

MEDIA INTERVIEWS; HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CONFIDENCE

Article by Ruth Bonetti

So, you have been invited to give a radio, television or journal interview. After the warm fuzzy glow subsides, ask yourself- and the producer- some questions: What slant will they want? Who else will appear on the program? Why did they ask me? What line might they take? Will it be a live interview or prerecorded? Does the journal or program have a good reputation?

Tape or video-record the program beforehand. Analyse the journalists' manner, depth of questions, content, bias. Do I trust them, like their style?

Before a media interview, write down a few questions that you imagine you might be asked. Answer them aloud while in the shower, driving, or walking the dog. Prepare, in note-form, important points that you wish to cover, any necessary facts that you might need. Note the interviewer's name; it is remarkable how easily we can forget well-known names when under pressure!

Arrive early to prevent a rushed, breathless voice - and to deposit in your briefcase all jangly keys, coins and jewelry. As studios are usually dry environments, arm yourself with a water bottle or polystyrene cup of water.

- Imagine a friend's face on the microphone.
- Smile at the interviewer; the warmth will be heard in your voice.
- Be personal, using "I" or "we", giving your own views.
- Choose a few important points. Express them in brief, clear, colorful sentences.
- Enthusiasm and vitality are infectious, attractive.
- Keep within known topics, for conviction and sincerity.

Andrew Lofthouse, an ABC television and radio presenter says:

For the most part, when it comes to discussing your work, reporters and interviewers are your "friends." Whether it's a thirty second "grab" or a lengthy feature interview, they want to get the best from you. In other words, you're not going to be made a fool of. So relax! Forget about the audience. I often say to guests, "Forget about all the knobs, screens and gadgets, this will be just you and me chatting as we might over a coffee." Radio is a great medium. It's portable, personal, powerful and immediate. Make use of it and enjoy it.

1. What will they ask me?

Ask the producer or journalist before the interview what particular angle they wish to take and what might make a good opening gambit. Be ready with a few topical, irresistible suggestions - whose answers are ready on the tip of your tongue.

2. What if the interviewer asks a question I can't answer?

It's very unlikely! You are the expert, the broadcaster is the facilitator. Avoid answering with a mere "yes" or "no" which means the poor journalist must drag

information out of you. Drop some tantalising leads to direct the talk into channels where you feel most comfortable.

3. What if I talk too much?

Go ahead! "Talkers" are good on radio. The interviewer will steer you onto a different tack when the time is right. If the interview is prerecorded as opposed to live-to-air, your answers can be edited. If you would be more at ease prerecording an interview, suggest it. If the interview is prerecorded, check when it will go to air, and remember to greet your interviewer with 'Good morning' even if it was taped by full moon.

Prerecorded interviews may seem less threatening, as you know that editing may save a multitude of sins... like clangers and libels. Don't be lulled into false security that an interviewer will edit out all glitches. They may prefer the natural tone that they create!

4. What if they interrupt?

Many political journalists make interruption the norm. Have the confidence to quietly say: 'Just a moment while I finish answering your last question.'

5. What if they misinterpret me, or quote me out of context?

It might happen that the interview, when you read it in the journal or newspaper, has been changed. It may give a negative picture of you in spite of all your attempts to be positive. There is little you can do as immediate come-back. Move on. If a journalist mistreats you in an interview you won't let him or her interview you again. Most realise they have to be constructive, careful when critical.

6. What if I blunder?

In normal speech, how much do we notice small stumbles? Just carry on and few will even notice. Besides, listeners love to see high-profile people as human beings like themselves. They don't remember small slips, much as we do from the other side of the mic. If we make a mistake we can simply say: "Let me word that more clearly" or "I can further clarify that by saying..."

Telephone Interviews

These may be convenient for both you and the journalist and are more common now, with mobile phones so prolific. They may seem more difficult because you cannot relate personally to the reporter. Resist the tendency to shout. If you have difficulty hearing because of a bad line, it is better to say so and finish the interview.

Some interviews are conducted long distance via head-phones between studios. Again, keep to your normal voice. Imagine the interviewer's face on the microphone.

"No Comment"

This useful phrase needs care. It can be interpreted against you to mean that you refused to speak with the media, that you had something to hide. Safeguard yourself by giving a reason:

- "It is not appropriate for me to give a statement until I have discussed it with my solicitor" or
- "I need to read the original statement before commenting."
- "I must wait for further information before replying."

Remember that the immediacy of radio and television may make your comments valid for the moment, but any hitches will soon be forgotten. Focus on the reporter, speak as person to person, and be yourself! You may surprise yourself by enjoying the experience.

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BYLINE

International Keynote and seminar presenter, Ruth Bonetti is author of 10 books including *Don't Freak Out – Speak Out; Public speaking with confidence* (published by Words and Music), which is also available on CD and E-Book. This, and Ruth's complimentary fortnightly E-Zine *Crisp Confidence Communiqué* is available on her website <http://www.ruthbonetti.com>

Ruth learned to conquer the platform jitters in her long international career, presenting in Europe (she speaks German, Swedish and French), Australia and America, where her seminars were repeated by popular demand.

During her humorous and interactive presentations, audience members learn to be fantastic on their feet – to speak out with confidence. Her keynote presentation *Take 5 Tips for Confident Presentation* is content-rich, humorous “infotainment”; her practical, do-able techniques, memorably highlighted with her clarinet playing and singing create COMMUNICATION CONFIDENCE.

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