

# When Media Call

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## Being a Good Source And Getting Your Message Across

Presented by:  
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*Extending knowledge. Changing lives.*



## Objectives for this session

You will learn:


- Why we need to work with mass media.
- What is news and what isn't news.
- How to understand reporters.
- How to prepare for an interview.
- How to develop your message.
- How to manage an interview successfully.



## Why bother?

“For the first time in our history, by the year 2000, 50 percent of all American jobs will require at least one year of college. In this environment, news isn't entertaining. It's a necessity. We need it. And we need it to be of high quality, comprehensive, and factually accurate.”

Michael Crichton, 1993



## Why is this important?

**The 24-hour news cycle:**  
every news outlet has a lot of time to fill.

**The web and social media:**  
lasting, worldwide reach for even the most local of stories.



## Why us?

- Mass media provide excellent, inexpensive ways to reach many people.
- The public wants, needs, and deserves to know about our work.
- Media coverage keeps our work in the public eye, building visibility and credibility.
- Mass media help shape public perceptions.
- Sustained media relationships pay off over time.



## Why build relationships with reporters?

- It's an exchange of value. You want a mention in their publication or broadcast; they want news from someone they trust.
- Good relationships = better communications with your ultimate audience.



## Media as messenger

- Know that the reporter isn't your ultimate audience.
- Know who your audience is.
- Know what's important, what connects with them.



## About reporters

- They're professionals—neither friend nor foe.
- A good source is hard to find.
- They focus on the audience's interest.
- Good or bad, they report the news.



## More about reporters

- Asking tough questions is their job.
- More often generalists than specialists.
- Live by tight deadlines.



## What do they want?

- A good story—as many of the elements as they can capture.
- Good quotes. Work on being quotable.
- The feeling that they understand the issue after 20 minutes as well as you do after two years.



“Most of the real cowboys I know,” says Mr. Miller, “have been dead for a while.”

Bill Blundell  
*The Wall Street Journal*

“I had known him since he was an egg,” Kramer said.

Kelley Benham  
*St. Petersburg Times*



## What do they want?

- Your respect, not necessarily your affection.
- Recognition.
- Timely responses when they contact you.
- You to be open and honest.
- To catch you if you lie.



### What do they want most of all?

News



### What is news? The compelling C's:

- Crisis
- Catastrophe
- Crime
- Conflict
- Change
- Corruption
- Color (human interest)



### What is news?

- *Timely, immediate*—not history.
- *Affects many people* in some way.
- *Innovative*—what we can do now that we couldn't before.
- *Interesting*—unique look at life or new angle on old story.
- What journalists decide is news.



### How can you help?

- Provide a list of contacts in your office with their areas of expertise.
- Consider providing agendas in advance, so that the reporter knows when the most important topics will be discussed.
- Offer fact sheets with basic background on issues or topics to be discussed.
- Provide photos or ideas for illustrating the story, especially for TV.



### How can you help?

- Offer story ideas, rather than waiting for reporters to come to you.
- Learn the best time to call: newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations differ.
- Honor exclusivity or advance-notice agreements.
- Consider all remarks as “on the record.”
- Say thank you after a story has appeared.



### When the call comes

Sooner or later ...

- The media will show up at a board meeting or a budget hearing.
- A reporter will call your office to interview you.
- You or your community will be part of some breaking news story or controversy.



## When the call comes

You need to be ready.



## Interviews are opportunities

- To reach many people.
- To convey your message.
- To share information with the public.
- Even the best are challenging.
- Most are informational, not confrontational.
- Enjoy them, but expect to work.



## When the call comes, find out . . .

- The reporter's name, who they work for.
- Who their audience is and what the story is about.
- What they want from you, your role.
  - Determine if you can help.
  - Or get them to someone who can.
- When they need it, what their deadline is.
- What they know about the subject.



## When the call comes, find out . . .

The interview format:

- Phone or in person?
- Live or recorded/taped?
- TV crew coming or you go to the studio?
- Call-in radio show?
- Local, regional, or national outlet?



## Preparation is key

- Great interviews don't just happen.
- Never wing it, if you can help it. Do your homework.
- Is the topic controversial? What will critics say?
- Gather background for reporters.
- Think visual—photos, videos, graphics.



## Buy some time

- It's okay to say you can't talk right this minute.
- Arrange a time to call back—within 15 minutes.
- Use the time to prepare: your key points, relevant background.
- Call back prepared!



### Your message—know it, hone it.

- You can't tell them everything.
- Honing messages takes discipline.
- What do you *really* want people to know?
- If you aren't prepared with your key messages, your audience won't get it.

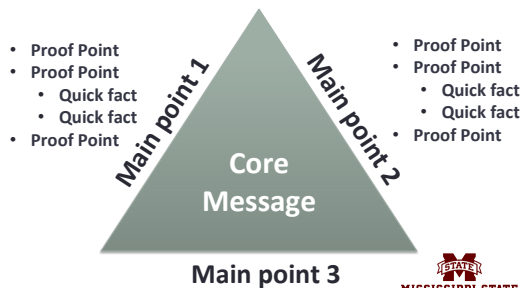


### Rule of threes

- Develop your core message, the essential point you want people to understand.
- Identify three main points explaining that message.
- Write three proof points, or supporting sentences, for each main point.
  - If they're long, keep refining, editing them down.
- Anticipate and prepare answers for the three "worst" questions you could be asked.



### Your message triangle



### Crafting your message

1. We take security very seriously.
    - We protect personally identifiable information through encryption.
    - We successfully defend against 10,000 cyber attacks per minute.
  2. I can't guarantee an unconditional fix.
    - When people are involved, you can reduce risk but not eliminate it.
      - Mistakes.
      - Malicious intent.
  3. We've taken action quickly—above and beyond federal requirements.
    - Proof points ...
- LANL is trustworthy and dedicated to best practices.
- We must balance security with mission.

Source: Speaking with Confidence: Techniques for the Effective Spokesperson. Los Alamos National Laboratory.



### Short and simple

- Use simple, everyday language.
- Ditch the jargon.
- Practice short answers.
  - Say it out loud, but *don't* memorize!
- Imagine explaining it to your mom in 30 seconds.



### Make it memorable

- How does it affect your audience?
  - Head, heart, or pocketbook?
- Use real-life anecdotes or examples.
- Develop descriptive phrases, or word pictures.
  - Example: DNA is our genetic "code."
- Think of memorable ways to express your key points, like the 4 C's of buying diamonds.



## During the interview

- Be cool, calm, professional, and pleasant.
- Actively listen to the reporter's questions while composing your answers.
- Remember that the reporter is your audience's representative: treat him or her the way you would treat a member of the audience.



## Managing the interview

- Interviews are more than just passively answering questions.
- It really is a two-way conversation.
- You can guide the discussion to focus on your main points.



## Management strategy: Focus

- Lead with your main points.
- Follow up with proof points and supporting background, if time allows.
- Answer concisely, then stop.
- "Dead air" isn't your responsibility.



## Management strategy: Bridging

If you are asked an off-topic question:

- Answer briefly.
- Transition quickly to your point.
- Examples:
  - "Yes, and our records show ..."
  - "True, however ..."
  - "No, and that's because ..."



## Bridging example

### Reporter:

But you have promised reform before, after [incident A].

### You:

- Reforms have been carried out, but their scope clearly wasn't sufficiently communicated.
- This instance is different from [incident A].
- I cannot guarantee an unconditional fix, but we have taken aggressive measures to improve cyber security.

Source: Speaking with Confidence: Techniques for the Effective Spokesperson.  
Los Alamos National Laboratory.



## Management strategy: Reframing

If you are asked a difficult or inaccurate question, recast the question and refocus the interview on the real message:

- Acknowledge what the reporter has said, but communicate your core message.
- Examples:
  - "The larger question is ..."
  - "Our first concern is always ..."
  - "It might seem that way, but the real issue is ..."
  - "It's important to point out ..."



## Reframing example

**Reporter:**

It seems that the security of other people's information is not a priority; you care only about getting your work done.

**You:**

- The lab is a workplace, and data must be accessible for work to be done.
- But we protect personally identifiable information through encryption. And we successfully defend against 10,000 cyber attacks every minute.
- We take security very seriously.

Source: Speaking with Confidence: Techniques for the Effective Spokesperson.  
Los Alamos National Laboratory.



## Management strategy: Self-Control

- Stick to facts. DON'T speculate.
- Stay with what you know, even if it disappoints the reporter.
- Don't let them put words in your mouth. Don't get drawn out by loaded questions.
- Correct inaccuracies, but NEVER repeat them.



## Self-Control example

**Reporter:**

So, your position is that the sky is red.

**You:**

That's incorrect. The sky is blue.

**NOT**

I didn't say the sky is red.

This technique ensures that you are not on tape saying something inaccurate.



## Are you getting through?

- Never assume the reporter understands.
- Ask questions to determine whether the reporter is "getting it."
- Offer to clarify or further explain.
  - Provide written background information.
  - Offer to answer follow-up questions or serve as a source for a follow-up story.
- Let the reporter know how to reach you after the interview—and *before* the story is turned in.



## When you know you'll be on camera

**Confidence.** Choose colors and clothes that fit you well, are flattering to you, and make you feel confident.

**Appropriateness.** When you're at an event, dress appropriately for the event.

**Color.** Don't wear solid red or solid white. Mid-tone greens, blues, browns, yellows, and grays look best. Avoid extremes.



## When you know you'll be on camera

**Fit.** Wear clothes that fit you comfortably.

**Style.** Wear a shirt, blouse, or jacket that buttons up the front. This will make it easier to attach the microphone and hide the transmitter.

**Fabric:** Don't wear knits or clingy fabrics or anything too sheer or see-through.



## When you know you'll be on camera

**Glasses.** Wear glasses only if you can't do without them.

**Makeup.** Whether you're a man or a woman, be open to wearing a little makeup, especially in a tv studio.

**Underneath.** Wear the appropriate undergarments. For men, an undershirt is always a good idea.



## When you're in front of the camera

**Coping.** If some distraction occurs, stop talking. Start your comment again when the distraction has ended.

**Take a stand.** Stand up, if possible.

**Hands.** Keep your hands still.

**Eyes.** Look at the interviewer or directly into the camera. Don't look at anyone or anything behind the scenes.



## When you're in front of the camera

**Sit still!** If you're seated, sit still in the chair. If the chair swivels or rocks, keep it still.

**The bee's knees.** If you're seated, keep your legs crossed at the ankles with your knees together, or keep your feet flat on the floor, also with your knees together.



## In a crisis, the absolutes

- Openness. Availability and willingness to respond.
- Truthfulness. Honesty is the *only* policy.
- Responsiveness. Recognize that all concerns are legitimate and must be addressed.
- Transparency. No secrets; behavior and attitude must be above reproach.
- Engagement. Actively seek out and contact those with concerns.

Source: Speaking with Confidence: Techniques for the Effective Spokesperson. Los Alamos National Laboratory.



## Key points to remember

- Nothing is ever "off the record."
- NEVER say "No comment."
- Instead, say:
  - "The investigation is ongoing."
  - "Personnel information is confidential."
  - "I don't have that information right now, but I will find out."



## Key points to remember

- Know your stuff.
- Provide clear, concrete, reliable information.
- Focus on your message.
- Keep promises and appointments.
- Demonstrate your commitment.
- Build a personal relationship.





## When the Media Call

### Please, never hit the reporter!



Commissioner Amos Newsome hits WTVY reporter Ken Curtis in face after meeting. [bit.ly/1LuN4IZ](https://bit.ly/1LuN4IZ)

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### Source

- *Much of this presentation has been adapted from Media Relations Made Easy, produced by the Association for Communications Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources, & Life & Human Sciences (ACE).*

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