

IS THIS INTERVIEW FOR YOU?

When a reporter calls, ask them a few questions. You can then decide if you either want to proceed with the interview or suggest that you can call them back shortly, like in 5 to 10 minutes. This time window may feel short when you are just starting out, but you want to be sure you are interviewed before their deadline and before they move on to someone else.

Here are a few things you might ask:

- ① When can I get back to you that is ahead of your deadline?
- ② What is the angle that you are taking on the story?
- ③ Who else are you talking to about this story?
- ④ What are you most interested in knowing?

RESEARCH THE OUTLET AND THE REPORTER

If you are not familiar with the reporter's outlet, take a few minutes to research them. Do they have a political slant? Who is their target audience? If possible, read a couple of articles written by the reporter with whom you will be speaking. Do they appear to have a liberal or conservative slant? Will you get fair treatment?

DEVELOP YOUR TALKING POINTS

The reporter called you because you know the subject matter, but an interview is not a data dump. You need to make intentional choices about what you are going to say.

Here are some points for you to consider to help you achieve this goal:

- ① What would be the perfect headline for you?
- ② What is the number one thing you want readers to know?
- ③ What are three things that you want to say to ensure that readers are hearing that number one thing?

Once you answer these questions, get clear on your core message. Then consider how you want to say it.

- ① Develop up to three short phrases, 7-10 words each, that each encapsulate your core message. Keep them simple.
- ② Avoid trying to memorize a long sentence or paragraph. Focus on a few key phrases that help you express the point. This helps you sound natural.
- ③ Metaphors or analogies are often the best way to do this.
- ④ Use vivid, interesting, or catchy language.
- ⑤ Appealing to your audience's values or aspirations, rather than reciting data, is more persuasive.
- ⑥ Always avoid jargon.
- ⑦ Remember—you may be talking with a reporter, but they are not the audience. Your audience is the readers. Your sound bites should resonate with them.
- ⑧ If appropriate, try to use humor (not sarcasm) to illustrate your point.

It is also a good idea to consider what the worst headline would be and to make sure that none of your talking points could possibly take you there.

PRACTICE

If you have time, once you have researched the outlet and the reporter and prepared a few talking points, you should practice. The best way to do this is to recruit a colleague to roleplay the part of the reporter asking questions. Get your colleague to ask you hard questions. It is always better to practice hard questions and face easy ones than to be surprised.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

There are a few key things to remember during the interview:

- ① It is perfectly reasonable to ask a reporter to repeat their question. Sometimes questions are unclear and you need clarification. Other times, you just need a moment to consider your answer.

- ② If a reporter asks you a complex, multi-part question, answer the one part of that question that leads you back to the core message that you want to deliver.
- ③ This is an interview, not a conversation.
 - Ⓐ It may feel odd but you do not have to answer direct questions. You can pivot back to your on top messages. For example, you might say, “I think to understand this issue, the key point to remember is ... [insert your talking point.]”
 - Ⓑ A more advanced version is to use a keyword in the question as your pivot. For example if the reporter asks, “What did you have for breakfast?” You can respond, “As I was having breakfast today, I was thinking about ... [insert your talking point.]”
- ④ Keep your cool. Give calm and balanced answers and focus on presenting yourself as a confident, reasonable person.
- ⑤ Speak reasonably slowly. If you hear a reporter scribbling notes, slow down and let them catch up. It might feel odd, but it is okay to repeat a sound bite.

FINAL THOUGHTS

- ① Don't use sarcasm. It often doesn't translate well and will depend entirely on how the reporter does or does not capture your point.
- ② Relax.
- ③ Remember that the reporter's job is to tell a story or explain an issue. Your job is to help them.
- ④ If you do an interview over the phone, make sure you have all your notes handy. But avoid reading from them. Instead, highlight key phrases that jog your memory.
- ⑤ Always assume that everything you say is on the record.

Contact ReThink Media if you need help preparing talking points or want to run through a mock interview for practice.