



Effective Media Communication

*The words you speak become
the house you live in.*

—Hafez

Media training has increasingly become an essential staple for executives striving to hone and refine their corporate communication skills. As a leader, you represent your company or product every time you look into a camera, clip on a microphone or sit down in front of a reporter.

The main difference between delivering a prepared presentation and interviewing with the media is one thing: control. When you craft a presentation you choose what points will be covered and in what order. When you are talking to the media, the interviewer is often steering the conversation. Therefore, you must ensure your specific message is put forward while responding to the questions being asked.



Why is it important to communicate well when speaking with the media?

Before you speak with the media, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Why were you chosen to do this interview?
2. Who is the intended audience for this interview?
3. What three points do you want your audience to remember?
4. What is your overall intention and objective?
5. What are the consequences resulting from the success or failure of this interview?



Name a recent media incident where the speaker or person being interviewed performed poorly as a communicator.



10 mistakes people make when talking to the media:

1. **Lack of preparation.** Like everything else, the more prepared you are before the interview, the better you are likely to do. Practice with a partner by doing a mock interview.
2. **Unclear or fuzzy message.** Memorize your three key points and rehearse until you can deliver them flawlessly.
3. **Looking at the camera and not the interviewer.** While appearing on television, speak to your interviewer and don't look into the camera. Don't let your eyes wander around the studio. Stay focused on your interviewer. Don't forget to blink and don't blink too much.
4. **Appearing nervous.** Make sure you use breathing and creative visualization to stay relaxed during your interview. Speak slowly and clearly as speaking too fast is a sign of nervousness.
5. **Lack of intention.** Identify the intention you are using for this interview and decide what you want to leave in the minds of your audience. Do you want your audience to be excited, reassured, empowered, etc.?
6. **Answering with, "No comment."** Refusing to answer a question directly can make you seem evasive. Even if questioned about a topic you are not allowed to discuss, you should give a partial answer by leading with connector phrases. Examples include: "What I can tell you at this point..." or "Some aspects of this are still being worked out, but..."
7. **Using too much jargon.** Unless you know everyone reading your interview is an expert on the topic you are discussing, be careful to keep the terminology you use appropriate to a wide and general audience.
8. **Forgetting to smile.** Always smile at the beginning of your interview and at the end as well. If there are opportunities during the interview to lighten the mood with humor or a positive example, don't be afraid to do that. A smile transmits friendliness and openness and can win over an audience, especially when you are on camera.
9. **Giving long-winded answers.** Try to keep your answers tight and succinct, no longer than 30-60 seconds, with no verbal viruses. Whenever possible, say less.
10. **Being evasive or defensive with your answers.** Even if your interviewer blindsides you with a "gotcha" type question, stay calm and relaxed and answer carefully. Give specific answers.



Creating A Bridge

When confronted by a difficult question that you are unprepared for or unwilling to answer, it is helpful to utilize a technique called bridging to stay in control of your message and maintain your credibility. To effectively “bridge” between topics, you can employ the following phrase

“I can’t speak to **(topic you don’t want to discuss)**,
but what I can tell you is **(info about topic you do want to discuss).**”

Creating a bridge shifts the focus away from a topic you do not want to talk about and toward one that you are more comfortable discussing. Use a bridge when a question involves a topic or subject that is out of scope or something you are not prepared or not at liberty to discuss.

10 tips for successful media appearances:

1. **Practice and prepare.** Take the time to practice in a mock interview scenario with a team member so you are ready for the interview. Give the partner a list of difficult questions you may be asked. Videotape your practice sessions and watch and analyze your performance.
2. **Watch body language.** Everything you do with your face and body will communicate messages to your audience. When on television, facial expressions and gestures can be smaller than when you stand in front of a live audience. Smile.
3. **Hydrate.** Avoid caffeine if possible as your interview nears. Drink plenty of water. Take water with you and have it nearby during your interview.
4. **Answer carefully.** Speak at a reasonable pace to avoid misspeaking. Take a breath before answering and never start an answer with a verbal virus.
5. **Hone your message.** Remember the message you are trying to convey and the intention behind your words. Prepare your take-away points and make sure you cover them clearly.
6. **Dress for success.** Clothing will also contribute to the impact of your interview. Try to avoid clothes with lots of designs or patterns and outfits with too much white (especially on-camera).
7. **Warm up properly.** Before your interview, make sure you warm up your voice and body. Exercise the morning of your interview to get over nervous jitters.



8. **Apply your personal stamp.** Remember to highlight your personality. Smile! Relax and just be yourself during the interview.
9. **Solicit feedback afterward.** Once the interview is over, debrief with a partner or business associate who can give you feedback about what went well for you and what can be improved in future interviews.
10. **Stay Flexible.** You never know exactly what your interviewer will ask, so be alert and utilize active listening. Be ready for anything.

Tips when appearing on television:

1. If you are near a camera, assume it is on and recording everything.
2. If you wear anything distracting on TV, people will often only remember that.
3. Don't lean back in your chair; it can make you look short and fat.
4. Sit up but don't sit perfectly straight; this can make you appear less rigid and tense.
5. Lean forward 15 degrees into the camera; you'll appear more confident.
6. Keep moving your head, even when you are simply listening.
7. Move your body a little; this will make you animated.
8. Don't be afraid to gesture with your hands.
9. Avoid quick, jerky movements, as these can be distracting.
10. Utilize facial expressions and make sure you smile early and often.

*A sudden, bold, and unexpected question doth
many times surprise a man and lay him open.*

—Francis Bacon