

## Tips for Interviewing with the Media

### *Developing Key Messages*

- ◆ Develop your key message. What is the most important point that you want to get across?
- ◆ Practice stating your key message in several different ways.
- ◆ Always state your main or key message whenever you answer a question.
- ◆ State your key message first, don't build up to it. If you build up to it, you risk that it won't be used.
- ◆ Keep it Short and Simple (KISS). If you use a lot of words, your message will be edited by an editor—not by you.
- ◆ Avoid jargon, acronyms, and technical terms. Give the information in a way that a sixth grader would understand.
- ◆ Use colorful language, anecdotes, and analogies to make your points stand out.

### *General tips*

- ◆ Be conversational when talking to a reporter.
- ◆ Make eye contact with the reporter; don't talk to the camera.
- ◆ Smile unless it is inappropriate to the subject matter. Smiling will make you more personable.
- ◆ If you don't know, say so and offer to get back to the reporter. Then do it. Don't speculate or guess.
- ◆ If you don't like the way you said something, ask to say it again.
- ◆ Be positive when making your points. Speak with authority.
- ◆ When giving telephone interviews with print and radio reporters stand up and move around. You'll be more animated and that will come through over the telephone.
- ◆ Be responsive, but don't let reporters make their deadlines into your problem.
- ◆ Practice with a colleague before the interview.

### *Dress*

How you look may be as important as what you say. Here are some tips for looking your best on camera.

- ◆ In general, dress should be simple and conservative.
- ◆ Avoid plaids, checks and other patterns unless they are subtle.
- ◆ Remove glasses if you can see OK without them. Glasses glare and tend to hide your eyes. Remove glasses at least 15 minutes before an on-camera interview.
- ◆ Remember to remove your employee ID badge before going on camera.
- ◆ It's a good idea to keep a nice jacket in your office in case you are asked for an on-camera interview.

#### *For Men:*

- Suits or sport coats are best
- Ties should be solid in color or simple design
- Remove pens, lapel pins, and anything that might be distracting

#### *For Women:*

- Suits and jackets are best
- Skirts should be below the knee
- Makeup should be subdued
- Avoid dangling earrings and flashy jewelry that might be distracting

## Tips for Interviewing with the Media, continued

### *Bridging Statements*

“Bridging” is responding to a question by answering the question you want to answer, not the one that was asked. It’s a way to keep the interview on track, to control it, and to get your message out. Here are just a few examples of bridging statements.

- ◆ “I think it is important to know....”
- ◆ “We see it from a different perspective...”
- ◆ “Let’s look at the bigger picture...”
- ◆ “Let’s talk about what is happening...”
- ◆ “Let me set the record straight...”

### *Common Traps*

There are some common “traps” that people fall into when giving interviews. Sometimes reporters will intentionally set up the interview to get a better quote; sometimes these happen spontaneously. In either event, keep them in mind when being interviewed. Always keep your cool and never argue with or condescend to a reporter.

- ◆ *Off the record*—you are never off the record. Consider anything that you say to a reporter as a potential quote.
- ◆ *The long pause*—sometimes a reporter will pause after you’ve answered in an effort to keep you talking. When you’ve finished answering a question, don’t feel compelled to fill a silence by continuing to talk.
- ◆ *The derogatory remark*—if a reporter makes a derogatory remark, don’t take the bait. Ignore the comment and bridge to your key message
- ◆ *The phantom authority*—the reporter makes a vague reference to a study or a quote by an unnamed authority. Don’t respond unless the reporter can provide exact information about the study and author.
- ◆ *Badgering*—the reporter asks the same question over and over or asks the same question in several different ways in an effort to get the response for which s/he is looking. Don’t concede the point. Bridge to your message.
- ◆ *Irrelevant questions*—if a reporter asks a question that is not relevant to the topic or your area of expertise, bridge to your message.
- ◆ *No comment*—never say “no comment;” it sounds like you are hiding something. Instead use a bridging statement and go on with your main message or simply state that you’re not an authority in the area and leave it at that.
- ◆ *“A” or “B” dilemma*—the reporter gives you a dilemma, “do you prefer X or Y?” Don’t let the reporter limit your choices. State what you think is best and don’t hesitate to state several options if that’s preferable.
- ◆ *Multiple or rapid questions*—A reporter asks several questions in rapid order or asks questions with multiple parts. Respond by taking the issues one at a time. If the reporter has asked several questions, answer the one you want to answer and ignore the others.
- ◆ *The open mike*—sometimes a mike is left on when the interview seems to be concluded. Always assume that the interview is going on until you’ve left the room.