



Tips for Working with the Media



Arizona Nutrition Network



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Introduction

When it comes to successful media relations, guidelines exist to provide key insight but there are exceptions to every rule. The following document provides some of the basics. Before speaking with a media outlet, check with your organization regarding any media relations policies or protocols that need to be followed when dealing with reporters or news outlets.

Before the Interview

Know what the interview is about.

Ask the interviewer why they want to interview you and establish how much they know and what they want to find out about the subject. Try to identify who else they might be interviewing on the subject and find out all you can about the publication.

Know your interviewer.

The better you know the interviewer, the more relaxed you'll be and the better you'll perform. Journalists work under intense pressure and they have to find a colorful angle to attract the reader, so anything you can do to help them with that will be greatly appreciated. Try to help them but remain true to your organization and its message and you will be regarded as a trusted source.

Say what you want to say, not what the interviewer tries to get you to say.

Don't go into an interview until you've prepared some notes on the subject being discussed. If the journalists asks for an immediate quote, promise to call them right back and spend a few minutes preparing your response. Call back as soon as possible - news stories constantly evolve that could result in you being forgotten.

Develop a theme and three or four positive key points about the interview topic.

You might have several points to make, but at the most your audience will only remember two or three. The less you say, the more they'll remember, so try to identify the key points and subjects that will have the most appeal. Write down your key points and practice them aloud. Don't memorize them, but get a good grasp on the material so you can elaborate on them if asked.

Preparing for a Media Interview

Remember the 3Cs principle:

Confidence – Have confidence in your own knowledge. You know your subject better than the reporter. Sit down beforehand and list all the advantages and any possible disadvantages regarding the interview topic.

Clarity – Write down your viewpoint/service. Think of examples that illustrate how your viewpoint/service relates to the average person. Use stories and common terms. Avoid industry jargon. Don't say "ambulatory" when you can say "walk-in" or "outpatient." Don't use abbreviations not commonly known and used such as "ADHS," instead say "Arizona Department of Health Services."

Control – Take charge of the interview. Preparation is key. Think of the types of questions you may be asked. Think of three or four key points you want to make during the interview. State your key points often and practice your comments and answers out loud. This will help keep your answers brief and to the point. Avoid using percentages. Say "nearly two out of every three," instead of "65.5" percent.

Other tips

Give examples – A good example can be worth a thousand words. People love stories, so identify a visual example or anecdote to back up your statements.

Use analogies – Analogies are a great way to "ring a bell" in the audience's mind. Relate abstract terms that are familiar to you, to everyday things.

Give advice – People love to be "in the know." Therefore, where possible give the audience a few hot tips on how to get the best out of something or how to avoid disaster. Be careful not to talk down to the reporter or audience.

Anticipate questions – Before the interview, list out possible questions you may be asked to minimize any surprises. If you are surprised, relax, take a breath, and answer. There are a lot of different questions that can be asked on your subject and you know the answers better than the journalist.

Body language – Actively listen to the reporter's questions. Engage the reporter with eye contact, don't slouch or frown, and use your hands to communicate and articulate your enthusiasm.

Don't Discuss – Be conversational and get your key points across.

Don't Get Defensive – Defend your point calmly and rationally.

It's your opportunity

Every interview presents a golden opportunity to communicate your position to a large number of people. In thoroughly preparing, you are enforcing the messages you need to get across to the audience.

Television

(tips for doing a sit-down interview in the studio)

Arrive early.

Ask to meet the reporter and producer to discuss the line of questioning.

Let them know your general philosophy but don't give too much away.

Be careful about what you say at all times. Microphones are everywhere, and they may be live.

Relax and ask questions.

Expect to feel a bit nervous.

Check yourself in the mirror just before going on. If makeup is offered, accept it. (yes, even if you're a male)

Ignore distractions – don't get sidetracked.

Concentrate on looking at the reporter or whoever is speaking. Don't look at the camera or a monitor while you're on the air.

Answer questions directly with "yes" or "no," "that's true," or "that's not true," or other appropriate phrases then add additional information. This will show that you are sincere and do not evade issues. It also will keep you on track and help you to avoid rambling answers.

If you must make a negative statement, end with a positive note.

Humanize yourself – talk about people, not percentages.

Smile when appropriate.

Use first names.

Be informal and conversational. Use short words and simple sentences.

Producers may ask you for talking points that will be used in the interview. Be sure to provide them.

If you are interrupted by the host or another guest:

Stop, listen, then pick up with "as I was saying..." and finish with "now, what was it you just asked?" or...

Ignore interruption, finish answer, then say "What was it you just asked?" or...

Allow interruption and respond to it (if doing so is to your advantage, such as giving you an opportunity to clarify a point you were making).

Do's:

- Sit with legs together or crossed at the ankle.
- Sit up straight and lean slightly forward in chair.
- Use moderate (but not too broad) gestures.
- Look interested, smile when appropriate.
- Hold your head level.

Don'ts:

- Fold your arms or make fists.
- Fiddle with papers, pen, pencil, clothing, jewelry or hair.
- Slouch, rock or swivel in chair.
- Be overly casual/gesture wildly.
- Frown or smirk.
- Wear white, shiny fabrics, small patterns, stripes, big or noisy jewelry.

Radio

Stick to two or three themes or positive points.

Use anecdotes and analogies. Good radio communicators paint "word pictures."

Be prepared for a small studio and many distractions. Ignore them, stay alert, keep your mind on the topic and your eye on the host.

Avoid pauses when answering questions in live radio interviews. Silence on the radio suggests confusion. It's okay if there's a pause after your answer; then it's the host's responsibility.

It's okay to refer to notes, but do not read directly from them if possible. Be careful not to rattle the pages, as radio microphones are sensitive.

Remember that all the sincerity and enthusiasm that you are trying to communicate must come through your voice.

Use the host's first name occasionally. In a call-in show, use callers' first names.

Smile. It will come through in your voice, even over the radio.

Print

Face-to-face or telephone interviews offer great opportunities. A face-to-face interview at your office allows the reporter to experience your work environment. If the reporter wants to do an in-person interview, ask if they are bringing a photographer.

Do your homework before the interview. Print reporters can do a more in-depth story and will need more details.

If you are asked several questions at once, identify the question you are answering.

Don't insist on seeing the story and/or photo before it is published, but tactfully suggest that you would be glad to confirm facts and figures.

Don't get upset if your quotes don't appear. Space is limited and reporters generally talk to more than one source.

Provide brief answers and speak slowly so the reporter can absorb and understand what you are saying.

Be prepared for a longer interview than was requested.

Try to get relevant facts and statistics beforehand. It will help you and will give the reporter an additional source.

Take time to educate the reporter. He or she isn't as knowledgeable on the subject as you are.

Don't say "no comment" or go "off the record." No comment suggests you're hiding something – that is, you know the answer but won't say. To respond to either, you can give a complete answer or say "I don't know but I will find out and get right back to you."