

# **COMMIT NEWS**

## **A Media Relations Primer**

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# Florida's Media Ecosystem

AP wire drives coverage decisions

PoliticoFL, St. Petersburg, Sayfie, SSNS

Print isn't dead...yet

TV remains coverage strongly local

Local talk radio still hits a vast audience

Florida still has 180+ weekly papers with a surprisingly large audience

# About Reporters...

Except in rare cases, they're not your friends...  
don't mistake friendly for friendship

They value information, insight, and honesty

Reporters are never "off the clock"

They need us...just as we need them

They're bored and hungry...all the time

# Core Principles of Media Relations

Take media seriously; be prepared and professional

Be disciplined and focused

**Don't lie**

Don't be defensive; “No comment” is a last resort

Don't repeat a negative question or phrase

Don't talk about sausage-making

All mics are hot. All recorders are rolling

# Have An Agenda

You do media interviews for two reasons: offense, or defense. **Have an agenda for both.**

Remember...the reporter isn't your audience... they're a way to **reach** your audience.

Know the message they're looking for...and the message you're going to give them.

Always have core messages you can **bridge** to from any question they ask.

# Have A Plan

Keep it specific. Your topic, your message

Get one point across

Define your communications goal

Have something newsworthy to say

Don't just try to fill dead air

Set a mental deadline

# How You Speak Is As Important As What You Say

Disciplined

Brief

Accurate

Simple

Memorable language

Engaging

Facts > Stats

Examples > Experts

# Your Media Bill of Rights

Know the topic

Know the format

Buy time

Have time to answer the question

Correct misstatements

Check your facts

Use notes

Record the interview

## **And Its Limitations...You don't get to:**

Know the questions in advance

See the story in advance

Change your quotes

Edit the story

Expect your view be the only view

Demand article be published

# Failing to Plan Is Planning To Fail

Know what's in the media that day

Anticipate questions

Staff contact on subject of questions

Prepare responses in advance

If you have time, rehearse with staff, family

Know the background of the reporter, publication or program, interview format

# Print/Major Daily

Longer, more detailed interviews

Preparation matters

You get 40 words. Make them count.

Possibly more knowledgeable reporter

Questions repeated to get different responses

Chance to correct misstatement

# Television

Confidence: not optional

Face: Direct eye contact with the reporter

Body: Energize your speech with gestures

Posture: If standing, don't cross your arms

If sitting, keep your hands in your lap

Voice: it's a conversation, not a speech

Makeup: take it if offered

# Talk Radio

Understand the show's format

Know the host's style

Bring your notes

Always be on your toes

Don't be bullied – remember your messages

Don't fight with callers

# Interview Courtesy Goes A Long Way

Get his/her name, affiliation

Ask: “What story are you working on?”

Ask: “What’s your deadline?”

Promise to get back before (**not on**) deadline

If TV, determine location, format, live or taped

If radio, try to use a landline

If Skype, check your speed and settings first

# Techniques: Headlining

Headlining your message, no matter the question:

Familiar examples:

“The most important thing to remember is...”

“The real issue is...”

“It boils down to these three things...”

“Let me make one thing perfectly clear”

“My policy is...”

# Techniques: Bridging and Blocking

Moving to what you want to talk about, always

It's not evading...it's choosing what to say

Address the topic of question, then bridge

If asked about a problem, talk about a solution

If asked for knowledge you don't have, bridge and move on

If you can't comment, explain why

# Techniques: Bridging and Blocking (Examples)

"It's our policy not to discuss X, but I can tell you..."

"I think what you're really asking is..."

"That speaks to a bigger point..."

"Let me put that in perspective..."

"What's important to remember..."

"What I really want to talk to you about is..."

"I understand your question, but..."

"The real issue here is..."

"What you're asking is..."

# Media Games And How To Fight Them

The Junk Predicate: The reporter asks: “Is it true that...?” then says something absurd.

Fix: “The truth is...” and get back to your message.

Hypotheticals: “What if...” then proceeds into extremes

Fix: “I’m not going to speculate...”

Stacked questions: three or four questions in one.

Fix: “Let's cover those questions one at a time?”

# Media Games And How To Fight Them

Machine-gun questions: not letting you complete one answer before asking another question

Fix: “I’m happy to answer all your questions...please start back at the first one and we’ll cover them in order.”

Interruptions: reporter doesn't let you complete your answers

Fix: Stop. Take a breath. “I’m happy to answer your questions, but you seem to want to get something out first... why don’t you then we’ll continue.

Negative Rephrasing: you answered but they turned it around to negative frame:

Fix: “No, my answer was...” and repeat your message.

# Media Relations Lexicon

On the record: Your statements and name will be used in the story. This is the default position on both sides.

Off the record: Material you provide the reporter may not be published or broadcast. **You must mutually agree before the interview starts.**

Not for attribution: Information may be published, but without revealing identity of the source.

Background: You and the reporter agree on the conditions

Deep background: When you don't want to be identified in any way, even anonymously but want to give the reporter ways to work the story