Media Interviews 101

Careful planning helps reap the rewards when speaking with a reporter. To maximize your chances of a favorable outcome you must be very clear on what you want to accomplish concerning the topic of the interview.

1. KISSs - Keep It Short Simple stupid. Stay on point. TV quotes last somewhere between five and 10 seconds. Quotes found in print stories are seldom more than 15 words, apart from an article on the person that is being quoted.
2. Remain focused while keeping your comments brief. In preparing for the interview, select the three most important facts you would like your audience to know. Keep your facts simple, preparing each declarative statement should contain 8 to 15 words. Think about the type of quotes you remember from the media and try to emulate them in your own style.
3. Remember who you are dealing with before the interview starts. A reporter may be friendly, but not your friend. It is their job to talk to you and the interview is a business discussion that is important to you. Stay focused and remember, a microphone is always live.
4. Make your answers credible. Acknowledge, when asked, any past problems and explain what you've done to correct them. Or simply state that you have discussed the issues thoroughly in the past and you have nothing more to add currently. Fight off the temptation to volunteer too much. Too often, a flood of information confuses a reporter.
5. Be confident. Remember the reporter came to you as an expert on the topic. The reporter might seem to be in charge, but do not shy away from inserting your key talking points into the interview by telling them what's important and why.
6. Reporters will question your assertions. Have backup information that explains your projection; be prepared to do so without revealing confidential data. Wait for the reporter to ask before providing the backup. Emphasize what is important while giving them the information they need.
7. Have your three (3) talking points in front of you if conducting a phone interview. Having a list of possible questions and proposed answers will also help keep your goals clearly in front of you.
8. Remember to be engaging during the interview, the reporter is looking for information. You can almost always expect them to ask questions that are off topic. When they do, smoothly steer them back to your main talking points.
    a. Good "bridge" phrases for this include: "What's important here is," "What I can tell you is," "There is something else to consider," "I'd also like to add," "Something we haven't talked about that's important is," and "What we know is."

Be realistic about the possible outcome. Getting even one message into a news story is a terrific outcome. With some planning, it could be the point you want to make.

Remember you are both doing your jobs.

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