

# FLEISHMAN-HILLARD

# MEDIA TRAINING MANUAL

*"It is always a risk to speak to the press:  
they are likely to report what you say."*

– **Hubert H. Humphrey**

*"If you lose money for the firm, I will be very  
understanding. If you lose reputation for the  
firm, I will be ruthless."*

– **Warren Buffett**  
to Salomon Brothers employees

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 1
The Media Environment	Page 2
Your Game Plan: Confidence, Control and Credibility	Page 3
Message Points: Sample Scenario	Page 6
Key Interview Techniques: Blocking & Bridging, Headlining	Page 8
Blocking & Bridging: Sample Scenario	Page 10
"Lures and Traps"	Page 12
Other Interview Dos and Don'ts	Page 14
Print Interview Tips	Page 15
Television Tips	Page 16
Radio Tips	Page 19
Telephone Tips	Page 20
"Stage Fright" Troubleshooting Tips	Page 21
The Ten Basic Values	Page 22
Summary	Page 23
Worksheet	Page 24

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## INTRODUCTION

A media interview, when conducted properly, can be an excellent opportunity to tell a positive story about your product, issue or event. At the same time, for most people, interviews are stressful situations. Although each interview will vary depending upon factors such as format, audience and location, basic techniques for more effective media interviews can be learned. With preparation and practice, whether you are a highly experienced spokesperson or a novice, you can become a more effective communicator.

This manual will provide you with an overview of media interview principles and techniques, from pre-interview preparation to actual implementation, to help you meet your communication objectives.

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## THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

The news media are a pervasive and powerful influence in our society. The American public can satisfy its seemingly insatiable hunger for information with a huge selection of print and broadcast news outlets, including:

- More than a dozen national television networks
- 1,300 television stations
- 8,000 cable systems
- 10,294 radio stations
- 1,700 daily newspapers
- 8,000 weekly newspapers
- 12,000 magazines
- Three major wire services, plus assorted syndicated services
- Numerous computerized "online" news services

The growth of the news industry has been accompanied by two other trends of particular relevance to spokespeople. First, recent years have seen the rise of "sound-bite journalism," the packaging of information in shorter and shorter bits. A decade ago the typical length of an interview sound-bite by a spokesperson in a television news story was 15 seconds or more; today, the average is 9-10 seconds. The popularity of publications such as *USA Today* shows that sound-bite journalism is not confined to broadcast media alone.

Even in lengthier formats, however, it is important to recognize the extent to which information in the news media becomes condensed. In most cases, your own remarks will be edited by reporters, and may be further reduced by an editor or producer; then, the listener or reader may take in all or part of the story and, in any case, will forget most of it within a short time. (Research has shown, for example, that most people forget two-thirds of everything they hear within 24 hours, and 98 percent within 30 days.)

Second, competition for viewers and readers has led to a blurring of the line between "news" and "entertainment." On one hand, this has prompted more so-called "soft news" or feature pieces. On the other hand, it has placed more emphasis on controversy, sensationalism and investigative journalism.

In fact, the media most often define news as *controversy* or *change*. In most cases, you will want to avoid or defuse areas of controversy. But unless you can describe some type of change — such as a new product or service, a new legislative initiative, a shift in policy or in direction — or take a controversial position, you may find that an interview does not yield a news story ... at least, not a story that includes your message.

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## **YOUR GAME PLAN: CONFIDENCE, CONTROL AND CREDIBILITY**

An effective interview strategy hinges on your ability to achieve *confidence, control* and *credibility*. Confidence enables you to go into an interview situation as an equal and enthusiastic participant, control enables you to communicate your own message clearly, and credibility enables your audience to believe that message.

The concept of "control" includes controlling your demeanor, your presentation, your language and your message. Most important, it means taking an active role in steering the interview – creating and seizing opportunities to assert your own agenda, rather than being pulled along passively by the reporter.

This strategy begins with preparation.

### Basic Groundwork

Your preparation begins with answers to some basic questions, for example:

- What type of publication/program is it?
  - Who is its primary audience?
  - To what extent has the reporter dealt with this issue? Does s/he have an apparent bias?
  - Who else is the reporter interviewing?
  - Where does my point of view fit into the story?
  - What is the interview format?
    - live/taped
    - edited/unedited
    - in-studio "Live at 5" or talk show format
    - on-location "stand-up"
    - telephone interview
    - "remote" interview (interviewer and subject at different locations)
    - listener call-in broadcast program
    - solo interview vs. multi-guest discussion
    - unexpected "ambush"
    - press conference
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- What type of story is the reporter doing?
  - "hard news"
  - feature story
  - personality piece
  - investigative report
  - in-depth background piece
  - point/counterpoint

(You may also find yourself the subject of an informal or spontaneous interview, for example, impromptu questions by a reporter who approaches you at a meeting or after a speech.)

Also, while you can't usually ask for the questions ahead of time, it is appropriate to ask the reporter in advance of the interview who else he/she is speaking with for the story.

Answers to these questions will help you decide:

- What opportunities this interview offers you to make positive points about yourself, your organization, your product or issue.\*
- What factual information and other preparation you will need to get ready.

(\*Note: If you conclude there are no potential benefits, then respectfully decline the interview. In most instances, however, interviews will offer some opportunity to tell your story to large audiences. Also, a good working relationship with media will increase an organization's chances of fair treatment during times of attack or controversy.)

### Defining Your Agenda

You cannot effectively assert your agenda or message unless you can express it in a concise and provable manner. Because broadcast interviews, and often print interviews as well, are very brief, you cannot count on being able to express every point you would like to make. Rather, you need to identify the few points — called "message points" — that are most important, and reiterate these points during the interview.

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Message points are a few concise thoughts, ideas, arguments and impressions that you most want to leave with your audience. The best way to begin formulating your message points is to determine the *specific goal(s) of the interview*. Who is your specific target audience, and ultimately, what do you want them to do?

- Support/oppose legislation?
- Buy your product?
- Buy your stock?
- Patronize your company?
- Take some other action?

In order to achieve your goal, remember that your message points must be *provable assertions* that you can back up with additional facts.

In a sense, you must think like a lawyer. No prosecutor would simply stand up, point at the defendant and say, "He's guilty. I rest my case." The prosecutor would bring in various types of proof – motive, witnesses, fingerprints, etc. – to back up the assertion.

### Anticipating Questions and Controversy

Your strategy isn't complete without anticipating the reporter's questions and controversies that could arise in the interview. Jot down anticipated questions, and be certain you know how to address each one. Be sure to include basic, simple and easy questions as well as the most hostile or difficult ones that could be asked – it's much better to be over-prepared than to be caught off-guard. Remember, with a good reporter, "if you dread it, you'll get it."

### Practice ... Practice ... Practice

To hone your message points and prepare for actual interview Q&A, even the most polished spokespeople find there is simply no substitute for practicing out loud. Better still, do "role playing" with a friend, co-worker or your F-H account team. Are your message points coming across? Are your answers concise enough? Are they believable, or do they need more support? Remember...professional athletes and actors rigorously train and rehearse before facing the public. Don't treat your own challenge lightly.

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## MESSAGE POINTS: SAMPLE SCENARIO

Mr. Johnson is a spokesperson for Acme Chemical Company asked to defend the company against charges of groundwater pollution. During an interview with a local television station he is confronted with the allegations.

### How to Lose

*Mr. Johnson:* That's absolutely false. If there is any pollution, Acme is not connected with it in any way. These charges are basically a witch-hunt, and I'm not going to justify them with a reply. We're a safe company, period. You can ask any of our employees or anyone else in the industry.

### WHAT MADE THE EVENING NEWS:

*Mr. Johnson:* If there is any pollution, Acme is not connected with it in any way. These charges are basically a witch-hunt, and I'm not going to justify them with a reply.

### HEADLINE IN THE MORNING PAPER:

"Acme Chief Denies Pollution,  
Calls Charges 'Witch-Hunt'"

### WHY HE LOST:

Mr. Johnson's goal and message points are cloudy. He asserts that Acme is not responsible for any groundwater pollution, and eventually calls Acme "a safe company," but he offers no facts to back up his assertion. As a result, few viewers will believe him; after all, he's paid by the company. In addition, his harsh – and quotable – allegation of a "witch-hunt" made him sound flustered, and is bound to steal focus from his other remarks.

### How to Win

*Mr. Johnson:* There's no truth to those charges at all. Environmental safety is Acme's top priority, and our record proves it. During our 20 years in this business, we've never had a spill. That's partly because every worker in our plant receives 100 hours of training each year in environmental safety. In fact, we spend three times the industry average on safety systems. I'm proud to say we received the County Conservation Society's award to the safest company last year, and we'll work to win it every year.

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WHAT MADE THE EVENING NEWS:

*Mr. Johnson:* There's no truth to those charges at all. Environmental safety is Acme's top priority, and our record proves it. During our 20 years in this business, we've never had a spill.

HEADLINE IN THE MORNING PAPER:

"Johnson: Acme Enviro Record  
Refutes Pollution Charges"

WHY HE WON:

- His message point – "Acme is environmentally safe" – is clear
  - It is stated up-front
  - He backs it up with facts
  - He stayed cool, didn't become flustered
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## KEY INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES: BLOCKING & BRIDGING, HEADLINING

### Blocking & Bridging

The most common mistake committed in interviews is to become so fixated by the questions that you lose sight of your own agenda points and become a passive respondent. Don't feel obliged to answer every question specifically. The most effective spokespeople listen to the bigger issue behind each question, and address that issue as they choose. This is done through the technique called "blocking and bridging."

"Blocking" means deftly avoiding an unwelcome or unproductive question. It may be a hostile or controversial question, an undesirable hypothetical situation or choice, a request for information that you can't disclose, or simply something that doesn't pertain to your agenda during a brief interview. "Bridging" means taking the discussion from unfriendly to friendly territory by making a smooth transition from an undesirable question or topic to an area that fits your agenda.

Blocking and bridging are accomplished by using smooth connecting phrases, such as:

"It's our policy not to discuss \_\_\_\_\_ specifically, but I can tell you ..."

"I think what you're really asking is ..."

"That speaks to a bigger point ..."

Only "block" a question completely where there is good reason to do so. Often, you can address the question briefly and then smoothly bridge to your chosen point. If you must block a question, don't simply say "no comment," or "I can't answer that." Instead, explain *why* you can't answer it (e.g., proprietary information, lawsuit pending, etc.) and bridge to a topic or message point that is important to you.

For example, a celebrity gives a stand-up interview to an entertainment reporter at a fundraising event for the American Cancer Society, the celebrity's favorite "cause." The celebrity knows the interview will be brief, and the quote that makes the news show will be *very* brief:

*Reporter:* Gee, it's surprising to see you here tonight. You've got a new hit television show, you just released a film, and you have a new baby besides! You must find it hard to balance all of your activities with your family life.

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*Celebrity:* You're right, sometimes it isn't easy. But you know, having my beautiful new baby has reminded me of how precious and fragile life is. That's why I feel so strongly that we need to help the Cancer Society help those many people who aren't so fortunate, and to find cures so we can all live full and happy lives.

Blocking and bridging is particularly critical in situations involving controversy or crisis. The guideline here is: "Asked about a problem? Talk about a solution." In other words, when faced with questions about a problem, whether or not you address the question directly, you must bridge swiftly to a discussion of the measures in place to deal actively with the problem.

Finally, blocking and bridging helps you *repeat* your message points during the interview. You must repeat your message points if you wish them to be retained by the audience; repetition also maximizes the probability that one or more message points will appear in an edited story.

*If you view every question as an opportunity to accomplish your agenda, you will be successful in conveying your positive messages.*

One way to remember this is via the formula:

$$A = Q + 1$$

... or, the answer equals the question *plus* one of your key message points.

### Headlining

Unlike a typical conversation that builds to a conclusion based on supporting statements, media interviews require that you state your conclusions first, then follow up with details as time allows. Such "headlining" is critical for broadcast media to ensure that your most important points are made during typically brief broadcast interviews. However, even with print media, the technique will help you be quotable and better express your message points.

Headlining is similar to the "inverted pyramid" model that has been used in journalism for many years. In a typical newspaper story, for example, the headline will contain the most important point or conclusion. The lead paragraph will expand on those important points somewhat, followed by paragraphs containing supporting facts and statements in descending order of importance.

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## BLOCKING AND BRIDGING: SAMPLE SCENARIO

In a speech to a national organization, noted consumer advocate Ralph Jones says the public is increasingly being victimized by the bad advice or ignorance of financial planners. CBS-TV news wants a response. They track down Burt Smith, president of the Association of Financial Planners, for comment.

The reporter asks the following question:

"Mr. Jones said abuses among financial planners have increased as much as 50 percent over the last several years. Is that an accurate figure, and if not, how much would you say it is?"

### How to Lose

*Mr. Smith:* No, no, that's much too high. Certainly there have been abuses and I'm sure the number is higher than we'd all like. But it's hard to quantify. We really haven't had a way of measuring this sort of thing nationwide. Now, we are in the process of setting up a system of being able to track this kind of data and we also have set up a monitoring system, a kind of licensing system, actually – it has been in place for several months and it's working very well – and it will give consumers information on planners who have met certain standards of performance and expertise and who they can feel fully confident in going to for advice.

### WHAT MADE THE EVENING NEWS:

*Mr. Smith:* Certainly there have been abuses and I'm sure the number is higher than we'd all like. But it's hard to quantify. We really haven't had a way of measuring this kind of thing nationwide.

### HEADLINE IN THE MORNING PAPER:

"Financial Planning Chief:  
Abuse High, Reforms Needed"

### WHY HE LOST:

- He was fixated by the question
  - He didn't effectively block and bridge
  - He didn't "headline" – key message is at the end, not the front
  - His message is not stated concisely or crisply
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How to Win

*Mr. Smith:* We have no statistical evidence to support that view at all. In fact, the trend is toward a higher level of performance throughout the industry. For some time, the industry has applied a rigid standard of licensing among financial planners nationwide. And it has been quite successful. Today, consumers can identify qualified planners in their community and use their services with complete confidence. In addition, we are now establishing a system that will allow us to monitor and quickly act upon consumer complaints throughout the country.

## WHAT MADE THE EVENING NEWS:

*Mr. Smith:* For some time, the industry has applied a rigid standard of licensing among financial planners nationwide. And it has been quite successful. Today, consumers can identify qualified planners in their community and use their services with complete confidence.

## HEADLINE IN THE MORNING PAPER:

"Financial Planning Chief:  
Licensing System Protects Consumers"

## WHY HE WON:

- He blocked and bridged
  - His message points were stated clearly and succinctly
  - He stuck to his agenda and didn't get "question fixated"
  - He highlighted a new solution to consumer complaints, rather than dwelling on the problem
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## "LURES AND TRAPS"

Spokespeople often face what might be called "trick questions" – questions that are phrased, often deliberately, in a way that makes them difficult to answer with a positive message. Following are guidelines for handling these types of questions.

Each type of question is followed by a sample Q&A. Assume that the scenario is the following: You are a spokesperson for Acme Pharmaceutical Company, which is introducing a new drug called Circulex.

**Irrelevancy** – A question that has no bearing on your agenda ... perhaps not even on your area of expertise or the stated focus of the interview. Solution: block and bridge to a relevant point.

*Reporter:* Concerns over the quality of generic drugs has also gotten a lot of attention lately. Circulex isn't a generic, but has the issue had any carry-over effect on your business?

*Acme:* I think there is an increased focus on issues of quality and safety throughout the pharmaceutical industry, and Acme has always taken a leadership role in those areas. With the manufacture of Circulex, like all of our products, we maintain a seven-step quality control program to be sure physicians and consumers are getting the highest possible quality ...

**Speculation** – The reporter asks you to predict the future or address a hypothetical situation. Solution: don't play this game unless the answer is a positive message for you. Block and bridge.

*Reporter:* Two other companies have tried to market similar drugs and met with strong resistance from physicians. What if you find in six months that you're having the same problem?

*Acme:* We don't have any reason to believe that will happen. Our focus group testing and other research has shown that 9 out of 10 doctors see a strong need for this drug ...

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**A or B Dilemma** – Reporter asks you to choose between two or more options or scenarios. Solution: same as above. Don't choose unless it benefits you. Block and bridge.

*Reporter:* Was this drug developed primarily because of lack of effective circulatory treatments, or because Acme considered it a major money-maker?

*Acme:* Well, we do expect Circulex to be profitable for us, but I think that speaks to the size of the demand for this type of drug in the medical community. Clearly, there is a void that Circulex will fill ...

**Absent Party Ploy** – The reporter attempts to create controversy by getting you to lock horns with an adversary. Solution: most often this is unproductive, can distract from your major points and make you seem petty. Even if it is appropriate for you to question the goals or tactics of an adversary, do not question his/her character – you will appear mean-spirited.

*Reporter:* The head of Universal Drug Company, Vern Peterson, has criticized your marketing effort for Circulex as being misleading and overly-commercial. Does that indicate Universal is running scared?

*Acme:* I can't speak for Mr. Peterson, you'll have to ask him that question. But I can say we're very pleased with the initial reaction to our efforts by the medical community ...

**Loaded Preface** – The question begins with a premise that is negative or incorrect. Solution: correct the inaccuracy, or else you will be tacitly agreeing with it. However, state your correction in a positive way, without repeating the falsehood or slur.

*Reporter:* Given Acme's dismal financial performance in the past two years, are you looking to Circulex to turn things around?

*Acme:* Actually, Acme's financial performance has been among the best in our industry during the last fiscal year. Of course, we'd like the numbers to be better, and we're expecting a significant improvement in the fourth quarter with the Circulex introduction ...

**Machine Gun Questioning** – This is an issue of pacing, rather than actual wording. The reporter asks a series of rapid-fire questions, perhaps not waiting for you to finish your responses. Solution: set your own pace, taking sufficient time to think. As an equal participant in the interview, you can answer questions as slowly as you wish, regardless of the reporter's pace.

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## OTHER INTERVIEW DOs AND DON'Ts

- DO "flag" key points with phrases like, "The most important thing is ..." or "I think the bottom line is ..."
- DO speak in easily-understandable terms. Avoid jargon and bureaucratese if simpler words would do.
- DO use facts and figures as appropriate to demonstrate your credibility.
- DO use illustrations and anecdotes to "humanize" and explain your topic ("enough widgets to fill Yankee Stadium" is better than "575,000 widgets").
- DO be sensitive to reporters' deadlines.
- DO be engaging, likable, enthusiastic — but not a cheerleader.
- DO be yourself. Don't try to reinvent yourself for an interview — you won't be credible. Be the best you can be.

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- DON'T over answer. When you're satisfied with your reply, stop.
  - DON'T be afraid to pause. Taking a few seconds to think will seem much longer to you than to the reporter or audience, and will make you appear thoughtful and deliberate.
  - DON'T allow yourself to be provoked. Keep cool.
  - DON'T "fake" an answer if you don't know it. If appropriate, assure the reporter you will provide the needed facts in a timely manner, or refer him/her to another source.
  - DON'T assume the reporter knows more about your area than you do. Usually, the reverse is true.
  - DON'T assume the microphone, camera or tape recorder is off immediately before or after an interview. You are still "fair game." It's safest to consider your entire interaction "on the record."
  - DON'T lie to a reporter. Ever.
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## **PRINT INTERVIEW TIPS**

The newspaper or magazine interview may take place in person or via telephone. The length of the interview and deadline for the story will vary depending upon the style of the publication and the reporter. While an interview for a news story in a daily newspaper may take 10 minutes, an interview for a feature story or profile in a monthly magazine may take two hours. And, while a daily newspaper reporter must often file a story within hours for it to appear in the next day's edition, a weekly or monthly magazine writer has the flexibility of waiting days to complete a story.

Keep the following tips in mind when taking part in print interviews:

- As with all news media, don't be surprised if the reporter has to cancel the interview at the last minute, especially if it is not related to "breaking news." Reporters are at the mercy of each day's news developments, and another event may take priority. Normally, you can reschedule the interview for a later time or date.
  - It is not unusual for a reporter to tape-record an interview. This can help the reporter pay better attention to you rather than furiously taking notes. But if you are not being taped, remember to speak slowly.
  - If you inadvertently offer misleading or incorrect information, correct yourself as soon as you recognize the error.
  - If you tell the reporter you will get back to him/her with additional information, ask the reporter's deadline and follow up in a timely manner.
  - Feel free to ask whether the reporter plans to write a story using the interview, and if so, when it is likely to run. (The reporter will rarely be able to tell you the exact running date, since editorial decisions are made on a day-to-day basis.)
  - Don't ask the reporter to see the story before it runs. You do not have the right to review it or change your quotes.
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## TELEVISION TIPS

Because television is a visual medium, your physical demeanor and the style of your presentation are just as important — if not more so — than what you say. However, the format and restrictions of television interviews also demand a solid command of "headlining," "blocking and bridging" and the other communications techniques. Here are some specific tips to help you with television interviews:

### Dress:

- Dress conservatively. For men, a dark suit and blue shirt is best. Avoid loud ties or ties with small patterns. For women, wear a dark-colored outfit in solid colors.
- Don't wear white. It casts unflattering light on the face and causes problems for TV cameras.
- Men should unbutton suit jacket when sitting, button it when standing. Sitting on the back of the suit jacket will help create a wrinkled-free line.
- Most studios are cold until the lights are turned on and then become quite warm. Mid-weight clothing is the most comfortable choice.
- Don't wear large, shiny or noisy jewelry.
- If you have contact lenses, wear them instead of your glasses. If you wear glasses, non-reflective lenses are preferable. Don't wear light-sensitive glasses.
- If offered makeup, accept it. The host or reporter will have it on; you should, too. Men should consider shaving close to air time, as even the hint of a beard shows up on television. Women should apply a matte finish to avoid a shiny face, with blush and eye makeup only slightly heavier than normally worn.

### Before the Interview:

- Arrive early at the station to orient yourself to the studio. If the interview takes place on location, arrive early to allow for lighting and sound checks.
  - Typically, a "pre-interview" precedes the actual on-camera interview. It may last 30 seconds or five minutes. This is a chance for you to "check out" the personality and demeanor of the interviewer, and to mention the topic(s) you would like to discuss during the interview. Often the pre-interview can help set the tone for the actual interview.
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- A technician may clip a small "lavaliere" microphone to your jacket, tie or shirt, and possibly run the cord under your jacket or other clothing. Speak naturally, and avoid brushing your hand or clothing against the microphone during the interview. Women should remove necklaces likely to swing against the microphone. Be sure the microphone is removed before walking away after the interview.
- If a technician asks you to test the sound level by speaking, speak at your normal level and say something innocuous (e.g., talk about the weather, recite a poem). Don't try to be funny, or say anything off-color or controversial.

### **Body Language:**

- If seated, sit erect but not ramrod-straight, and slightly forward or toward the interviewer.
  - If standing, stand with arms at sides or one hand in pocket. Planting one foot slightly in front of the other will help you avoid swaying.
  - Gesture naturally, but not expansively. Keep gestures small and in front of you, and avoid sudden body movement.
  - Make your expression match your words. Smile if it is appropriate. Keep a mildly pleasant expression at all times; an expression that looks neutral off-camera looks unhappy or angry on-camera, so a pleasant face may feel unnaturally "smiley" at first. Practice in a mirror.
  - Lean forward slightly and modulate your voice to bring attention to key points.
  - Avoid obvious signs of discomfort or nervousness, e.g., foot tapping, clenched fists, shifting back and forth.
  - Don't nod your head to indicate that you understand or are ready to answer the question. Inadvertently, this may convey agreement with the questioner's premise when you don't mean to do so. Remain neutral and become animated only when you begin to speak.
  - Test yourself on the above points by reviewing your training tape with the sound off. Ask yourself: Do I look interested? Do I appear animated and excited? Would I "tune into" this person if I were flipping channels?
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**During the Interview:**

- Remember, make your statements punchy and concise. Put your most important message up-front.
  - Whether an in-studio talk show format or a stand-up interview, talk to the interviewer or other guests, not the camera. Breaking eye contact by staring off into space or looking at the ground will make you appear "shifty." Stay attentive even when others are speaking.
  - If it is a "remote" interview – in which the reporter is at another location and asks you questions through an ear piece – look directly at the camera at all times.
  - Don't be distracted by the activity around you in the studio or by the camera crew. Keep focused on the interviewer.
  - Don't overlap the reporter's questions. Wait until the question is finished to begin your answer.
  - Hold your "interview attitude" until the interview is completely over and the camera is off.
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## **RADIO TIPS**

All of the "non-visual" television tips on the previous pages apply to radio interviews as well. Here are a few additional guidelines:

- In radio, your voice establishes your image. Don't speak in a monotone, modulate your voice and try to make it as expressive as possible.
  - Speak at a normal level of loudness. Stress key points by raising your intensity level and pitch, not your voice.
  - Use words to create an image or paint a picture of your story for the audience. Examples, anecdotes and illustrations are even more important in radio than in other media. If you're part of a news story, try to localize your examples.
  - Whenever possible, personalize your delivery. If you're part of a talk program, ask what the host/hostess prefers to be called, and try to put the interview on a first-name basis.
  - Feel free to have notes in front of you to remind you of message points, key facts and figures, etc.
  - If responding to listener call-ins, don't let a hostile caller anger or fluster you. The most effective way to overcome hostile questions is to make your points firmly and politely and back up assertions with facts. Take the "high road" by responding to the issue behind the question, not the specific charge.
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## **TELEPHONE TIPS**

Telephone interviews can be particularly challenging because they most often occur in the middle of a hectic workday and office environment, making it difficult to focus on the interview. This can be very hazardous. The following tips will help you handle them more effectively:

- Buy preparation time if possible. Tell him/her you would be glad to talk, but are tied up at the moment. Find out the reporter's deadline, and set an acceptable time to get back to him/her. Stick to it. (Even a delay of 10 minutes is sufficient to help you prepare.)
  - Establish an "interview atmosphere" by isolating yourself with the telephone as much as possible. Close the door and turn over extraneous papers on your desk.
  - Review your message points and other relevant notes. Keep them in front of you during the interview, along with scratch paper to take additional notes.
  - Since you can't see the face of the person at the other end of the phone, occasionally ask the reporter for feedback on your comments to ensure his/her understanding.
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## **"STAGE FRIGHT" TROUBLE-SHOOTING TIPS**

It is absolutely normal to be nervous before an interview, particularly on television or radio. The "adrenaline rush" or nervous energy, if not excessive, actually helps you by keeping you alert and on your toes. Being fully prepared for an interview will go a long way toward helping to instill confidence and reduce nerves. However, here are a few helpful hints for controlling undue nervousness:

- Arrive at the studio or location early, to get used to the surroundings.
  - "Psych yourself up" by thinking positively about your preparation for the interview and a successful outcome.
  - Even if it is likely to be a confrontational interview, don't allow yourself to develop a "victim" mentality. If you are in control, it is your interview as much as the reporter's.
  - Focus on the interview as a conversation with the reporter or host, not the larger audience.
  - Take several deep breaths and let them out slowly.
  - If possible, take a few minutes in private before the interview to do a few relaxation exercises, such as shaking your hands and arms vigorously, rolling your neck, stretching, and hanging over with your hands touching the ground and slowly rolling upward to a standing position.
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## THE TEN BASIC VALUES

In your effort to project a credible image and viewpoint, it is important to remember that people tend to believe and support individuals and institutions who share their concerns and values. Research by political organizations has revealed 10 basic values – the things that Americans care about most. It is helpful to incorporate one or more of these when crafting your message points, and every time you speak to the media or in other public forums:

1. Health
  2. Financial security
  3. Closer relationship with God
  4. Better relationship with family
  5. Planning for retirement
  6. Enjoying leisure
  7. Better, more satisfying job
  8. College education for children
  9. Buying a new home/owning a home
  10. Traveling
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## **SUMMARY**

Meeting the media can be a beneficial, and even enjoyable experience. Just remember to:

- View every interview as an opportunity to establish the message points about your organization, product or issue.
- Identify goals and key message points and repeat the message points during your interview.
- Organize your points in a concise, interesting and provable manner. Remember, time is limited.
- "Headline" your points by starting with your assertion and backing it up with facts.
- Don't be so fixated by the questions asked of you that you forget to make your own points.
- Be engaging, likable.

... and above all ...

**PRACTICE!**

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## **WORKSHEET**

INTERVIEW WITH:

AUDIENCE:

MESSAGE POINTS:

SUPPORTING FACTS:

GOAL(S):

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