

## MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

Remember, reporters are humans too. Good reporters work hard to establish rapport with their sources. Be carefully candid, civil and above all, **honest**. Faced with such good manners, a reporter is most likely to respond in kind (**hopefully**).

Also remember that if you're talking to a broadcast reporter: In 1968, the average was 42.2 second sound bites. Today it's 7 seconds. And when viewers were asked what caused them to believe the message delivered, 16% said they believed the message **because of what was said**. **84% said they believed it because of HOW it was said**.

### What to do?

1. Remember, there is nothing in the First Amendment that requires you to answer any question—or to talk to a reporter **at all**. If they call you on the phone and you aren't sure what you want to say, simply tell them: **"Let me call you back when I get the information you need. What's your phone number?"** (Then hang up and call a professional!)
2. Keep your answers short, simple and to the point. Avoid industry jargon and acronyms that may be alien language to the interviewer.
3. Determine a concise way of relating your overall message. Think over and rehearse answers to likely questions. Try to keep the reporter focused on your main message and say it several ways to get the point across.
4. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say: "I don't know." Or, you can simply answer another question of your choosing.
5. Realize that only a small part of what you say will appear in print or be heard on the air.
6. Be very judicious in speaking "off the record." The best policy is to talk only "on the record" and understand that everything you say can be quoted. Just because they're not writing doesn't mean they aren't remembering what you say. Some reporters don't use notes.
7. Get you, or you and your staff media training!

**What not to do:**

1. Never, never lie.
2. Don't talk fast—some reporters (even print) record your comments. Most are writing things down and you want them to get it right.
3. Don't answer questions that aren't part of your agenda. Sometimes the best answer to a question is rephrasing the question itself.
4. Don't be afraid to change or redefine the topic or angle the reporter may be using. Consider yourself an educator. Gently correct wrong impressions, terminology or facts.
5. Don't talk down to the reporter. If they need to be taught something, teach gently.
6. Don't lose your cool even if you're seething inside. You will only alienate a powerful friend.
7. Never say, "No comment." Remember how that looks in print or on the air: "**Refused to comment.**" Instead, offer an oblique answer, directing the conversation back to your message. You can always begin that effort with: "What's important here is..."