

HANDLING A MEDIA INTERVIEW

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

This is vital. Failing to prepare is like walking into battle unarmed. Even if it is a friendly, non-confrontational interview, lack of preparation will leave you looking inept, confused and unfocused.

Preparation means focusing on the things you want to say...

- Firm, positive facts that will mean something to the audience.
- Not more than two or three main points – otherwise you (and your audience) will have difficulty remembering them.
- Facts and ideas that support the impression you want to give.
- Statistics (but not too many and not too detailed) that support your main points.
- Examples that will illustrate your points and perhaps put a human face on them.

But...

- Don't try to second-guess the interviewer's questions. By all means, work out how you would answer the trickiest questions that could come your way. But you will never be able to forecast all the questions.
- Don't try to learn by heart any of your material. At best, it will sound stilted and will prevent the interview sounding like a normal conversation.

And remember...

- You're there because you are an expert.
- You know more about your subject than the interviewer ever will.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Your main goal during the interview is to keep control and get your points across.

Remember to...

- Get straight to your main points at the start of the interview. Remember, some interviews only last two or three minutes so don't waste vital time warming up.
- Keep asking yourself: "Am I getting across the two or three points I came here to make?" If you're not, try to steer the interview back onto your territory.
- Use bridging phrases to get your key messages across: "But I would like to make another point...", "But what's really interesting is that...", "The real issue is...", "Don't forget that..."
- Think about your audience. The extent to which you engage them will determine the success or failure of your interview. The style and language you use will be important.
- Keep it conversational. Ditch your in-house jargon and use everyday language instead.
- Use open body language and speak in a clear, friendly tone.

But...

- Keep your cool. An angry response when you are being given a hard time by a tough interviewer can come across as a sign of guilt. At the very least it can make you look as though you're on shaky ground.
- Be prepared to take control, especially when the interviewer tries to take you into areas you're not willing to discuss.
- Don't allow inaccurate accusations to stand uncorrected. Use strong, assertive language to put them down. Leave the audience in no doubt.
- Avoid being drawn into hypothetical situations. Simply state that you are not prepared to speculate.
- Don't recycle negative language used by the interviewer. Talk solutions instead of problems.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Never guess. And don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you haven't understood the question.
- Try not to be fazed by silences. If you have made your point, then stop.
- When interrupted, acknowledge the interruption but insist on finishing your reply.
- Never speak off the record. A journalist is always on duty.