

MEDIA RELATIONS

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ABOUT REPORTERS

- ➔ Media have **different rules of conduct** (trips, meals, gifts, tickets, etc.)
- ➔ All legitimate media have a **glass wall** between advertising and editorial
 - Assume they will observe the “glass wall” between advertising and editorial and don’t let them break the glass.
- ➔ Reporters are **usually generalists**
 - **May need basic education** on your subject
- ➔ **Need an angle** that works for their audience
- ➔ **In a hurry**

MEDIA RELATIONS: WHAT REPORTERS WANT TO KNOW

- ➔ **What’s new, what’s real, what’s *not* normal?**
- ➔ **What’s in it for *my* audience?** (the local angle)
- ➔ **How will it work in my medium?** (visual support, creative hook)
- ➔ **What does it mean?** (aka the second “how,” “how come” the significance, the trend, the pattern)
- ➔ **Details. Details. Details.** (Spelling, names, titles, dates)
- ➔ **Why do they always write bad news?**

In mid-July (2006) I attended an event to hear Bob Woodward, the famous *Washington Post* reporter who with Carl Bernstein whose Watergate reporting eventually took down Richard Nixon. He had a very important insight to share about the minds of reporters and their editors. He said:

thePRguy incorporated
 David Kirk, APR, Fellow PRSA
 President

127 Gateshead Way
 Phoenixville PA 19460-1048
 610.422.0048.voice
 610.792.3349.fax
 610457.00107.mobile

davidkirk@thePRguy.com

www.thePRguy.com ■ www.theCRISISguy.com
 www.theWRITERGUY.com ■ www.theIRguy.com

[Paraphrase] Writing a good news story is always the riskiest for the press because the expectation of people is that things will work, that the systems in place in government, in life are doing what they are supposed to do. Therefore, a good news story doesn't interest anyone, doesn't sell. So the story itself must be exceptionally compelling. This takes a lot more energy and time for the reporter.

MEDIA RELATIONS PRINCIPLES

- ➔ **Treat the reporter as a fellow professional, not an adversary of inferior.**
- ➔ Remember **they don't work for you.**
- ➔ **Understand the constraints** under which they operate: deadlines, visual needs.
- ➔ **Know the audience** for the medium.
 - **Communicate *with* the audience but speak *to* the reporter**
 - **Adjust language** appropriately

THE SEVEN COMMANDMENTS

- ➔ **If they ask it, you must answer it.**
- ➔ **You are always responsible for the result.**
- ➔ **Always tell the truth; never hedge, never exaggerate.**
- ➔ **Never speak off the record, for background or not for attribution.**
 - If you don't want it on the 6:00 news, don't say it.
- ➔ **Never, ever (*ever*) say "no comment."**
 - It's the sign of a rank amateur and makes you look guilty.
- ➔ **Never discuss advertising with editorial staff.**
- ➔ **Never, ever (*ever*) say "no comment."**

HOW TO AGGRAVATE A REPORTER

- ➔ **Demand that he run your news release** without editing it.
- ➔ **Call the reporter to "find out if you got my news release and when you're going to run it."** This is especially ingratiating if your news release breaks all the rules of news writing.
- ➔ **Include a quote in your news release that says you are "pleased"** about obviously good news.
- ➔ **Show-off all the wonderful articles that other publications have written.** Point out especially well written ones.
- ➔ **"Embargo" news.**
- ➔ **Offer an exclusive then** give the same thing to everyone else.
- ➔ **Let the reporter know that your story is a good feature or cover story** (just in case he or she isn't smart enough to figure it out.)
- ➔ **Say the words "no comment."**
- ➔ Follow something you said with **"that was off the record."**
- ➔ **Talk about your connection to the editor or publisher.**
- ➔ **Talk about your advertising** and how much you do with the publication.

- ➔ **After the interview, bug the reporter** frequently **about the status** of the story.
- ➔ After the story appears, call and **complain about the headline or the art.**
- ➔ If you are quoted saying something you later regret, **claim you were misquoted and demand a retraction.**
- ➔ **Thank the reporter for “the publicity.”** Be sure to mention specific benefits to your business that came as a result of his or her good work on your behalf.
- ➔ **Ask to review the story before it’s published.**

ABOUT THE REPORTER’S PRODUCT

“A reporter's work is considered the intellectual property of that news agency. It is, therefore, inviolate and in need of protection from all outside changes or influence until published. Journalists also know that human beings, given any chance to do so, will want to edit their own words, ideas and opinions. That urge is the result of second thoughts or a natural tendency to want to sound better or smarter. Generally, this results in a complete alteration of the content and course of an interview. Journalists are understandably reluctant to permit that kind of second guessing.” *The Foundation for American Communications*

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

- ➔ **Anticipate questions** from the point of view of the audience.
- ➔ **Don’t write answers.** Prepare *positions*.
- ➔ **Be intimate with the trends** of which you are a part (not just your piece)
- ➔ **Anticipate opponents’ questions or counter evidence.**
- ➔ Know where your **argument is weak** and prepare for predictable challenges.
- ➔ **Rehearse** for the specific circumstances **and do live simulations.**
- ➔ **Prepare** 10 times the information you plan to use.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- ➔ **What if they don’t accept a fundamental** premise?
- ➔ **What if it becomes** hostile?
- ➔ **What are my legal or ethical** constraints?
- ➔ **Where is my argument or evidence** weak?
- ➔ **What’s the single thing I want to have reported/heard** if nothing else is?