions/Answers.
- ▶ Set aside the time. Make sure to not be interrupted during the interview. Allow enough time for the interview.



#### When the interview begins

- ▶ Ask how much time is scheduled. Try not to go longer than the time allocated.
- ▶ The person being interviewed should first assess very quickly just how much the journalist knows about the organization. Start by with a really basic overview, as if addressing someone who has no knowledge at all of the organization. If the journalist knows this, he/she will say. It is better to take this approach and make sure that the organization is well known. Above all, do not start by saying, “I imagine that you know our organizations, so let me start right away by talking about our...” Often a journalist will not dare to interrupt you to say that he/she does not know, thereby leaving the door open to getting information incorrect or not really understanding the topic.
- ▶ Make it known right away that the essential data can be found in the Press Kit. This is important because, on the journalist’s side, there is the risk of making errors while taking notes—a statistic could be written down incorrectly, a name misspelled. On the interviewee’s side, key points could be forgotten. The Press Kit serves as a lifeline and the journalist will only be more careful.



## During the interview

- ▶ Remember the goal: Say as many things as possible in the least amount of time, by stressing the key message.
- ▶ Get the message that you want to share out as quickly as possible, particularly before the journalist leads you on to another topic. At the same time, do not give the impression you are not answering or have not answered the question asked.
- ▶ Reformulate the key messages, by addressing them from different angles.
- ▶ Always start with the most important message and then move on to those that are lesser in importance.
- ▶ Imagine that the person (the interviewer) with whom you are speaking is not familiar/does not know anything about the subject (that is unless you are dealing with a journalist who is a specialist)
- ▶ Transmit confidence: A journalist may realize if you are not telling the truth, however, if you acknowledge some weaknesses, for example regarding an activity, but then put this in a context that justifies the problem, then the distrust will lessen.
- ▶ Be pedagogical.
- ▶ Be open, accessible. Dialogue. You can also ask the journalist questions about his/her media organization, the focus of the story, etc.
- ▶ Quote credible sources (e.g., studies done by international organizations.
- ▶ Repeat any misstatements. Do so with tact, but do not let any misstatements or misconceptions settle. Answer objectively, with statistics, examples, etc., then gradually return to the misstatement issue with a question, "Do you have any evidence that this rumor is true?"
- ▶ Use simple words, non-technical. Give a brief definition any words that may not be readily known, in particular acronyms, for example, RAMPAO, CSRP, etc.
- ▶ Try to avoid giving out too many figures, instead use more images and comparisons.
- ▶ Reply in short phrases.
- ▶ Avoid the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree unless you are really sure to have mastery of it and that it is understood by the listeners.
- ▶ Answer calmly and with fair-play to the provocative questions. Guard your nerves. Do not be disdainful or aggressive.
- ▶ Do not speak too fast and be sure to articulate well.
- ▶ If a question is not understood, do not hesitate to ask that it be repeated. Better to have it repeated than to not answer it.
- ▶ Be positive: It is better to present things positively rather than negatively, i.e., "to see the glass as being half-full rather than half-empty."
- ▶ Relativize: "This is a minor point" or, "On contrary, let me draw your attention on this point," etc.
- ▶ Be wise. Only say what can be published, reported.
- ▶ Do not go in for useless or unnecessary criticism of people in power, leaders, and public figures. Do not talk about partisan politics.
- ▶ Do not reply "No Comment." It is better to respond, providing an explanation, rather than leaving the door open to other interpretations. If a question is not flattering, there are several techniques for responding: First take a small pause before responding, take time to reflect, then bounce back by saying "There are several aspects to your question" and then tackle the most convenient one or reply, "I can see where you're going with this, but the real debate would be..." The question can also be returned to the journalist or say "I expected you might ask this question and it gives me an opportunity to point out that..." move from a technical reasoning to an affective reasoning; have a standard phrase that you can state; or use a generic proverb.
- ▶ Remember this: Anything that is said during an interview can be published. As much as possible, avoid asking to go "off the record" ("I'll tell you this but you can't repeat it or talk about it later).
- ▶ Do neither speak on behalf of another nor act as the spokesperson. Instead respond, "You can ask (that person) direct."

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COMMUNICATION ADVICE WORKSHEET

- ▶ Never talk about your intentions to publish an advertisement in the media of the journalist for several reasons: 1) Most of the time, there is no connection and communication between the Editorial and advertising departments; 2) The journalist may take offence seeing the comment as an insult to his/her independence.
- ▶ Do not transform the interview in publicity spot.
- ▶ Do not mention competitors, or at least, not the small ones. The journalist should be familiar with the major ones. No need to make their work easy for them.
- ▶ Anecdotes are a good way to capture attention, to humanize a story, and also make transmit the message more easily.
- ▶ As you come to the end of the interview, be sure to ask the journalist if all the questions have been answered completely and/or if any additional information is needed.

**Do not expect that the interview will definitely be published.**

**In the framework of an interview it is possible to ask, diplomatically, for the right to review all the quotations or technical aspects. Never demand to do so.**

## The Radio/TV/Video Interview

The same principles (stated above) apply here, however the answers will have to be given in a faster and more concise way. Go straight to the point, especially if doing a live interview. You can take note sheet on which is written the key messages, talking points, statistical data and essential names. Be pedagogical.

### KEY RULES FOR DOING TV/VIDEO INTERVIEWS:

- ▶ Look at the interlocutor, not the camera.
- ▶ Keep it in mind that even if you do not speak, you might be filmed
- ▶ Be aware of any nervous habits, e.g., fiddling with a pen, twisting a paper clip, chewing on the microphone, taking a sip of water just before or after speaking, etc.
- ▶ Control your movements and gestures: Sit correctly in the seat. Smile (this is true even for being on the radio where smiling 'can be heard.) Do not forget that you are contributing to the image of your organization.
- ▶ In case of stress, go slowly at your own pace, speak a bit louder. Take a moment before the interview to relax.
- ▶ Note: Some colors are not suitable for appearing on the screen, e.g., red or white satin; stripes. Blue and greens lends itself to incrustation.
- ▶ Do not touch the lapel microphone, the table microphone or pat the table.
- ▶ Also, do not forget that when wearing a lapel microphone you can be heard before and after the formal interview. So pay attention to what is said outside the interview. Remind yourself to remove it as soon as the interview is ended.

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