

APRIL 2017

Interviewing Tips

Before the Interview

Congratulations, you've just gotten a call from a reporter requesting an interview!

Before you launch in to answering this curious reporter's questions, run the request through a vetting process. Begin by asking yourself...

What is your goal with this interview?

The media is a vehicle for getting out your organizational or topical message. If an interview request doesn't give you the optimal forum to discuss what you want to discuss, consider turning it down. Instead, spend your time on something that will let you get your message out clearly and pass the reporter on to another group more suitable to the topic at hand. As well, if you don't have a clear sense of what you want to convey, how the headline should read, and what you want people to know about your issue, then the chance that you will be satisfied with the result of an interview is slim.

If the topic of the interview is indeed up your alley, then bingo, please read on!

Ahead of the interview, do some research on the reporter.

Is this their first story on your issue and, if not, what is the history of their reporting on this subject? What are they tweeting?

And, now let's begin. No, wait just one more minute...

There are several questions you need to ask to clarify the parameters and context of the interview before you agree to go ahead. The more knowledge you have about your interview, the more prepared you will be. Don't worry, you won't lose an interview because you ask these questions:

- What's the interview about?
- What's your organization's role in the piece? Are you the focus or just a supporting player? Who else are they interviewing?

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- What outlet is it for? Is it one that reaches one of your target audiences? Are you even the right spokesperson to reach their audience? Women’s magazine readers want to hear from women, fellow fishermen are best to talk to a fishing magazine, etc.
- If it is not one you are familiar with, ask about their format: Is it a weekly, a daily, a conservative or liberal talk show?
- What’s the interview format if it’s for radio or TV? Is it a one-on-one or a panel session with other guests? Is it a live or edited broadcast interview? Call-in?
- How long will the interview be?
- For print pieces, do they also need a photo?

If you are comfortable with the answers to all of these questions and you feel this interview gives you a good opportunity to get out your organization’s messages, go for it. **If you don’t feel you are the right messenger**, consider suggesting someone else from your list of spokespeople or partner groups who might have more credibility with your audience. Remember, the messenger is as important as the message.

You are in charge, not the reporter!

You don’t have to launch into an interview right away if you are caught by surprise. If a reporter calls your office for a “quick comment,” you don’t need to take the call right away. Ask what the subject is and what their deadline is. Tell them you are just finishing up a meeting and will get right back to them. Take a deep breath, make quick notes about the points you want to make, and then call back when you are ready.

Ask to do TV interviews outside. Let your surroundings help set the tone for your interview and your image. Working on marine issues? Can you have the ocean as a backdrop? Sitting behind a desk or in an office will project a more bureaucratic or academic message.

And if you are ready:

- Know the one, two or three (maximum) key points you want to make, all supporting your main message.
- Have stories, anecdotes, analogies, and a few simple facts and figures ready to support your key points.
- Use every opportunity to answer questions and then reiterate one of your main points.