

Media Relations Training

PENNSYLVANIA
MUNICIPAL
ELECTRIC
ASSOCIATION

PROUD PA PUBLIC
POWER COMMUNITY



September 9, 2021
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Harrisburg



Who We Are, What We Do

With offices in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Harrisburg, Ceisler Media & Issue Advocacy is the largest statewide issue advocacy firm in Pennsylvania. Ceisler Media's 32 employees execute strategic media relations, reputation management, crisis communications, political consensus-building, grassroots mobilization and issue advocacy campaigns on behalf of public agencies, multi-national corporations, non-profits, associations and coalitions.

**If you've read about it in the news in Pennsylvania,
chances are we're involved with the issue in some way.**

Media Audiences: Tailor Your Approach

TELEVISION:

For the eye (visual)

- ❖ Arrive early.
- ❖ Be friendly --- smile.
- ❖ Accept makeup (if in studio).
- ❖ Look at interviewer, not the camera.

This also helps with nerves, allowing for a “conversation” rather than an “interview.”

RADIO/PODCAST:

For the ear (audio)

- ❖ Speak at a normal volume.
- ❖ Use notes.
- ❖ Cite examples, stories and anecdotes:

“Polling shows that 85% of Pennsylvanians support the commonwealth joining RGGI and we hear this strong support echoed by our members statewide...”

PRINT:

For details (long-form)

- ❖ Great opportunity to speak in depth and offer greater detail about issues.
- ❖ Print reporters are more likely to take printed materials, reports, etc., that can support claims.

Media Audiences: Art of the Interview

Understanding the Interview Process:

- Reporter's job is to get information. (5W + 1H)
- Your job is to provide truthful, strategic information. This is an opportunity to tell **your** story.
- Make sure you understand the nature of the request.
- Prepare and rehearse repeatedly.
- Beyond just answering the questions: **Attitude can make or break the interview**, or impact or amplify messages you're trying to convey.

Media Audiences: Art of the Interview



Controlling Your Message in Interviews

Controlling your message

Proactive:

- Prepare your 2-3 key messages. Write them down. Prioritize them.
- Come out strong – deliver your priority message early.

Reactive:

- Stay on track – keep coming back to your key messages.
- Don't repeat a reporter's negative comments or messaging back in your response.

Controlling Your Message

**Pivot to the point
you want to
make.**

- If your facts are correct, stand by the statements you made and, tactfully, correct the reporter: *“I think that’s a generalization. The facts are ...”*
- If the reporter interrupts, listen politely and then continue with the point you were making: *“Well, as I was saying ...”*
- If the reporter continues to ask you the same question several times in several different ways, stand your ground: *“As I said before ...”*

Controlling Your Message



Art of the Interview: Tips & Techniques

Consider the Source: Online

VISUAL:

❖ **Consider Your Background.**

- ❖ Your background should be clean, tidy, and professional.

❖ **Adjust Your Camera Angle.**

- ❖ The camera should point nearly straight in the face or even slightly above.
- ❖ Make sure your camera's lens is clean

❖ **Check Your Lighting**

- ❖ Make sure that you and your room are both well lit.
- ❖ Tip: Have the light (from windows, desk lamps, etc.) in front of you.

❖ **Wear the Right Outfit.**

- ❖ Do: A solid colored top (excluding green).
- ❖ Don't: Stripes and patterns can be distracting and get distorted on camera.
- ❖ Tip: Wear a complete, professional outfit for any unexpected position changes.

❖ **Smile! Especially When You're Not Talking.**

Consider the Source: Online

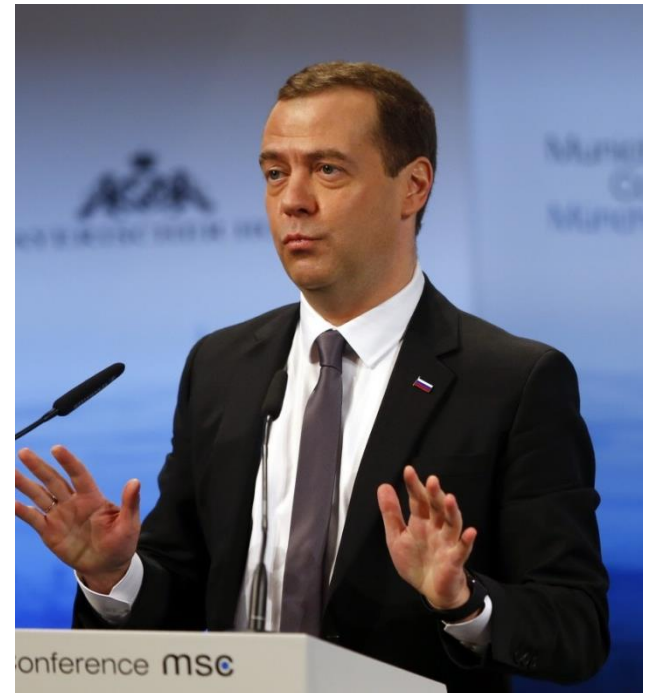
SOUND AND SETUP:

- ❖ **Use notes!**
- ❖ **Set up in a Quiet Room**
 - ❖ Set up your computer in a quiet, locked room where outside noises or small children won't interrupt you.
- ❖ **Adjust Your Microphone**
 - ❖ Test your computer and headset mics in advance and be comfortable with how to adjust its volume.
- ❖ **Pay Attention to Your Talking Speed**
 - ❖ Keep the pace of your talking speed slightly slower than normal.
 - ❖ The slower the rate of talking, the easier viewers can see, hear, and process your words virtually.
- ❖ **Watch Mute**
 - ❖ Keep an eye on your mute settings on screen so you can quickly and easily turn them on or off.

Art of the Interview: Posture

Posture and body language are just as important as the content of your presentation. It is critical to supporting an attentive and engaged audience.

- **It's ok to talk with your hands: But keep your hands inside the box.**
 - Imagine there's a square or box in front of you. Keep all of your gestures within the four corners of that box.
 - Make gestures and movements that align with your natural inflections and statements.
 - Don't put your hands in your pockets or leave your hands or arms folded. **(This is especially important during Q&A sessions.)**



Art of the Interview: Tips & Techniques

Before an Interview

- Get the reporter's name and phone number, and understand deadlines.
- Research the reporter or outlet to understand past coverage.
- Anticipate key, relevant questions.
- Anticipate negative questions.
- Prepare and practice key messages.

During an Interview

- Strictly adhere to key messages and strategy. But answer the question.
- Remain calm and positive --- breathe!
- Be polite, act professionally. People respect someone who remains calm, courteous and professional, especially when confronted or when facing a crisis response.
- Give honest answers. (It's OK to say "I don't know" if you don't know.)
- Correct mistakes.

Art of the Interview: Don't Throw up Walls

**You are the face
of the
organization.
Leave a lasting
impression.**

- **Say only what you know.** If you can't answer for legal/privacy reasons, or you don't know the answer: Just say so! Don't "wing it."
- **Attitude can make or break a situation.** Stay positive and confident. Don't seem angry or dismissive. You agreed to do the interview, so act like you want to do the interview.
- **Be polite and act professionally.** People respect someone who remains calm, courteous and professional, especially when confronted or when facing a crisis response.

Art of the Interview: Tips & Techniques



DO NOT ...

- Go “off the record.”
- Say “no comment.”
- Over-answer.
- Get fixated on one question.
- Let false facts go uncorrected.
- Repeat a reporter’s negative statement.
- Wing it. Get the facts --- even if you have to do so after the interview --- and stay on message ... Say only what you know.

Art of the Interview: Tips & Techniques

- **Relate.** When you introduce yourself, talk about your professional credentials and make references to your background and any ties to the local community.
 - Build common ground where you can.
- **Translate.** Make sure your information is easily understood. It is meaningless if it is too technical. Tailor materials to the audience.
 - Avoid technical jargon and acronyms.
 - Less is sometimes more. Avoid the tendency to provide too much.
- **Enunciate.** Speak calmly, clearly and steadily. Believe what you are saying.
- **Validate.** Acknowledge the concerns the interviewer presents, and address those concerns respectfully. Don't be dismissive. Be willing to continue the dialogue.

How to Win the Q&A Game

Q&A Scenarios, Responses

The Paraphraser: Attempts to simplify or sum up what you said.

“So what you’re saying is the power outage wasn’t the borough’s fault?”

- Repeat YOUR words and messages, not somebody else’s.

“What I’m saying is we can’t prevent every outage, but we can and do plan to make our system as resilient as possible, and ensure we are prepared to respond immediately to unforeseen events and fix them as quickly as possible, which is what we did here.”

Q&A Scenarios, Responses

The Hypothetical “IF”: Seeks an answer about something that never happened and may never happen.

“What if converting to more renewable electricity sources causes more blackouts?”

- Don’t answer questions for which there are no real answers.
- Respond frankly and clearly.
- It’s a win if you can neutralize the question and pivot to your own messaging.

“The renewable energy market is evolving constantly, and we are keeping up with those developments to ensure that our citizens have reliable power at the lowest cost possible. We have not, and would never, enter into any purchase agreements that would threatened the reliability of our service.”

Q&A Scenarios, Responses

The Absent Party Trap: Puts you somewhere you never were and never wanted to be.

“Some people say that allowing this development will cause property values in the borough to decline, what do you say to that?”

- Don't answer what you don't know. Don't guess.

“We have solicited input from all our interested residents, and I can assure you we gave everyone's comments serious consideration. We also consulted with experts who disagree with the small minority who is concerned about property devaluation and we are confident that allowing this development to proceed will benefit all our residents.”

Q&A Scenarios, Responses

The False Choice: When either/or are both bad.

“So do you have a plan to prevent the next outage? Or do we just have to fend for ourselves?”

- The real answer may be a combination of “A” or “B” --- or it might be “C,” something totally different.

“It will never be possible to prevent all outages, but we do everything possible to limit them and restore service as quickly as humanly possible. We encourage all residents to plan ahead for a range of possible emergencies, but the borough is always prepared to step in with assistance to anyone who needs it.”

Q&A Scenarios and Responses

The Machine Gunner: Reporter bombards you with several questions (some of which may be loaded).

“How much is this going to cost? Are our taxes going to go up? What happens if the project goes over budget?”

- Slow down the process. Ask the reporter to re-state his or her questions ... one at a time.
- Answer at your own pace, not the reporter's pace.

“You’ve asked me several questions. Let me start with the first one...”

Q&A Scenarios and Responses

The Open-Ended Question: The reporter is looking for you to lead the conversation, or offer opinions.

“What’s do you think of all the political arguments over clean energy? It seems to be really contentious.”

- Walk into the interview with things you intend to talk about.
- Pivot to what you know and trust.

“What we’re focused on is ensuring that all of our residents have access to reliable, affordable electric power. We will always adapt to evolving conditions in the market to ensure that we can do this. It is our sole focus and number one priority.”

Q&A Scenarios, Responses

Bridging as a tactic: Getting from where you are to where you want to be

- The most important thing is....
- What people need to know is....
- The facts are...

Q&A Scenarios, Responses



Q&A Scenarios and Responses

Anything else? At the end of most interviews, a reporter will run out of questions and offer you a moment to speak.

“Those were all the questions I had. Is there anything else you’d like to add?”

- Don’t let your relief get the better of you.
- Have an elevator pitch ready to go.

“We’re really proud of how this project turned out. It came in on time and on budget, and it will deliver benefits to our residents for years to come.”



Ceisler Media & Issue Advocacy executes media relations, issue advocacy and grassroots organization. We use the relationships we've forged with a wide network of elected officials, public leaders, foundations, community groups, media providers and others throughout the state to ensure the most compelling messages are delivered to the most appropriate audiences.



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