



After the Reporter Calls: 10 Steps to Prepare for a News Interview

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Do you know any professional musicians who would perform without rehearsing or athletes who would compete without practicing? Probably not.

Yet there are many leaders who would agree to a news interview without preparing, despite the potential harm to their organizations if they perform poorly. The leaders are either overly self-confident about their abilities or think there's nothing they can do to prepare.

But, indeed, there are steps you can take to make sure you're at your best during interviews – to help you convey the right messages. Here are 10 steps:

1. **Ask about the topic:** Beforehand, find out as much as possible about the focus of the interview. The reporter probably won't tell you the specific questions but it's likely he or she will tell you the topics.
2. **Research the reporter:** Learn about the reporter who will interview you. Know his or her professional background and the types of stories the reporter covers. Most important, review the stories the reporter has done on the subject you'll be interviewed about.
3. **Research the media outlet:** Your answers will be different depending on the type of news organization. You probably wouldn't give the same answers to a business publication as you would to a general-interest newspaper.
4. **Review the subject:** Unless it's a subject you deal with every day, review the topic you'll be talking about so details are fresh in your mind.

5. **Develop main points:** Decide on about three main points you want to make during the interview. This will help you steer the interview – to be proactive in making the points you want to make, rather than entirely reactive to the questions.
6. **Confer with someone you respect:** Talk to a colleague or public relations professional to help you prepare – to make sure your main points and your other planned comments are the right ones. It's a way to test what you plan to say.
7. **Do a mock interview:** Have your colleague or PR professional conduct a mock interview with you -- even if it's just a few questions -- to give you practice and to offer feedback. If possible, do so in front of a video camera, then play back the video to help the two of you assess your answers.
8. **Prepare a sound bite:** Draft a quote or two – 20 to 30 words each -- that will be so compelling the reporter will find them difficult to resist. While talking to your colleague or PR professional, interesting quotes might arise naturally so write down the gems that come out of your mouth. It's likely President Reagan and his staff thought of this one *before* the debate, not during it, to counter concerns about his age: "I will not exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience."
9. **Remember story-telling:** Think about anecdotes – short, memorable real-life stories or examples – that support your main points. Reporters are alert for anecdotes or examples because they make otherwise dry stories more interesting. A college business student who won a stock-picking contest told me that his interest in finance started when, as a five year old, he sat on his father's lap in front of a computer and learned about the stock market. His interest in finance grew from that moment.
10. **Train your staff:** Even before you need help, think about hiring a PR professional to conduct media training with you and your team. Media training prepares leaders for news interviews, news conferences and other interactions with the news media.

If you don't have time to do all of the above, do as much of it as you can. By being prepared, you won't have to think as much during interviews when you're under pressure. Instead, you'll be able to consider your potential answers ahead of time when you're more relaxed. That way, you'll be the best possible spokesperson for your organization.

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