

ImPRESSive

A MEDIA TIP SHEET FOR ADVOCATES

January 2001

TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS

PART III: TELEVISION

Many people consider television interviews to be the "big time"—and with good reason. Studies show that more Americans get their news from television than from any other source. Because of this, many different people and organizations compete for airtime. They know that getting one minute on the evening news can do more to further their issues than almost any other media hit.

Imagine that your organization held a press event about the uninsured in your community a few months ago. You wrote a report with graphs and statistics showing the number of uninsured, their average income, and other demographic information. The press conference was successful, in part because you had real people available to tell their stories and have their picture taken. At the press conference you met Will Clark, a television reporter for KYW-TV. He was very interested in your report and your issues.

Yesterday, the governor proposed a plan to cover the uninsured in your state. Will wants to interview you on-camera for your group's perspective. You've accepted and now you must prepare for the interview.

Anticipate the Reporter

Before you ever walk into an interview, your message should have already been established. Message development can take a lot of time and thought so it should be done in advance of any media opportunities. You never know when you'll have the opportunity to talk to a reporter.

When news breaks and you are asked to respond, the first thing you need to do is think of how the news affects your message. How does your organization feel about the governor's proposal? Is it a real solution to the problem of the uninsured or is it merely a political prop for the governor's re-election campaign? These are the kinds of questions

you may be asked, so be sure to have clear responses that push your perspective. (For more information about crafting a message, see the October 2000 *ImPRESSive*, "Tips for Interviews; Part I: Newspaper.")

After you set your message, sit down with a colleague and think through the kinds of questions you'll be asked. Carefully craft short, interesting responses. Remember, this is your opportunity to have your message heard. Repeat your message relentlessly and find ways to include it in your response to every question. Practice responding to tricky questions and ways you can shift the reporter's questions to those more in line with your message.

Once you feel comfortable with your message and your ability to stick to it, begin looking at the way you convey your message. It's important that you look natural on-air so, if possible, try to videotape yourself during these mock interviews. It may seem silly at first, but it will give you the opportunity to critique yourself. If you have done a television interview in the past and have a copy of the tape, make sure to look at that as well. It may give you some ideas about how to improve your posture, gestures, enunciation, and eye contact.

Appearances Count

When you are being interviewed, sit up straight and look directly at the interviewer. Resist the urge to look directly into the camera lens. This comes off as overly aggressive and unsettling to the viewer. Try to keep both feet flat on the floor.

Use gestures to make a point. Some people find that holding a pen in an interview helps them with their nerves and gives them something to do with their hands. What you don't want to do is look stiff or artificial.

Speak clearly, enunciating your words. Most of us tend to speak quickly when we're nervous. Try to control the speed at which you speak. Because you've practiced so much, the content of your speech should be second nature. Relax and concentrate on the interviewer. Remember to use your voice as a tool to convey doubt or approval. Using active words to describe the situation will also help keep the viewer's attention.

Smile and be engaging throughout the interview, even when you don't think the camera is on you. The reporter will appreciate this and the audience will pick up on it as well. You don't want to look and sound dour no matter how much you may dislike the governor's proposal. You want to appear active and upbeat.



Lights! Camera! Action!



- 1 Sit up straight.
- 2 Avoid large gestures.
- 3 Speak clearly and animatedly.
- 4 Smile.
- 5 Make eye contact with the interviewer.

What to Wear

Your clothes are very important in a television interview. This is a visual medium and you want to look as polished and professional as possible. In choosing your wardrobe for television interviews, avoid anything distracting or unflattering on camera. You may love that brightly patterned sweater but the camera doesn't. It can distract the viewer from listening to your message. Therefore, try to

stick to dark, solid clothing. Avoid white and light-colored clothing. Too much jewelry can also be distracting. Sometimes necklaces rub against lavalier microphones, obscuring your voice. Large, dangly bracelets can also be distracting, especially if you are using your hands to gesture. If possible, remove your glasses or wear contacts as the lens may cause a glare. However, if your vision is so bad that you will be squinting, definitely leave the glasses on!

from notes, if you do have specific points you want to make you should feel free to have them handy.

The reporter may wish to interview someone in the community who is uninsured. If you have someone who would be willing to speak, bring his or her name and telephone number with you. (For more information about gathering stories, see the July 1999 *ImPRESSive*, "The Art of Storybanking.")

Clothes Make the Interview



- **Avoid shiny, bright, or otherwise distracting clothes.**
- **No funny ties or short skirts.**
- **Leave the large jewelry at home.**
- **Remove glasses or wear contacts, if possible.**
- **For women, apply slightly more makeup than usual. For men, allow the professional make-up artist to apply foundation.**



Follow Through

Once you have finished, thank the reporter for his or her time. Make sure he or she has your business card for future reference. Find out when the interview will air and ask for a copy of the interview, if possible.

If you cannot get a copy of the tape from the station, make sure to record it yourself. Review the tape to see how you might improve for future interviews. You can also use the tape for soliciting possible funders or showing your board of directors.

Conclusion

Despite the amount of preparation involved, television interviews are very important to master. The more time you take perfecting your message and "stage presence," the more likely you'll be asked back to do more interviews on health care topics. Many people clamor to do television interviews and then don't do the preparation necessary. As a result, they end up looking stiff and unnatural. You can always spot the television novices; they stare into the camera like deer in your headlights and barely manage to raise their voice above a whisper. You can bet they won't be asked back. Producers love to find people who are knowledgeable about their subject and give good interviews. This is definitely the reputation you want to cultivate.

What to Bring

Always make an effort to bring a press kit. Especially include materials such as your report on the uninsured and a one page executive summary. The producer may ask the graphics department to adapt some of your charts and graphs to be shown on air.

You may also want to bring one page of notes with you. While you don't want to be reading

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ImPRESSive

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