

MEDIA INTERVIEWING TIPS

Interviews with media are a great opportunity to communicate key messages. To help you feel more comfortable in giving an interview, review the following tips. We also recommend practicing these strategies, asking a friend or family member to act as the reporter. Remember – the AKC Communications Department can help answer any questions you may have about the interview, the reporter and the audience.

GENERAL INTERVIEWING TIPS

- Always tell the truth.
- Avoid over-answering. You are not obligated to answer every question, but you are obligated to respond. Sometimes when a reporter says you did not answer the question, he or she really means that you did not answer the question the way they hoped you would. Respond to questions as you see fit, not necessarily as the reporter might like. Keep answers short and simple – be quotable.
- An interview is NOT a conversation. When necessary, repeat your key message points to increase the likelihood that they get into the reporter's notes and the article.
- Use nouns, not pronouns. For example, use the name of your company instead of "we."
- An interview is NOT a court deposition. Do not merely answer "yes" or "no" or limit yourself to the subject matter of the question.
- Always "bridge" back to your key message points, particularly when asked a question, which is somewhat off topic. You can turn any answer into your message point.
- Flag any key points for the reporter with "The key point here is..." or "The more important thing to remember is..." They will be more likely to remember it and you'll be more likely to see it in print.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Paraphrase other experts and explain frankly that your expertise is in another area. Explain what you do know and offer to get someone who can speak more knowledgeably about whatever else the reporter is looking for.
- Don't criticize the competition. If asked, say "I'll let them speak for themselves, but our position is..."

HOW TO GIVE TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- Stay focused. Do not do anything else during an interview, however long or boring it may seem.
- Listen to the entire question before responding. Seek clarification if you need it.
- If the question contains false information or an incorrect assumption, tactfully correct the interviewer before proceeding with your answer.
- Often a reporter tries to put words into your mouth with, "So, you'd say..." Respond with, "No, I would not say that; what I will say is..."
- Be prepared to follow your initial answer with specific support for your positions, such as examples, facts or statistics.
- Prepare for the interview. Find out who the reporter is, how informed about your topic and what they have written.
- Calling the reporter by name buys you time and also "pulls him in." "You know, Tom, the thing to keep in mind is" buys three or four seconds to formulate your response.
- Assume there is no such thing as "off the record" unless you have a long-established relationship and an explicit agreement with a reporter.
- Don't respond too quickly. Think. Breathe. Take some time before answering. It will help you feel more in control.
- Don't repeat an objectionable question in order to deny it. For example, "No it is not true that we shipped 12 carloads of dangerous widgets last year." Just say, "That's not true."
- Don't be drawn into a trap. Beware of pauses and hypothetical questions. Beware of "and...?" When you're finished, stop talking. Don't fill an awkward silence with unnecessary statements. If there's a pause, use it to review a previous point or simply wait for the reporter to ask another question. Don't feel the need to fill up the space.

HOW TO GIVE TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

- Prepare several key message points that you want to emphasize in the interview. You will probably only have 3–4 minutes so keep focused on them and pace yourself accordingly.
- Anticipate key questions the interviewer may ask and decide how to use them to communicate your key message points.
- Anticipate negative questions and be prepared to turn them into positive responses that deliver your key message points. End every answer on a positive/upbeat note.
- Maintain an even pace of talking. Visualize yourself in a living room setting, and act and talk naturally.
- Watch the program beforehand to see how the host or hostess conducts an interview.
- Call the host or hostess by his or her first name at least once during the interview.
- Gestures provide added emphasis. Keep those gestures close to the body and face without covering your face. Show your interest by leaning in toward the interviewer.
- Unless you are told otherwise, look at the interviewer, not at the camera.
- Be aware of how you are sitting. Sit up straight with hands unclasped in your lap just above your knees. Cross your legs at the ankles.
- Talk to your audience—how can they get involved in what you are discussing and how does it affect them?
- Don't use jargon, abbreviations, and business expressions, which are meaningless to the audience.
- Whenever possible, use a visual that will enhance your presentation.
- Remember that TV is entertainment. Your presentation must hold the audience's interest. Have fun and relax!
- Don't touch the microphone, it causes static.
- Don't use swivel chairs. If you must sit in one, avoid swaying by planting your feet firmly on the floor.
- Don't be afraid to talk to the cameramen, studio crew, and interviewer as they set up for the show; it can help you to relax.

What to wear:

- Dress conservatively and comfortably.
- Avoid anything with small stripes, checks or patterns. Solid colors are more effective on color television.
- Light blue or gray shirts work best. Off-white or pastel colors are also good.
- Avoid pure white shirts, which may cause light reflection problems.
- For men, bright colored neckties work best. Red is preferable. Like suits, avoid checks or small patterns.
- For women, pantsuits are always appropriate and eliminate any concern with skirt length.
- Avoid all-red or all-black outfits or large pieces of jewelry, which tend to reflect the glare of studio lights and distort the picture.

HOW TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH A HOSTILE INTERVIEWER

Certain interviewers are hostile under any circumstances. Hostile interviewers can be classified as one of the following four types:

- Machine Gunner: Interviewers fire several questions in rapid succession. Suggest to the interviewer that he or she is posing several questions, and ask, "Which one would you prefer I address first?" OR, simply choose to answer the question of your choice that best allows you to segue to your message.
- Interrupter: Interviewer constantly interrupts your thoughts with controlled questions or comments that throw you off the main point. Let them finish their question, say that you'll address it shortly and continue on with "As I was saying..." You may also ignore the interruption, finish your idea, then ask the interviewer to repeat the question.
- Dart Thrower: Some interviewers throw barbs into their questions to pin negative labels on you or your organization. Deflect negative comments and restate your objective.
- Paraphraser: Interviewers attempt to put words in your mouth by saying, "You mean to say that..." Handle this by stating clearly that "No, that's not what I said. What I said was..." and then repeat word for word what you said.