

Media Relations 101

...
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Today's agenda

- Why work with the media?
- What are reporters like?
- Responding to the media –
- Scenario – Test drive your skills



Why work with the media?

- ▶ If you don't...they can derail your train
- ▶ Reach less engaged publics
- ▶ Help shape public perception *
- ▶ Help shape your “reputation”
- ▶ Enhance your profile



What is the role of the media?

➤ **Watchdog –**

Attend the meetings/ court house/ legislature for us

Hold a mirror up to society

➤ **Gatekeeper –**

Choose what is covered.

Choose who is quoted and where.

Choose where it runs.

➤ **NOT your public relations firm....**

It's your job to tell your story.

➤ **First target of a repressive government**



What reporters are like/want?

Reporters see themselves as...

- Dispassionate observers
- Guardians of the public interest
- Champion of the underdog

What reporters are like/want:

- **Want to get it right, first and fast.**
- **Under pressure.**
- **Looking for drama.** (*Where's the conflict?*)
- **Just the facts ma'am.** (*Not there to socialize*)
- **Resourceful.** (*They will find someone to talk*)
- **Pushy.** (*Rushed/ under pressure*)
- **Generalists.** (*You know your business better*)



What makes a story news?

- Does it involve crisis, conflict, controversy or conspiracy?
- Does it affect many people?
- Does it involve a high profile individual?
- Is it an emotional story?
- Is it related to a major news story?
- Is it a novelty? (man bites dog?)
- Is it superlative? (first, biggest, smallest)
- Does it have a David versus Goliath theme?
- Is it visually interesting?(for TV.)
- Do they know about it?

Who's who in the media





Radio

- “Fastest”/most immediate release
- Always assume the tape is rolling
- 15 to 30 second sound bite
- Contact by phone, tape an interview and you are on the air within an hour if not live



Newspaper

- Tend to publish more detail, more explanation and more vivid illustration
- The most permanent record
- May lead the story
- Often trend-setters – may lead the story
(*rip and read*)



Television

- Seen as the most credible form of media
- Need “visual” element
- Say it in 15 to 20 second clips
- Assume the camera is always on
- Maintain eye contact with the host
- Neither a windmill or a statue be
- Don’t fidget, cross legs, fold arms, rub brow
(watch your non-verbals)

...

A word about non-verbals

Credibility

- Believability of a person as measured by another person.
 - ▶ Competence: Knowledge and expertise
 - ▶ Trustworthiness: Honest and sincere
 - ▶ Dynamism: Energy and confidence

Your credibility is affected by

- How you dress
- The words you choose
- Your body language
- Your tone of voice
- How fast/slow you speak

Your goal:

- You want to project:
 - ▶ Humility; rationality; openness; at ease with discussion; positiveness; thoughtfulness and energy
- You don't want to project:
 - ▶ Arrogance; hostility; defensiveness; negativity; complacency and anxiety

Eyes and pace of speech

- Maintain eye contact while communicating.
- Weak voice: lacking confidence
- Strong voice: shows confidence
- Talk too slow: bore your audience
- Talk too fast: unintelligible
- Speak fast enough to maintain interest;
slow enough to be understood

Tone of voice

- Monotone: neither competent or dynamic
- Vary pitch: colourful and dynamic
- Poor pronunciation: less competent; less trustworthy; less dynamic
- Confident voice/dubious message more credible than doubtful voice/credible message.

Gestures

- Standing and talking with no motion: dull
 - ▶ Strive for spontaneity and naturalness
- Don't touch the body or play with objects.
- Moving feet or legs speaks to discomfort
- Finger-tapping, lip-licking and smiling too often: tentative lack of confidence
- Best gestures involve hands, arms and head

Posture

- Posture involves the whole body.
- Closed: folded arms and crossed legs convey lack of confidence
- Open: arms spread conveys confidence

Facial expression

- Show interest and attention as you speak.
It conveys confidence

Environmental factors

- Face-to-face is optimum for communication. When people are side to side communication flow is minimal
- The position that faces the most people is the best for communicating with the most.
- Elevated position is best to convey leadership.

How you speak

- Friendly and professional
- Polite but confident and assertive
- Imagine talking to “one person” in their living room
- Animate your face and body to reinforce your message: positive, negative, concerned, whether being interviewed in person or on the phone.

How you speak

- Control the ums, yahs, okays
- Enunciate clearly.
Don't trail off at end of sentence
- Use everyday words
- Watch your pace: too slow you will be interrupted; too fast: they may miss the quote. Vary speed for interest and emphasis.

Your body speaks volumes

- Animate your face to connect with your feelings. If you have a beard you will have to be more animated.
- Make eye contact with the host.
- Show feelings as appropriate; but plan ahead the feelings that will be expressed and how they will be expressed.
- Be open, warm and compassionate: no folded arms, rigid stature

Your body speaks volumes

- Moderate hand and arm gestures nicely support a message
- Stand and sit up straight. Do not hunch your shoulders or lean to one side
- When sitting; keep your feet flat on the floor or cross your legs at the knee towards the interviewer.





Responding to the media





Warner Troyer's words of wisdom

"A news interview bears as much resemblance to a conversation as walking down the street does to the pas de deux."

Warner Troyer, investigative journalist

This Hour Has Seven Days, Public Eye, the Fifth Estate and W5.



Dealing with bad news

- **When faced with “bad” news” ask yourself**
 - If this gets out will it be news?
 - Is it possible this will get out?
 - If someone else tells this story will it be worse?

- **If you get yeses:**
 - Tell the story yourself.
 - Establish yourself as the official source
 - Speak as frankly about the issue as possible



When the call comes in...

**“So I can I get you what you need..
can you tell me...”**

- Who is calling?
- What organization?
- Who else will be interviewed?
- What do you need?
(time? in-person interview? a photo)



When the call comes in...

“So I can I get you what you need.. can you tell me...”

- What kind of story?
- What triggered the story?
- What do you want to explore so I can pull the right file?
- When will my statements be made public?
- Where will the interview take place?
- What is your deadline?



Once you have the answers...

1. Decide
Can/should you comment
2. Buy time.
Respect their deadline
3. Prepare.
Respect their deadline
4. Do the interview.



Responding to reporters

Remember:

1. You can not control their questions or their behavior.....
2. You can and must control how you respond.
3. The key is preparation.



Prepare for the interview

- Get your story(facts and figures) straight
Who, what, where, when, how, why and how much
- Write “key messages”
Core messages you want to convey (three)
- Choose “tone” you want to convey
Emotional note you want to hit
- Anticipate questions (negative/positive)
Prepare answers
- Test run an interview
Get feedback



Some basic tools

- **Decide on overall goal of the interview**
 - *Why have you agreed to do this?*
 - *What do you hope to achieve?*
- **Decide on tone**
 - *(e.g.) calm, fairness, resolve, reasonable*
- **Decide on key messages –**
 - *What at the end of the interview do you want to have communicated. (3)*
- **Anticipate questions**



Key messages: just words?

In an emotionally charged environment....

“We have laid our cards on the table”

- ◆ What does it mean to you?
- ◆ How could it be “spun”?

“As our teachers have indicated they will be going on strike in 72 hours, parents are encouraged to make alternative child care arrangements.”

- ◆ What does it mean to you?
- ◆ How could it be “spun”?

Key messages

- 2 or 3 key points you want to appear in the story.
 - ▶ What is it I want to share with public?
 - ▶ What does the public/media need to know about this situation?
 - ▶ What is most important thing about this situation?
 - ▶ Is there action I want people to take?

Effective key messages

- attract attention: passionate, powerful
- 5 – 10 seconds in length
- stand alone statement
- everyday language

Support your messages with

- Understandable examples
- Evidence
- Statistics

Positioning statement

- Opening statement that includes:
 - ▶ A brief overview
 - ▶ 2/3 key messages

2/3 key messages

- Brief statement of each of most important messages
- Meaningful, persuasive, interesting
- Easily understood
- 5 to 10 seconds in length
- Stand alone
- Every day language

Anticipate questions to come

- Prep answers, thinking about how you will bridge to your key messages.
- Practice at your table.
- Scrum your spokesperson
- Send them up for the interview

During the interview (advanced)

- You have prepared for the who, what, where, when, how and why questions: but don't just answer obediently. Seize the opportunity to get your key messages across – to achieve your goal . *This is called bridging*
- Don't make “good TV”. Keep your cool. Calm is credible.
You alone control how you respond.
- Don't let the reporter put words in your mouth.
Rephrase controversial statements.



The art of the “bridge”

“Bridging” phrases allow you to move from answer to your key messages

- *It's important to know...*
- *The key thing to remember is...*
- *What I want to say is...*
- *What I want to leave people with is..*

During the interview

- If you don't know say so.
- Speak for the record only.
- Do not venture opinions.
- Be concise. Use clear language.

During the interview

- Listen to the question
 - If you aren't sure what is being asked get clarification
- Answer the question
- Bridge to your key messages



... Types of questions

Situation:

Trustee elect Mary Cannabis, has been charged with operating a grow-op in one of her 5 rental properties. Before the RCMP issued a media release about the charges – naming Mary and indicating she was a school trustee, Mary called the superintendent of schools to say she wasn't guilty and that her tenants were to blame and that she had nothing to do with the grow-op. The media have received the RCMP release and our now calling to talk to you as the spokesperson.



If you can't comment

▶ Don't use the words: *No comment*

▶ Do explain that....

The matter is before the courts

The matter is subject to an investigation

1. "I can't speak to that because:

- ◆ of privacy considerations
- ◆ because it's before the courts
- ◆ because it's subject to an investigation

2. . What I can tell you is....

- ◆ Key message
- ◆ Key message



Types of questions

When you simply can't comment:

- ▶ I can't give you that information because:
 - it is before the courts
 - it is personnel information

- ▶ However, I can tell you that (*this is a bridge*)
 - speak to policy
 - speak to process

When you can't comment..

Q: Are you going to kick Mary Cannabis off the board?

A : I can't speak to this because this matter is before the courts.

But I do want to tell you:

We will be guided in our actions and decisions by

- ▶ Respect for legal processes
- ▶ Provisions in the School Act.

I do want to emphasize that as a board we have the highest of expectations of our trustees as set out in our Code of Conduct.

When asked to speculate..

When you are asked to speculate. Don't.

- ▶ I don't want to speculate about the outcome of this matter...
- ▶ However, I can tell you that (*this is a bridge*)
 - ◆ Speak to policy
 - ◆ Speak to process

When asked to speculate..

Q: If Mary Cannabis is found guilty will she get kicked off the board?

A: I can't speak to the specifics of this case as it is before the courts.

I can tell you that we have the highest of expectations of our elected officials as articulated in our code of ethics.

And that we will be guided in our decision making by the law of the land – Section 81.2 of the School Act.

Q: Do you think Mary sold drugs to children?

A: As I said earlier, this matter is before the courts and an RCMP investigation. Questions in that regard should be directed to Constable Smith.

I can tell you we have the highest of expectations of our elected officials as set out in our code of ethics. And we will be guided in our decision-making by respect for the legal process – and the School Act.



It's an “offensive” question

When you face offensive questions. Restate the question

- ▶ So what you are asking is....

It's an “offensive” question

- Q. But Mary is tarring your reputation..... if you had any backbone you would kick her off today to send a message that you don't support drug dealing?
- A. Our school board expects the highest standards of behavior from our elected officials as set out in our code of ethics. We will be guided in our decision-making by the School Act.
- B. We also respect the processes of the law and we will not comment on matters before the courts or personnel matters.

It's an “emotional” question

When they use emotional question laden with overstatement and strong language. Rephrase. Convey key message. Recap and confirm.

It's an “emotional” question

Q. This is an outrage... you have a drug dealer making decisions about kids. You are heartless – you don't care about kids' safety.

Student safety is always first and foremost in our hearts and minds.

As articulated in our code of ethics we have the highest of expectations of elected officials. And we respect the processes of the law. W

e will await the outcome and make decisions based on that.

Today's scenario

School board criticized for attending conference on poverty in Las Vegas in December. *(See scenario)*



Preparing your spokesperson

- As a table you will prepare your spokesperson to be interviewed
 - ▶ Read over the scenario
 - ▶ Complete steps to prepare your scenario.
 - ▶ Run your spokesperson through an interview
 - ▶ Send your spokesperson up
 - ▶ Provide feedback



Write down

1. What is goal of doing this interview?
2. What tone do we want to convey?
3. What are our 2/3 key messages?
4. What is our positioning statement?
5. What questions do we anticipate?
6. Practice answers with BRIDGE to key messages.



How to build relationships?

You can build relationships by:

- Returning their calls promptly
- Providing answers as quickly as possible
- Providing accurate information
- Introduce yourself at board meetings
- Say hi if you see them at events
- Being truthful
- Being friendly



How to hurt your credibility?

- Don't tell the truth
- Obscure the facts
- Play favorites
- Let your ego show
- Get angry at honest question
- Constant complaints about negative news

Your rights and obligations

- You have the *right* to remain silent.
- You have an *obligation* to tell the truth.
- You have the *right* to know your position and be fully briefed.
- You have the *obligation* to know the other side.
- You have the *right* to express your district's message.
- You have the *obligation* to express it so people understand it.

adapted from Jonathan Shenker, “Ketchum Contact”, June 1987

Your rights and obligations

- You have the *right* to know the audience to whom your message will be given.
- You have the *obligation* to speak to them.
- You have the *right* not to be manipulated.
- You have the *obligation* to prepare an agenda
- You have the *right* to say a reporter is wrong.
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