

More interviewing tips

By Bob Hooley

There are many aspects of media, and each interview style has its own concerns and strategy. Whether you are being interviewed on the phone, for print, radio, talk show, or on television, remember your key message and keep your focus.

Most of your interviews will be via the phone. It is important to resist the tendency to relax too much and lose your focus with this type of interview. Keep focused on communicating your message.

Here are a few tips for the on the phone interview:

- ☞ Smile and sit up straight - it communicates well and helps you keep your focus.
- ☞ Avoid other distractions - eliminate TV, radio, background noise, and conversations or interruptions from kids or co-workers. Arrange to have someone cover your calls or workload during the interview so you can focus on your conversation with the reporter. Discuss this in advance of any calls and have a signal that can be used to let your co-workers know you need their help in covering for you.
- ☞ Focus on your key messages.
- ☞ Make sure you speak clearly, enunciate and are slow enough for the reporter. Don't be shy about stopping and checking in to make sure the reporter is following ok.
- ☞ Repeat and come back to your key messages as a thread in your interview and don't be afraid to emphasize key words.
- ☞ Assume you are being recorded and 'on the record' at all times.
- ☞ Make a note of the questions you've been asked and the genesis of your answers.
- ☞ Remember the old '3 and 10' rule and USE IT!

If a reporter calls you home and you don't want to deal with them there for any reason, don't be shy about asking them to call back during work hours when you have access to the information you need to answer their questions accurately.

If they are under a deadline and the call is urgent, I'd suggest asking about the concern or topic and suggest calling back when you've had a chance to do your homework or compile some information on the topic. Don't be pushed into an ill-prepared interview because of their deadline. It is better to not be quoted, than mis-quoted!

The '3 and 10' rule as I recall it from my media friends is:

**Wait three seconds before answering a question
and keep your answer short - to 10 seconds.**

For print interviews where you've agreed to meet a reporter in your office or onsite location here are a few ideas that might help:

- ☞ Always be prepared and focus on your 2 or 3 key messages.

- ✂ Make sure your environment (pictures, book titles, reports, trinkets, magazines) doesn't conflict with the message you want to broadcast or the image you want to present to the public.
- ✂ Make sure you have any necessary support material close at hand. (Fact sheets, reports, company or organization brochures, etc.)
- ✂ Don't be shy about suggesting a photo opportunity to visually show what you or your group actually does. Often, with smaller papers they will run the photo with a caption in addition to the article.
- ✂ Before the interview, ask how much time the reporter thinks they'll need to conduct the interview. Schedule it, accordingly, and set aside time, without interruptions, to conduct the interview and give the reporter your undivided attention.
- ✂ You may want to record your interview for your own records.
- ✂ At the very least, make a written record of the questions you are asked, as they are asked. After the reporter leaves, make a quick note of the genesis of your answers.

USE ACTION WORDS: Keep your sentences tight, avoid jargon and enhance your communication by using active words vs. passive words. Avoid weak or weasel words that convey uncertainty or weakness, as they detract from your messages.

Radio interview success depends on your ability to convey an emotional and visual identity to the audience by effectively using your vocal tone, pace, speed and other vocal attributes in projecting your message.

Here are a few ideas that will help:

- ✂ Remember and use the '3 and 10' rule.
- ✂ Speak clearly and as slowly as you can and still sound natural. Enunciate clearly!
- ✂ Verbally punch key words in your message.
- ✂ Work to keep your speed natural. Most of us have a tendency to speed up our pace on radio. Could be the nerves kicking in. Don't let your anxiousness show. Remember to relax and breathe.
- ✂ Don't fill dead air. If you have a pause, move into the next point of your message or wait for the next question or comment from you host. I guaranty he won't let the dead air go for long.
- ✂ Work to eliminate long pauses or ahs, and ummms from your answers. Joining a Toastmasters Club is a great way to get a handle on this verbal crutch usage. And it is a fun place to learn too! Tell them Bob Hooey, DTM sent you!

If you are invited on an open line radio program, here are a few tips:

- ✂ Do your homework and investigate the style and personality of your host in advance, before you appear on air. Listen to the show if you can.
- ✂ Arrive early and get a sense of the studio and relax.
- ✂ Stay conversational and friendly. Sit up straight and smile - it shows in your voice.
- ✂ Don't make critical, personal remarks or cut off people when you are on air.
- ✂ Keep you answers clear, concise and friendly. Remember it is your host's show!
- ✂ Keep your sense of humor at all costs.
- ✂ If a question or comment contains errors, politely correct them and answer the corrected question without making a big deal about the error. Always be positive!

- ✂ If there are other guests, try to find out what their issues are and be prepared to offer comment if you have expertise. But, keep focused on your key messages.

Here are a few tips to help you relax during all styles of broadcast interviews:

- ✂ AVOID COFFEE! The caffeine and acid can irritate your stomach. It also dries out your mouth and acts as a diuretic too.
- ✂ Drink room temperature water instead. Don't drink ice water as it works against your throat muscles. Water helps keep you from dehydration.
- ✂ Practice speaking in your normal, well-paced tone. Keep it conversational and friendly. Remember to finish your sentences, as some of us tend to drop off at the end of them, and our message is then lost. Punch up your key words.
- ✂ Knowing your material is the best preparation for any speaking. It helps you to relax and be more comfortable, if you know and are focused on your 2 or 3 key messages.
- ✂ Show up with a list of typical questions for you host. Explain that these are some of the ones most frequently asked, and you thought they might be useful. Sometimes you host will not be prepared and this will help you have an interesting interview. And as a bonus, you'll know the answers.
- ✂ Remember to bring along copies of your book, any brochures or other visual materials - just in case.

Appearing on TV can be an interesting challenge. Most of us will never face the TV camera, but it helps if you are prepared. You may be contacted if a major announcement is made, and you are an acknowledged expert in that area. Or how about a key event or conflict requiring your comment. More likely, you may be invited to appear on a local cable show in relation to your company, association or personal experience. Again, preparation is the best way of dealing with any nervousness.

Again, a few ideas:

- ✂ Do the interview at a site that shows an example, or ties into what you do or want to share. This may not always be possible, but it never hurts to suggest it. It can make for a more interesting show and the producer might like it!
- ✂ If you have photo grey or graduated glasses (automatically darken with light sources) don't wear them. Under TV studio lighting they will act the same way.
- ✂ If you are filmed outside, never wear sunglasses!
- ✂ If you wear a hat, avoid hat head by not taking it off just prior to the interview. Avoid wearing one all together unless you have to wear it for work conditions.
- ✂ Don't take off your prescription glasses if you wear them all day. Your eyes will have a problem adjusting to the new vision and it conveys a less than flattering image.
- ✂ If you have the time, practice with a video camera or digital one at home and learn to be more positive in how you project yourself on camera.
- ✂ Look and speak at the interviewer. Resist the amateur's pitfall of looking at the camera or at the monitor. Carry on a normal conversation with the interviewer and talk to him.
- ✂ As much as you can, make sure your environment is consistent with your intended message. Make sure nothing detracts from your key messages. I'm told Norman Vincent Peale would not allow himself to be photographed with a glass in his hand. He knew he didn't drink but wanted to make sure people did not get the wrong impression.

- ✂ Cross your legs at the knee. If you are standing, don't use your hips as a parking place for your hands. If the reporter is a different height than yourself, work to keep your head level when you are talking. It photographs much better.
- ✂ When sitting, keep your hands away from your face and don't touch your hair or adjust your glasses. Sit straight, be comfortable, and lean slightly forward or into the camera. Don't slouch!
- ✂ Remember the 3 and 10 rule and use it!
- ✂ Avoid jargon, acronyms, abbreviations or shoptalk and don't number your points.
- ✂ Remember 'you are always on camera!' Often the cameraman will shoot from different angles and if in a studio you may have a multi-camera situation. They will edit after the show is done, unless it is a live shot.
- ✂ BE aware of good use of body language and vocal projection techniques. Make sure they are consistent with what you are trying to get across.
- ✂ If more than one reporter is interviewing you, don't use specific names or affiliations in your answers. This works very well in press conferences too!
- ✂ Don't smoke or chew gum on camera. Remember you are always on camera.
- ✂ Avoid overly colourful clothing, heavy jewellery, and make sure it is clean and presentable. Men - wear socks long enough to avoid showing your bare legs or ankles.
- ✂ If the cameraman re-shoots the reporter asking your questions - make sure they are the same ones originally put to you during your interview?
- ✂ Like radio interviews it is a good idea to arrive early and get familiar with the studio and your on- stage surroundings. And it is fun to watch the set-ups.
- ✂ Be aware of other guests and their issues. Make sure you are compatible for the topics they are discussing.
- ✂ Don't bring along charts, documents etc. If they are needed, talk to the producer in advance to see if they can be prepared to be used on screen when needed. Body language is important in broadcast media, especially television. It is, however, also important in other areas as well.

Here are a few ideas or points to be aware of in this regard:

- ✂ Be attentive and sit straight. Maintain eye contact with the reporter or host and listen carefully to questions and comments.
- ✂ When asked a negative question, resist the common tendency to nod affirmatively. You might be thinking you understand it, but you are visually conveying agreement with the question. This is important to your credibility!
- ✂ Avoid nervous smiles during the tough questions. I know this is a common response, and often a subconscious response or reaction, but again it conveys uncertainty and weakens your argument or message.

A few final tips for getting positive press:

- ✂ Know which reporters specialize in or are interested in your type of issues or activities.
- ✂ Strong vivid pictures make for good television. Keep your message simple, personal and emotional.
- ✂ Keep in mind that you might get bumped or cut back by other newsworthy events.
- ✂ Know and respect the deadlines of the various media outlets you are targeting.
- ✂ Television is the media that requires the longest lead-time unless you have a major breaking news story.

- ✍ Be aware of issues that may affect you or your organization. Be ready to act on them!
- ✍ Be pro-active in your responses in respect to evolving or actual issues.
- ✍ Errors-in-fact should be politely corrected - immediately. Responses to issues should be immediate to be newsworthy.

Remember it never hurts to be prepared to state or re-state your main messages in an ongoing public relations effort. Persistence and consistency are the watchwords to getting your point across to your public.

The personal power of public relations and a good media management strategy is not limited to simply issuing press releases. Remember, it is reflected to your public by the literature you distribute, the people you associate yourselves with, and by the issues you champion publicly.

I believe we must be willing to let people know where we stand, ready to share our experiences, expertise, and exchange viewpoints. This makes for a good mix of ideas and enriches the community, in which we live and work.

I believe in the power of applied public relations, having seen it expand my ability to share my Ideas At Work and open avenues across North America for me in my business as a professional speaker and facilitator.

If you have any stories, or success points to share, please send them to me:

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Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey, DTM, PRA, CKD-Emeritus, Accredited Speaker, 2011 Spirit of CAPS recipient is an inspirational leader, speaker, and a prolific author whose works include **'Legacy of Leadership, Strive for significance – lead on purpose!'**, **'Speaking for Success'** and **'The Courage to Lead!'** His articles have been featured in a multitude of North American trade and global consumer publications. He is a respected leader who has been honored by CAPS, NSA, Toastmasters, and the United Nations for his leadership contributions. His creative Ideas At Work have allowed him to travel the globe sharing insights, encouragement in 61 countries, so far. With Covid-19 he has been zooming around the globe to share his ideas. His **innovative Ideas At Work!** have been successfully applied by global leaders as well as Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies.