



10 Tips for Handling the Media

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It's amazing. When a camera or a microphone is put in front of us, our brain suddenly gets out of sync with our mouth. That very same trusted mouth also becomes dry and begins to stumble out some sort of incoherent communication.

Facing the media doesn't have to be a daunting process. As trainers, we do get requests for quotes, interviews or invites to televised debates or interviews and it's exciting but incredibly scary. Equally, we may well be expected to coach our managers before they face the media, be it television, radio or press. Handling the media actually draws on a lot of the techniques we already know within professional people development.

Having a clear message, developing relationships, handling conflict and of course, the ability to be a great communicator are all critical to anyone who needs to face the press. And, as we all know within learning – practice, practice, practice. In a majority of cases, we all have access to a

fairly reasonable DV or HD camera, even current Smart Phones have an incredible capacity to record and playback amazing quality through to a television set or PC.

Handling the media successfully is based on being clear of what you want to say, keeping it simple and focusing on a positive message.

1. Build good relationships with journalists They too want a successful outcome so it's a case of mutual respect and understanding.

2. Ask questions before agreeing to an interview These would typically be in what context is the story you are working on, why me, who else are you talking to, have you approached anyone else in this organisation, where is the final piece going to be seen, heard or published, what is your specific angle, why me, where do you want to record the piece, etc

3. Set the aim of your communication Identify what the key outcome of the message will be. This is important as it will remind you or your managers to concentrate on delivering that message despite the variety of questions or challenges that may be put forward.

4. Develop the core messages In all good communication, concentrate on three or four key points only and stick to these in the context of the interview and your initial aim. Research the facts in case you are challenged on information.

5. Practice, practice, practice Even if the request for an interview is within the next few hours, work with a colleague to develop your message and practice being interviewed. Encourage your coach, trainer or colleague to really challenge you on fairly tricky issues. Ideally, record and playback your practice session.

6. Set the start of the interview If the piece is televised or recorded, make sure you ask the journalist what the first couple of questions will be, especially the first question. Practice your response in your mind before the start of the interview.

7. Use metaphors and paint pictures It's not just the journalist you are trying to deal with, you must remember the end viewer, listener or reader – it is they you are influencing. Keep your message simple, ideally short informative statements. In the UK, we have a tendency to give a response and then carry on by way of feeling we have to justify. People are not stupid and can work out what you are saying. If more information is required, the journalist will ask. Use visual, auditory and kinaesthetic words and always maintain the message with positive language.

8. Speak in soundbites When answering a question, reply as if it is a standalone statement and not a response to a question. This is particularly useful to Editors as they then have the option to cut out the interviewer or the question if time is tight on a piece. If you reply as if to a question then the Editor may have to cut that statement. That statement may be your most critical point.

9. It's all PR If it's a good news piece, think about having your logo, product or business in the background. Conversely, if it's a difficult story, try and find a neutral backdrop. If the piece is being made on your premises, you choose the location.

10. Develop a Media Policy Many companies do not have a Media or Press Policy and different messages can come out of the same organisation if they are not in place.

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