

#### 4. The Camera Is Always "On."

Never assume the recorder is off, even if it seems to be. Anytime there is a camera nearby, consider yourself "on-stage" and act and speak accordingly.

#### 5. Look At The Reporter, Talk To The Audience.

Don't look at the camera. Speak to and look directly at the reporter. However, address your remarks with the viewer in mind.

#### 6. Dress Conservatively.

Blue or gray suits are a good choice. Women should avoid shiny jewelry or loud patterns. If you wear glasses, tinted lenses will help cut lighting glare. Use makeup sparingly and don't be offended if the TV crew wants to put makeup on you.

#### 7. Try To Relax.

You might have butterflies. Try to get them to all fly in the same direction. Remember, you're not a TV professional, but you are important and have something newsworthy to talk about.

### Radio

#### 1. It's Easier Than TV.

Remember, in radio there are no lights or cameras and, in the case of talk shows, more available time to make your points. Radio is an excellent compromise between TV and newspapers.

#### 2. Work From Note Cards.

Have facts and examples on note cards that you can quickly flip to in making your points.

#### 3. Know Your Audience.

Who's out there listening? Male, female, young, old, educated, low-income? Tailor your remarks to the interests and concerns of the audience.

#### 4. Be Conversational and Brief.

Make your points in a conversational way. You may also want to repeat or rephrase the question, especially if it comes from an "open line."

#### 5. Assume You're Always "On-The-Air."

When you enter the studio or take the phone call from the radio station, assume anything you say is being broadcast.

### Some helpful hints

- Supply the reporter with materials that help clarify complex stories.
- Don't ask to see the story before publication or broadcast. But do offer to be available if the reporter needs further information or needs something clarified.
- Never go "off the record." There are no assurances, legal or otherwise, to keep the reporter from using the information.

### Finally...

You don't have to be a media guru to know that health care is big news these days. And you can be certain that when they call us they will be interested in hospital news that affects consumers, health care trends and new developments in treatment and technology.

The job of the media is not to promote the hospital, but to report the news. Reporters look for stories that are interesting and unusual. Most try to be fair and objective.

*CM wishes to thank the PR staff of The Christ Hospital of Cincinnati for permission to excerpt materials from its publication "On the Record" for this pocket guide.*

#### About Communications for Management, Inc. Int'l

CM offers on-location media, employee relations and presentation skills training programs for clients throughout the U.S. and abroad.

#### The Author

*Frank Corrado is President of Communications for Management and author of the books "Getting the Word Out: How Managers Can Create Value with Communication." and "Communicating with Employees."*

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360 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 801  
Chicago, Illinois 60601  
(312) 641-0570; fax (312) 641-6915  
www.c4m.com



# MEDIA FOR *Health Care* MANAGERS

A MEDIA FIRST AID KIT FROM CM



## Why Talk with the Media?

There are at least three good reasons:

- [1] We get to wave our flag as a community health care leader and as experts;
- [2] The media gives us a channel to get our key messages across to the past, present and future customers; and
- [3] If we aren't available or won't comment, people think we're hiding something.

When the media calls, we can pick from strategies: "Do nothing," "React when something happens," and "Stay ahead by being proactive." Different organizations adopt different strategies depending on how they perceive the potential for problems. It's a judgment call, but history supports a proactive approach.

## How Hospital Public Relations Works

Media interviews can be challenging, fun and, yes, a bit nerve-racking, even for professional communicators. With some help from PR, you can carry out a successful interview. Here are some of the services PR provides for media, employees and medical staff:

- Obtain clearance and approval for media presence in hospital;
- Answer media inquiries about hospital, health and community news;
- Alert hospital staff when media will be present;
- Determine which editors or reporters may be interested in particular stories and present story ideas to them;
- Help physicians and employees prepare for interviews; and
- Protect patient confidentiality by obtaining written permission before allowing them to be photographed/interviewed.

## Getting Ready

The key to a successful interview is practice. Taking a few minutes to think about potential questions...and your answers...can make a difference. Start by asking yourself: "If I could make just one point about this subject, what would it be?" All of the answers you give to the reporter should support this key message. Also, consider:

- What current events have an impact on this subject? Are there any recently published studies or reports that will support or contradict my statements?
- What questions would my patients or neighbors ask?
- What facts or statistics should I have readily at hand?
- What are the most controversial or sensitive questions that a reporter can ask?

Avoid memorizing pat answers to complex questions, and try to be flexible. Go over the questions in advance with a colleague or someone from PR. Don't panic if you're asked a question you can't answer. Pause a second to collect your thoughts, and if you don't know the answers, say so and promise to find out. Get back to the reporter with an answer as quickly as possible.

## Rules for Interviews

### 1. Speak To Be Understood.

Answer questions in complete, easy to understand sentences, without using jargon. Try to speak in terms of the audience's interests. Reporters like colorful language, and it keeps your meaning intact. Identify what you say as either fact or opinion.

### 3. Be Positive.

If a reporter asks, "Why haven't you corrected this problem?", don't answer with, "We haven't corrected this problem because..." A better way to answer is to say, "We have been moving as quickly as possible to obtain the necessary permits..." Make as many positive points as you are able to.

### 3. Stay "On-The-Record."

Don't go off the record with a reporter. Avoid playing favorites; giving one reporter a "scoop" can sometimes make enemies.

## Interview Traps

When you're going through an interview, there are some interview traps to watch out for:

### 1. The "Set-up."

**Example:** "Considering the low regard people have for your industry, how do you, as a major industry spokesperson, expect people to believe you are not ripping them off?"

**Solution:** One solution is to break in politely and challenge the premise. (Don't nod your head when the question is being asked—viewers will think you agree with what is being said.) A second approach is to wait until the question is finished, then go back and knock down the preface: "Yes, it is true that some people don't think much of our business, but in fact, profits in the last two years have been flat." Or simply, "What you have said is just not true...let's look at the figures."

### 2. The "Empty Chair."

**Example:** "Mr. Nader has said that your product is a health hazard and should be recalled immediately." Or, "Congressman X says your industry is notorious for price fixing..."

**Solution:** You can simply respond, "I have not heard those remarks," or "I cannot believe the Congressman said that, but I believe the facts will show..." Don't attack an opponent who is not present.

### 3. The "What if" question.

**Example:** "What if gasoline goes up to two dollars a gallon?"

**Solution:** The best advice is to move to your main point: "I think that such a question is pure speculation, because our real problem is conservation..."

### 4. Inconsistency.

**Example:** "Your firm issued a press release indicating that you would not leave this community and move to Arkansas." Or, "You previously stated that there were absolutely no health problems associated with your new drug."

**Solution:** Clearly explain the reason for the change, whether it was due to a change in policy or circumstances. For example, "Our intentions have always been to maintain a plant in this community. However, the difficult economic conditions nationally and the flood of competing imports have forced us to consolidate our operations."

### 5. "No comment."

**Example:** "Is it true your company is considering buying our local television station?"

**Solution:** If the answer is "no comment," it can be done smoothly. For example, "Our firm has a history of attempting to expand in many areas. It is a major decision and one in which there must be a consensus within the company. At this time, there has been no decision about buying the station." Talk about policy, procedures, and processes, NOT specifics.

## Television

### 1. TV Covers the News Differently.

Newspapers tend to present a "world view" of events. They stress an **information** approach. For example, in reporting on a famine, the newspaper would tend to present facts as presented by agencies, officials, and experts. Television, on the other hand, focuses on individual "stories" to convey information. In covering a famine, TV would tend to focus on the suffering experienced by a particular family or village.

### 2. Pictures...and Picture Words.

Pictures are very important with TV. Doing your interview against some type of visual "background" is important. Also, use visual language — similes, metaphors, analogies.

### 3. Be Brief, Focused, and Enthusiastic.

Thirty seconds on a television news interview is considered a lot. The downside is that many things cannot be explained in that short time period. Try to open your interview with a brief summary of your key point. Be enthusiastic for your point of view.