

# Public Speaking

## Tips for Dealing with the Media

- Know who you're talking to — the reporter's track record and style.
- There is no such thing as "off the record."
- It is common for a reporter to use a tape recorder. Don't let it unnerve you; it increases your chances of being quoted correctly.
- Be sure the reporter knows where to reach you or a designated alternate spokesperson for additional information.
- Never ask to read the reporter's copy or request changes before publication.
- If a reporter writes a story that seriously misrepresents the facts, contact the publication's editor and ask for a correction. Be prepared to explain in detail why a correction is needed.
- Don't complain about minor slips in an otherwise accurate story. Complaining about minor matters or perspective can antagonize the reporter.
- Reporters often make a telephone call to ask for a source or a quick note to balance a story. If you are called, remember that you are under no obligation to answer immediately. Ask for the reporter's deadline and promise to get back with a response. Return the call only after you feel confident of your position and the facts. However, it is imperative to respect the reporter's deadline.
- If you are asked a question that should be answered from a different perspective, refer the reporter to the appropriate source.
- Keep a personal log of contacts with the media, including dates, media organizations, names of reporters, topics of interviews or contacts, dates the article or story was aired or printed, and any follow-up actions and dates.

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Some additional pointers for general media interaction:

- Speak in "headlines." Offer conclusion first, briefly and directly, and back it with facts.
- Don't over-answer. Short answers are better than long ones.
- Don't be fixated by the question. Find a way to get from the question to a point you want to make and then move on.
- Asked about a problem?  
Talk about a solution.
- Don't let false charges, facts or figures offered by a reporter stand uncorrected.
- Don't repeat a reporter's negative statements. Reply with a positive.
- Speak clearly.  
Avoid jargon, "bureaucratese" or "environmentalese."
- Be engaging, likable.
- Don't know the answer? Don't fake it. If appropriate, assure the reporter you will find and provide the needed facts in a timely manner, or offer to assist the reporter in finding that other source.
- Don't overlap the interviewer's question: begin when the reporter is finished.
- Keep cool. Don't be provoked.
- Never lie to a reporter.

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## General communication guidelines whether giving a speech or discussing a program opportunity

- Talk from the viewpoint of your audience's interest.
  - Know your audience.
  - Don't use jargon.
- Don't mistake a reporter for your audience.
  - A reporter is the conduit to get your message to the reporter's readers or listeners.
- Speak in personal terms whenever possible to enhance credibility.
- If you do not want a statement quoted, do not make it.
  - There is no such thing as an "off the record" or "not for attribution" statement.
  - Off-the-cuff statements made in the studio, in the elevator, or on the way to lunch run the risk of making headlines the next day.
  - Statements made for backgrounding or briefing purposes are subject to being quoted.
  - If an inaccurate statement is made by a reporter or by you, correct it immediately.
- Do not argue or lose your cool.
  - Gracefully get around an argument by "bridging" back to your key messages. (See explanation later in this section.)
  - Defensiveness generates a hostile feeling.
  - Reporters and competitors can be deliberately argumentative to elicit a response. Remember that you are in a public environment.
- If a question contains negative language or words you don't like, do not repeat the reporter's negative words.
  - You run the risk of having the reporter's negative language attributed to you.
  - Find a neutral "agreement" word and build a bridge to the point you want to make.
- A direct question deserves a direct answer.
  - Answer the question, then bridge to a message.
- If you don't know an answer, say so.
  - Don't speculate.
  - Don't speculate. It is acceptable to say "I don't know, but I will find out and get back to you as soon as possible" – and then do so.
  - Refer the person to someone who can answer the question.
- If you cannot answer a question, never say the words, "no comment."
  - Always give a valid reason for not being able to answer. For example, a legal case is pending or the information requested is of a proprietary nature.
- Listen to the question.
  - Be sensitive to the reporter's intent.

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- If you miss the point of a question, you may appear to be evasive.
- If you are unsure of the question, rephrase it before answering.
- Always answer questions honestly.
  - Tell the truth, even if it hurts.
  - Avoid any temptation to exaggerate the positive.
- Provide good, solid information, but don't be overwhelming.
  - Provide summaries.
- Give all audiences — the media, analysts, industry representatives, employees, regulatory officials — the same message.
  - Speaking with "one voice" enhances credibility.

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Some bullets were added and minor changes were made to the original document.