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Five: Developing Press Lines

Begin by asking your group to imagine for a moment that they are in a position to write an article or produce a television newscast on your issues. What would the article include? How would the news story be scripted? Ask: What do you want the headlines to say? What are the best possible stories, quotes or news items on your issue. Imagine the best then go for it.

Do this exercise in reverse. Ask yourself what the worst possible headlines could be? If your bill were to be defeated or a law suit lost, what are the worst outcomes? Then, work to avoid them. In the world of public relations, this is known as "damage control."

The most important result of any media strategy session will be to develop press lines in simple and clear messages. You will need to articulate responses in 10, 30 and 60 second answers for television and radio interviews. Then develop longer, more substantive analyses for background briefings with reporters.

The Bottom Line

The most successful press coverage usually does not just happen. Know what you want the coverage to be, and work with reporters so that they understand your position. In the end, the article or newscast will be the responsibility of the reporter. Unless you are a journalist, you will not be able to actually write the article, headline or news show. But, the more you know about what you want, the better your chances are of achieving it.

Words, Phrases, And Themes

The words, phrases, and themes that your group uses to describe your issues are extremely important. Advertisers spend hundreds of thousands of dollars developing messages they want to send to consumers. Similarly, White House advisors consciously choose the words which best describe the President's position. The terms "kinder, gentler America," "peacekeeping missiles," and "safety net" are examples of controversial positions made neutral or softer by specific terms.

When determining how to position your issues in the media, a major decision will be: are you for it or against it? Examples: are you for clean air or against pollution? Are you for burning the flag or protecting the Bill of Rights? Polling data can help you decide how to best frame an issue in the media.

Once you have brainstormed the best possible coverage and have developed a set of press lines, draft an op-ed piece for your local media in which your words are not edited or taken out of context. By putting the words, phrases and themes to paper, you can usually improve the quality of the product tremendously. Test out the "lines" on some friends or in a small group of

"New words and phrases are one organic measure of change. They capture transformations of perception, and sometimes of reality itself."

Gloria Steinem

impartial participants. Advertisers pay up to \$10,000 each for "focus groups." Informally, conduct your own focus groups with neighbors, college students, or community activists.

When you are comfortable with the lines, share them with other organizations who are working on the same issues. The trick will be to get as many people as possible to agree on similar press lines which can then be repeated over and over. Remember, if you are doing an interview with media that will be edited to a few quotes, repeat the main theme or press line throughout the interview as often as possible. Make the main point you are trying to get across to the reporter from the beginning, and then return to that point again and again.

Target Your Audiences

Before you begin scheduling press interviews at random, identify whom you are trying to reach. Keep in mind that the mass market is specialized into segmented markets. Magazines, for example, are no longer just *Life* or *Look* — the two dominant forces 25 years ago. The average newsstand in America has hundreds of magazines written for and targeted to specific readers. Newspaper sections are much the same. Television and cable audiences, although still considered "mass media," are more specialized than ever. (See *Ten: Targeting Your Message To The Right Audience* for more details.)

The Oprah Winfrey Show has a very different set of viewers from This Week With David Brinkley. Public television audiences, although smaller in numbers, are more likely to be policy-makers and trend setters. If you are trying to reach legislators, who often do not have time to watch much television, a newspaper editorial may work best. New parents, homemakers, students, and unemployed workers are the primary daytime viewers.

Target The Media As Well

Most issues have a variety of "angles" or ways to sell the story. For example, energy efficiency could be covered by business reporters, the lifestyle section, consumer columnists, legal writers, editorial boards, the city desk, or national reporters, depending on how it is framed. You may want to "shop around" for the reporter who has a good understanding of the issue. In the end, an editor or news director will make the final decision on who covers the issue for the media outlet. However, if you are promoting a story as opposed to just reacting to a reporter's call, you are in a better position to approach a specific reporter with your story idea.

Remember

Keep the message simple. Target your audiences and reporters. Repeat, Repeat, Repeat.

Seven: Picking Spokespeople

"Reporters like to talk to people in charge."

from *Gannett's Media Resource Guide*

The single most important decision your group will make is picking your spokesperson. If you do not, the media will. Start by making sure that your spokesperson is comfortable doing press interviews, is willing to take the time out of a busy schedule, and makes a good presentation on television, radio, and in print.

Working with the media must be a team effort. Your spokespeople are not being interviewed because the press thinks they have something to say as individuals. They are interviewed as representatives of your organization and as the voice for activists in your community.

First, Determine Who Talks To Press

If possible, pick only one person as the official spokesperson, such as the president or executive director of your organization. Your group may want to establish a policy that press staff or volunteers talk to reporters on background. If this is the case, you should indicate to the media that quotes are available from your official spokesperson, with staff providing background. It is usually best to limit the number of people who initiate or return press calls. Make sure all parties know what has previously been said to reporters on the issue at hand. Reporters hate to be bounced around, never knowing if the person they are talking to has any authority to speak for your organization. Even worse, they don't like having to repeat their requests to a half dozen people.

On And Off The Record

There are at least three ways of dealing with reporters:

- **On-the-Record Interviews** should only be conducted by official spokespersons. Reporters will assume that everything said to them is on the record and for quotation, unless otherwise stated at the start of an interview.
- **Background Interviews** are just that, discussions with reporters with a prior understanding that the information can be freely used in a story, but only on background, without a direct quote. Press staff should open any discussions with reporters by saying, "I would like to talk to you as background only. Most of what I will be saying will be exactly what our President says, but to save time, I can give you the background for publication but not for attribution. You can get quotes from her." You must establish this understanding before the interview begins, not after.
- **Off-the-Record Discussions** are not for quotes, not for attribution, and usually not for use in an article. Such a discussion may be useful in situations where you need to share information with a reporter, but you do not want your organization quoted or identified as a source. If the information is to be used by reporters, their editors may require two or three sources to confirm the story, particularly if the

information is sensitive. Again, establish the rules for the interview at the start, not the end of an interview, or you could find your organization in a bind and unable to "undo" a negative or inappropriate quote.

Some leaders who are regular news sources have a policy that all discussions with the press are on-the-record. Clearly, this is the best policy for reporters but not always for organizations, for obvious reasons.

Adding Some Polish

Sensitive leaders and substantive policy analysts often reject or feel awkward attending media training sessions. Actors including Ronald Reagan, on the other hand, regularly solicit professional advice on improving their image and delivery. Professional media advisers can be invaluable members of your strategic team. But understand that most good media coaches are highly paid and very busy. Professional fees may run from \$300 to \$500 an hour with a half or full day minimum. There are several low cost options for high return services:

- Pool costs with other non-profit organizations in your town. Most good media trainers are willing to do small sessions with 3-5 participants.
- Approach the theatre or communications departments of a local college or university. One-day sessions with professional academics, as compared with political/corporate professionals may be a less costly option.
- If your issue resonates with highly paid professionals, you might be able to persuade them to volunteer their services "for the cause."
- Rent or purchase a video cassette player and set-up a "moot" press interview/conference for your spokesperson. Playback the tape for an immediate "feedback" session.
- Several very useful books have been written by some top professionals including Dorothy Sarnoff and Roger Ailes. As press secretary, you might want to read these books thoroughly and copy or highlight the important sections for your boss.
- One of the best techniques for improving television performances is a simple one. Regularly video/audio tape the media appearances of your spokesperson and organize a serious feedback session within a day or two. Several trusted advisors should be in the room to give "feedback" which includes strong positive compliments and gentle, but firm, criticism.

No matter how often your spokespeople are interviewed by the media, there is always room for improvement. Presidents, governors, chief executive officers and television anchors all regularly improve their on-camera images. Like it or not, too often the media is the message and if your messengers are

"Publicity is the oxygen of recognition, the polar opposite of secrecy. As such, it's bound to be on the minds of anyone who wants to gain the notice of the public—or of selected publics."

from *Gannett Center Journal*

going to be taken seriously by the public and policy makers, they need to constantly scrutinize their performance to make sure the message is presented as clearly and effectively as possible.



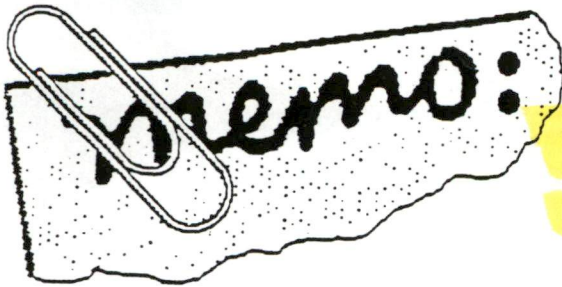
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Rex,
I thought this material
from the RWJ Comm. Conference
might interest you - also

I showed 1 clip from the 21st
Century Video & Frank was
very impressed - He said
he wanted to see the whole
program and I suggested
he come to Houston & see
it and our PBS series.

I need to call & follow up...
Your thoughts/comments?

Kym



Facing the Television Camera

By Michael Sheehan

Finding yourself in front of a television camera and the 6:00 o'clock news crew can be great P.R. for your foundation...unless you are unprepared. Then it could be devastating. With some 10,000 individual broadcast news stories being created each day, odds are good that one day you may be facing the camera as a spokesperson.

When that call comes in and the camera crew is on the way over, it's all up to you. Although the television station may set up the interview, remember, you can set the stage. The guidelines below will help you not only to prepare for your interview but to control it as well.

1 Establish the issue:

Prior to the interview, you may not be able to obtain a list of the questions the reporter will be asking, but responsible journalists should at least give you an idea of the subjects they plan to discuss. Don't hesitate to ask, and don't assume you know what they are planning.

2 Provide background:

Most television interviewers are generalists. Their knowledge about your organization, its past and its goals is probably limited. Whether it's background you send to the station or a two-minute briefing just before the interview, the more general information you can give a reporter, the better your chances of successful coverage.

3 Formulate your agenda:

Before the interview begins, decide on one or two points you want to make, then be sure to make them. Do not treat the interview as if you were a

witness before a grand jury answering only the questions you are asked. If you need to discuss a topic broader or narrower than the question posed, bring it up.

4 Treat questions as topics:

When a reporter asks you a negative question, consider the question a general topic area and respond to a positive part of the topic. For example: if the question is about a drug abuse crisis, you may be able to respond by focusing on foundation grants to support drug rehabilitation efforts.

5 How you look:

Like it or not, the validity of your presentation is greatly affected by the way you look and sound, so:

- **Smile**—The television camera tends to make people look more serious than they are.
- **Look at the interviewer**—Unfocused eyes are mildly annoying in person; on camera, if your eyes wander you will appear either uncomfortable or defensive.
- **Remain relatively still**—Find a comfortable position before the camera starts rolling and maintain it. Do not rock back and forth, play with your hands, etc. Unnecessary movements will make you look disinterested or nervous.
- **Stay calm**—Never get mad or annoyed. Every answer should sound like you just said, "I'm glad you asked..."

6 Keep it brief:

Less is more. Make your point briefly and stick to the point. The average quotation used on a newscast lasts only about 15 seconds. If you are not brief, your response runs the risk of being edited. Edited remarks which are taken out of context can distort your response.

7 Make responses colorful:

Technical, complex answers end up on the cutting room floor. Reporters are looking for the unusual, colorful and dramatic response. Instead of explaining the budget details of the program, relate a brief case history or a human interest detail about a project you've funded.

8 Choose your site:

Television is a visual medium: exploit it. Rather than sitting behind your desk during the interview, schedule the meeting at a location which compliments your point of view—at a grant site, for example.

9 Don't be rushed:

Take your time and start again if your answer gets jumbled or confused. Always answer in complete, clear thoughts. Short sentences and interrupted sentences will be edited out if a better version is available. Simply say, "I'd like to try that again." Just remember the 15-second rule.

10 Silence—off the record:

Off-the-record comments have hurt as many novices as they have helped. Never say anything you would not feel comfortable hearing on the evening news.

11 Make your point:

If the interview is coming to an end and you have not made an important point, be bold and tell the reporter you would like to make one last point and go for it! ■

Michael Sheehan is a professional media trainer in Washington, D.C. In addition to training corporate and association spokespersons, he has conducted extensive work with Democratic presidential and senatorial campaigns.



Jackson and Barry: 'Jesse don't wanna run nothing but his mouth'

MEDIA

The Art of the Profile

People say the darndest things to Bella Stumbo

During the 1980s, newspapers and magazines dripped with sticky-sweet profiles of the rich, mighty and odious. All the while, though, a few profile writers upheld a tougher approach without resorting to cheap shots. The strategy is simple: during the interview, they skillfully ingratiate themselves enough to loosen their subjects' tongues. Then, back at their computer terminals, they discard the age-old practice of cleaning up quotes. Why protect the subject from his own mouth? If he sticks his foot in it, so much the better.

Call those profiles "Stumbos," after Bella Stumbo, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times who has perfected the form. In 1981 she got B. T. Collins, a top aide to California Gov. Jerry Brown, to make sport of his boss. In 1982, Justin Dart, a member of Ronald Reagan's kitchen cabinet, dumped all over Gerald Ford for her. In 1988, after dozens of reporters had failed to obtain good interviews, she quoted Susan Estrich, Michael Dukakis's campaign manager, as saying "I have the power," a line that haunted Estrich for months. Each caused a squall, but none of the subjects, however embarrassed, complained publicly. Collins, in fact, blamed himself.

Marion Barry, the embattled mayor of Washington, D.C., and the subject of a pointed profile on Jan. 7, isn't one to take

the blame. Barry didn't know Stumbo, who works out of Los Angeles. Instead, according to a report in The Washington Post, Barry's former spouse Mary Treadwell, who knew Stumbo's work, vouched for the reporter to the mayor's staff. (An ex-wife's exquisite revenge?) After following him around for a day and a half to schools, bars, even a lingerie shop, Stumbo wrote a long profile that quoted Barry as saying that Jesse Jackson would be "the laughingstock of America" if he ran against him for mayor, and that "Jesse don't wanna run nothing but his mouth." Barry, who has been linked in print to drug dealers, but never criminally charged, was defiant: "I'm gonna be like that lion the Romans had. They just kept throwin' stuff at me, you know? But I'll be kickin' their asses, every time!"

After the story appeared, Barry flatly denied making the comments about Jackson. For its part, the Times defended the story. Assistant Managing Editor John Brownell said that "part [of the Jackson comments] are on tape, and part in notes. ... We have total confidence in the reporter's accuracy." The Times would not play the tape for inquiring reporters.

Barry also was angry that a few of the quotes appeared in black dialect. "People who do not know me would think I leaped

from the screen of the 'Amos 'N' Andy Show,'" he said in a letter to the Times. Henry Locke, managing editor of The Chicago Defender, a venerable black newspaper, agreed: "We would not quote in any kind of dialect; the editor should make him [the subject] seem intelligent." Locke recalls covering Lyndon Johnson, "whom you couldn't really quote because every other word was a cuss word."

As a result of that gentlemen's agreement, Johnson was drained in print of most of what made his speech so interesting. Now the rules have changed a bit. George Bush and Dan Quayle have found that even in official settings they risk being quoted with total accuracy, however goofy the result. That's because their fractured syntax has become news in its own right. "Traditionally, the rule was to clean it up [grammatically]—not make them [subjects of stories] look foolish, because they couldn't protect themselves," says Louis Boccardi, president of the Associated Press, in a quote that hasn't been cleaned up here at all. "But it depends on context. In a profile, where you're trying to convey the mood and feeling of talking to Mr. X in a bar, more of that [style of speech] would survive." In the Barry story, says Brownell, "we wanted to show the contrast between the public person—who is very articulate—and the rhetorical emphasis he uses in private." Ironically, a representative of a group of black linguists phoned the Times to say more of the article should have been in dialect, which they—and many other blacks—consider a source of pride.

Janet Malcolm: The peculiar truth is that there are no firm rules on any of this. The New Yorker magazine, for instance, claims that its legendary fact-checking department ensures accuracy. Yet the subjects of its articles all seem to speak in beautiful sentences and perfect paragraphs. And in a libel suit, staff writer Janet Malcolm was reduced to arguing (successfully) that she invents quotes in order to get at a larger truth. When newspaper columnists play by Malcolm's rules, they're called "pipe artists."

As for Stumbo, the true riddle is how she gets her subjects to say so much in the first place. Her explanation, to the extent that she has one, is deceptively simple. "Basically, I'm a sympathetic person who approaches people with an open attitude," she says. "I'm not one of those reporters who runs to the toilet to take notes—I take them very openly." One key, she says, is to ask the obvious questions that reporters on the beat won't ask, either because they think they know the answer already or they're afraid of alienating a source. Then there's the hubris factor. It always helps to have subjects who are sure that they're just too clever to be Stumboed.

JONATHAN ALTER

SMART WAYS TO HANDLE THE PRESS

Reporters are strange beasts, and as Exxon's ordeal shows, dealing with them can be tough. You've got to face facts—and whatever you do, you've got to talk. ■ by Stratford P. Sherman

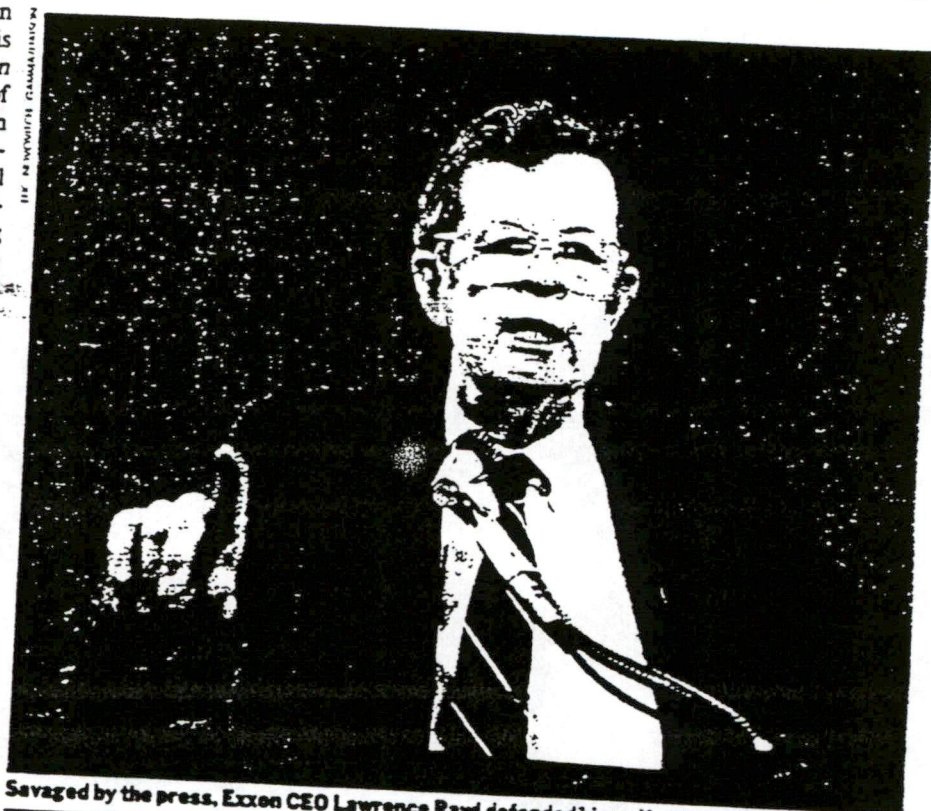
IF YOU DOUBT that bad press can wound a company, consider what is happening to Exxon. Since the Exxon Valdez dumped 260,000 barrels of crude oil into Alaska's Prince William Sound, TV and print reporters have portrayed the world's third-largest industrial company as an uncaring, incompetent, penny-pinching despoiler. Almost everything Exxon says and does—from criticizing the Coast Guard to running stiffly worded apologies in the press—seems to make matters worse. Shareholders, including some heavy-hitting institutional ones, have attacked the company and even demanded CEO Lawrence Rawl's resignation. Rawl's conclusion: "Our public image was a disaster once that ship went on the rocks."

True enough—but inept public relations has made it worse. Had Exxon followed the guidelines listed on page 72, it surely would be better off. So would any corporation that finds itself in the public eye, as nearly every major company inevitably does. Those guidelines tell how to implement the basic truth of handling the press: You must realistically appraise your own situation as well as that of the journalists who have to describe it. Sounds easy. It isn't.

Avoiding Exxon's fate requires adopting attitudes that will lead you to the right behavior. Says Roger Ailes, former media adviser to George Bush: "Many executives don't see PR as part of their job description. They should." Step one is to acknowledge the public's legitimate interest in your affairs. Not just the general public, which may prefer to ignore you much of the time, but also employees, investors, bankers, legislators, regulators, neighbors, friends, and family. They read newspapers and magazines. They watch TV.

Next, try to understand the press, just as you would a competitor. News organizations earn their keep by producing stories

REPORTER ASSOCIATE Darlene L. Dennis



Savaged by the press, Exxon CEO Lawrence Rawl defended himself at the annual meeting.

that attract audiences, and thus advertisers. Deadlines are tight because news is most valuable when it's fresh. A journalist who calls you might have no more than an hour to finish his or her reporting; you might have to interrupt an important meeting to respond. Inconvenient that may be, but it sure beats being dragged through the mud.

To the extent that time allows, think before you talk—but do talk if you possibly can. Even when you can't answer questions, as when SEC rules prohibit disclosure, return the reporter's call. Saying little is better than saying nothing, and explaining why you can't talk is better than stonewalling. Remember that the reporter is

human too. He or she will form an impression of you based on how you behave, and first impressions are hard to change. If you treat reporters courteously—who knows?—they may return the favor.

To win positive press, you can't just wait for the phone to ring. If you think you have a good story, sell it. But treat journalists as you would customers: Try to understand their needs. Forget about press releases. Restrain yourself—and the people you pay to praise you—until you have a story likely to interest others. Decide whom to share it with: News organizations compete for a living, and they value most what no one else has. Give your story to the reporter you

judge most likely to get it right. If a number of able people cover your company, try to parcel out the goodies in roughly equal measure. At all times, advises Gerald Meyers, former chairman of American Motors and now a consultant on crisis management, "kill them with kindness."

DON'T THINK of the press as a monolith. When irate businessmen complain about "the media," they are often thinking of television. But even TV is far from monolithic: You can expect different treatment on CBS's *60 Minutes* from what you'll get on ABC's *Nightline*—and your local TV news shows are something else again. The CBS program is put together in the editing room, where your influence may be nil. Audi's U.S. sales have slid 69% since 1986, when *60 Minutes* aired a blistering story on unintended acceleration in the Audi 5000. Today Audi of America CEO Richard Mugg complains, "Our people talked to *60 Minutes*, but their intelligent comments were edited out." *Nightline*, on the other hand, is carried live. Most local TV stations and the networks' evening news shows use a format so condensed that you may get no more than one sentence on the air: the renowned ten-second sound bite. Ridiculous, perhaps, but a fact of life.

One reason so many executives fear television is that in its haste to communicate, it often treats them roughly. Says *Nightline* anchor Ted Koppel: "There are lots of people who clearly are brilliant leaders in the corporate world who don't communicate very well with people they can't order around. They are right to be afraid of television, because TV sees right through that. If they come on a program, they should expect to be worked over." A CEO may not find that prospect enticing.

Don Hewitt, executive producer of *60 Minutes*, characteristically goes much further than Koppel: "If you have anything to hide and are the least bit unsure of yourself, don't go near the press. If I went into PR, my business would center on telling people to say no."

Hewitt goes too far. There are sound reasons to appear on TV. When a company urgently needs to communicate with a mass audience, TV can be a godsend—as it was for Johnson & Johnson during the Tylenol scare. Recently retired CEO James Burke helped save the brand with his frequent appearances. Says he: "If you've got nothing to hide, I don't see it as risky at all." Often TV appearances simply can't be declined without giving the impression of stonewalling. Video press releases—the canned statements that Drexel Burnham Lambert and other companies sometimes distribute—are easy to control, but TV stations sometimes try to avoid or discredit them. Better to train one of your senior officers in the ways of video and make him or her available.

The print media, while less fearsome, are harder to avoid. Most major corporations routinely deal with trade publications, newspaper beat reporters, and the national magazines. Repeated contact with the companies they cover can make print journalists more knowledgeable and their reporting more balanced. Executives who deal regularly with the business press generally agree that it has become more professional and sophisticated in the past decade.

Still, journalism as a whole suffers from what one PR man dryly terms "low barriers to entry," as well as a tradition of on-the-job training. To be sure, standards are high and competition fierce at the major publications and broadcast outlets, and some business journalists have MBAs. But one of a reporter's main qualifications remains the ability to persuade an editor to hire him or her, and even the best publications occasionally field reporters whom businessmen justly regard as scarcely competent. Complains a veteran newshound who became an airline PR man: "It's surprising how few reporters know anything about what they are talking about." To the degree his charge is valid, it highlights the need for executives to educate the reporters who cover them. The task ranges from holding meetings with

editors to sitting down with a reporter for an hour or so and patiently explaining why you used pooling-of-interest accounting in your latest acquisition. Such efforts are time-consuming and sometimes boring, but in the long run they pay off in better stories.

An executive is wise to approach new relationships with reporters cautiously. At the touch of a button, anyone with access to a database such as Nexis can call up stories from hundreds of publications, making it easy to research a journalist's work. If doubt remains, pick up the phone and talk to someone whom the reporter has already interviewed. Nothing, however, beats a personal relationship.

Never assume that a reporter's interests are aligned with yours. Journalists are peculiar in some ways; for example, many a reporter is not highly motivated by money. According to *TJFR* (*The Journalist & Financial Reporting*), a business-press newsletter, print journalists start out earning roughly \$29,000 a year and average \$48,000. Talented journalists top out at levels well below what they might hope to earn in other fields. The disparity may not itself

be important, but it suggests the breadth of the gulf that distances reporters from their subjects.

Remember—and this often isn't easy—that that humbly paid reporter is the one in control. Present your case and respond to questions with all the charm and conviction you can muster, but don't relax completely. It's hard to know what the reporter thinks, so ask. Usually you'll get a straight answer. It's particularly useful to ask a reporter what he or she feels the negative points of the article will be, so you get a chance to respond. Any PR consultant will tell you to start worrying when the reporter closes the notebook on the way to the elevator: That's when countless interviewees let down their guard and utter terribly damaging statements. When Truman Capote, a reporter of consummate skill, profiled Marlon Brando for the *New Yorker*, Capote softened him up by recounting intimate, even lurid, details about his own life—and Brando responded in kind. Capote of course printed mainly Brando's side of the conversation, and the remark-



Ted Koppel of ABC's *Nightline*: "If businessmen come on a program, they should expect to be worked over."

ably revealing story horrified the actor.

In this strange relationship you are not the only vulnerable one. Dean Rotbart, 32, a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter who publishes the *TJFR* newsletter, says, "Reporters can be bought," and cynically suggests that executives start shopping. Money, he notes, is rarely the medium of exchange. Most often the currency is infor-

mation, which executives possess and reporters need.

In return for sharing what they know executives expect fair treatment in print. Some get more. Rotbart points out that inside trader Ivan Boesky and his accomplice Martin Siegel routinely shared information with many reporters on the Wall Street beat, while Michael Milken, the dethroned king of junk bonds, remained aloof. For years, argues Rotbart, the press seized every available shred of damning information about Milken, yet ignored signs that Boesky and Siegel might be crooks.

The rules of dealing with the press become doubly important in time of crisis. Audi said little after *60 Minutes'* devastating report, then seemed to blame its customers for their injuries by citing driver error as the culprit. "We were rolled over till we looked like a toad on a highway," says Mugg, the car company's fourth U.S. chief executive in less than two years. He has changed course dramatically, castigating the press and planning to advertise the results of a recent study by the National

FOURTEEN WAYS TO DEAL WITH THE PRESS

- **Make the CEO responsible for press relations.** That means he must often speak for the corporation, routinely and in times of crisis, and delegate enough authority to make the PR spokesman a credible source.
- **Face the facts.** If you screw up, admit it candidly. Avoid hedging or excuses. Apologize, promise not to do it again, and explain how you're going to make things right.
- **Consider the public interest in every operating decision.** Your reputation depends far more on what you do than on what you say. Act accordingly. Try giving your senior PR expert a seat at the table when decisions are made.
- **Be a source before you are a subject.** The time to make friends with reporters is long before trouble hits. Get to know the people who cover your company, educate them, help them with their stories, and give them reason to respect you. Determine which journalists deserve your respect and trust.
- **If you want your views represented, you have to talk.** Reporters are paid to get stories, whether you help or not. When you clam up, they must depend on other sources—often people like that marketing VP you fired last month.
- **Respond fast.** You can't influence a story once its deadline has passed. Nor will you appear credible if you seem to be stalling. In a crisis, figure you have a day to get your story out.
- **Cage your lawyers.** They will always tell you to keep your mouth shut. But in many crisis situations your potential legal liability may be trivial compared with the risk of alienating your customers, employees, or regulators.
- **Tell the truth—or nothing.** Nobody likes a liar.
- **Don't expect to bat 1,000.** PR is a game of averages, so be content if you win most of the time. Even the most flattering

story will likely have a zinger or two, and even the best companies get creamed now and then.

- **Don't take it personally.** The reporter is neither your enemy nor your friend: He or she is an intermediary between you and the people you need to reach. And forget about your ego—nobody cares about it but you.
- **Control what you can.** Release the bad news yourself—before some reporter digs it up. Use your selective availability to reporters as a tool. Set ground rules every time you talk. If the public isn't buying your message, change it.
- **Know whom you're dealing with.** The press is not monolithic. TV is different from print, magazines are different from newspapers, and the *Austin American-Statesman* is different from the *Wall Street Journal*. Within a news organization will be a normal mix of individuals, some honorable and competent, some not. Do your homework on journalists before you talk to them, reviewing their past work and talking to other executives they have covered.
- **Avoid TV unless you feel free to speak candidly.** Even then, learn to present your views in the ten-second sound bites that are the building blocks of TV stories. Use simple declarative sentences and ignore subtleties. Whenever possible favor live TV shows over those that can edit your remarks.
- **Be human.** Reporters—and the public—usually will be more sympathetic to a person than to a corporation. If you can do it without lying or making an ass of yourself, reveal yourself as a person with feelings: Your mistakes will as likely be forgiven as criticized. Insist on being judged on a human scale, with normal human fallibility taken into account. Remember that people love to root for underdogs.

Highway Traffic Safety Administration that buttresses Audi's case. He may be too late.

The biggest mistake a company can make is to recoil from the truth. It is a normal human reaction and, according to a former journalist who runs public relations at a major Wall Street investment firm, a common problem for executives. "I never see lies and deception," he says. "Most people in the corporate world believe in what they do. But there's a lot of self-hypnosis."

DECLARING WAR on the press, tempting as it may sometimes be, is a game you can't win. Says crisis consultant Meyers: "You can't fight the press—it's foolish even to think about it. It is bigger than you no matter how big you are." Forbidding future contact with an organization you feel has mistreated you usually accomplishes nothing. Even married people can get divorced, but you and the media have no choice but to go on living with each other. Much better to try to talk things out.

Textbook case on how *not* to deal with the press: Exxon's unfortunate handling of the Alaska oil spill. The crisis merits study, for its lessons apply broadly to press relations. When Rawl argues that he faced a PR disaster as soon as his ship hit the reef, he has a point. But Exxon's blackened image also stems from an apparent inability to accept

full responsibility for its mistakes, an attitude that fostered a deadly series of PR blunders. Exxon's reputation might have survived the spill if Rawl, a forceful and hitherto highly regarded manager, had only grasped the problem he faced.

The essence of Exxon's wrongheadedness shows up in the well-intentioned full-page ads the company ran ten days after the accident. Rawl, who signed the ads, preceded his apology with an assertion that Exxon had acted "swiftly and competently" to clean up the spill. Perhaps—pending investigations will determine the answer—but that claim seemed to be contradicted by overwhelming evidence of Exxon's incompetence, from the unqualified third mate steering the ship to the inadequate cleanup plan. The journalist who visits Exxon

finds earnest, chastened executives—but no one willing to admit how badly the company's operations people screwed up. Elliot Cattarulla, VP for corporate and public affairs, eloquently misses the point: "We have always prided ourselves on being quietly competent. We depended on our competence and performance shining through.

Maybe we should have been more vociferous." On the contrary—the company should have acknowledged its mistakes and put the problem behind it. In context, the apology had no heft.

Rawl's inability to consider his situation from the public's point of view led to much folly. At first he seemed to be hiding from the press. The only way to seize control of a situation like this is to step right into the spotlight and fess up. Instead, for six days, as reporters around the world spread the news of wheezing waterfowl and oil slicks the size of states, the most visible Exxon spokesman was Frank Iarossi, the head of the company's obscure shipping division.

Then, when Rawl entered public view, speaking to PBS's *MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour*, *FORTUNE*, and others, he some-

times made matters worse with heedless remarks. On *CBS This Morning*, for example, he said it was not his job to know details of the highly technical cleanup plan. His point was valid, but he would have done better to emit a nine-second sound bite about what he *did* know. On the defensive, Rawl attacked bureaucrats in the Coast Guard and the government, accusing them of delaying the cleanup. The tactic backfired: The bureaucrats, enraged that Exxon was shifting the blame, have taken every opportunity to castigate the company. An Exxon PR staffer summed it up, "In the first few days we dealt with the problem, not the perception."

The bottom line, which is not exactly news, is that dealing with the press means dealing with perception. That may be uncomfortable for executives used to communicating hard facts. Certainly trying to convey perceptions through the filters of reporters, editors, and producers is risky. But it is less risky, on balance, than not trying. Just as signed contracts cannot always prevent disputes, so relationships with journalists sometimes lead to unsatisfactory outcomes. That's life. When the story turns out bad, firing the PR person is no solution. Neither is holding a grudge or pulling your ads from the offending publication. This is a game for grownups. If a reporter wrongs you, complain forcefully to the perpetrator and, if necessary, a higher-up. But take a peek out the window first, and make sure the oil slick spreading out there isn't yours. ■

Saying little is better than saying nothing, and explaining why you can't talk is better than stonewalling.

TALKING TO REPORTERS: A GLOSSARY

■ **Negotiate ground rules** with reporters before you volunteer information. Knowing these definitions will help.

■ **Off the record** material may not be published or broadcast, period. Don't go off the record casually or with anyone you don't have reason to trust.

■ **Not for attribution** information may be published, but without revealing the identity of the source. Always specify whether that applies to your company as well as to you. Nail down the attribution the reporter will use—"a member of Acme Corp.'s two-man executive committee" vs. "an industry expert"—before you open your mouth.

■ **Background** usually means not for attribution, but don't take that for granted. Discuss it with the reporter.

■ **Deep background** usually means off the record. Again, make sure.

■ **Just between us** and other ambiguous phrases mean little to reporters. Don't use them.

■ **Check it with me before you use it** means just what it says. Specify whether the restriction applies to quotations as well as facts. When the reporter checks back, you have the right to correct errors and misunderstandings, but not to withdraw statements you now regret.

■ **Read it to me before you use it** gives you no right even to correct errors. All you get is advance warning of what the reporter will use.

■ **No** means that you have decided not to answer a reporter's question. Used judiciously, this is a lifesaver.

Rex,

9/27

FYI

Kym

Document Originally
Attached to
Following Page

Design for people of all ages and all abilities
BARRIER free ENVIRONMENTS

Propagated

September 13, 1995

Ms. Diane Lucas
 Programming Director
 WUNC-TV
 Post Office Box 14900
 Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-4900

Dear Ms. Lucas:

On Monday of this week, I faxed to your attention a flyer describing a Public Television production out of Houston, Texas which is being made available to PBS stations nationwide (another copy is enclosed). The name of this particular offering is *REAL LIFE*. Produced in a forum format that addresses independent living by people with disabilities it is comprised of four (4) separate 30-minute programs. *REAL LIFE* premiered in Houston this past July with excellent success.

This year represents the fifth year of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), so the timing of this series is right. Also, October is National Disability Awareness Month. I would certainly hope that our local PBS station is scheduling some programming in recognition of this event. I would like to suggest folding this series into any other programs you may be considering. I think the community would be very interested.

Statistically, there are currently 49 million people with disabilities (documented) in this country which represents about 17% of the population. Of those 17%, 6% have mobility disabilities. It is estimated that 85% of all Americans will suffer some kind of disability, either temporary or permanent, at some time in their lives. Currently, many view people with disabilities in negative ways. Strides have been made to turn this attitude around, but unfortunately, the negative connotations still prevail. This series not only addresses many of these issues, but touches on issues affecting ALL people. The portion on Universal Design is a clear example -- by incorporating the principles of universal design, life is made easier for everyone regardless of age, size, or ability. For instance, in residential design, children on through the elderly (whose mobility may be affected by age alone) benefit. The term "Universal Design" was coined by Mr. Ron Mace, President of Barrier Free Environments, Inc. located in Raleigh. He was a member of the expert panel for the program on Universal Design. Enclosed is a bit of information to further introduce you to Mr. Mace.

This *REAL LIFE* series deals with information about people with disabilities by people with disabilities. It is done in a unique and informative way that helps convey and reinforce positive and realistic images of people with disabilities. It's a powerful vehicle for influencing the general public's attitudes toward and perceptions of people with disabilities. It could be used as a vehicle for getting people, both with and without disabilities, to focus on and join in advocating issues which affect them. Perhaps a discussion group made up of local people with varying disabilities could follow the series. It could be designed to address the ways these national issues impact the lives of people with disabilities within our immediate community.

If I can provide more information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Cheryl McConnell

Cheryl McConnell

Enclosures

Post-it Fax Note	7671	Date	9-14-95	# of pages	1
To	Tajana Dunning	From	Cheryl McConnell		
Co./Dept.		Co.	BFE		
Phone #		Phone	919-782-7823		
Fax #	713-520-5785	Fax	919-787-1984		

Calls re REAL LIFE download from satellite:

- 1) We got a call (Dorothy McDowell 908/255-2733) from Ocean County, New Jersey who received the REAL LIFE letter. Wanted to know who/what number to call--call was a little strange--Laura had a directory of all PBS stations in U.S. and called her back. The lady had a meeting with several people with disabilities tomorrow and wanted to be able to tell them about it.
- 2) FYI. We got another call from Mr. Penn Cline, Pegasys Community Access in Enid, OK. (405) 237-0099. Friend of Lou B. of Sandra Beasley Disabled Adults Center, re REAL LIFE. He wanted to know if he could record the show if he could download it from the satellite? Laura said it was ok since he was from OK, and since we weren't getting royalties from it. She thought it's best to get it out to the people.
- 3) Debbie Bajaun (sp?) DD Council in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. (504) 342-6803. Has questions re REAL LIFE. Gave message to Laura.
- 4) Lori Jerrals (sp?) Director of SW Center for Independence in Durango, CO (970) 259-1672. It's all cable up there--not sure how to get it. They are out of the loop. Gave message to Laura.
- 5) Leslie Gall in Steve Tremblay's office called with questions. Referred her to Laura.
- 6) Sherri Nance of the Lighthouse of Houston called to get the dates of the showing on Channel 8 in Houston. (Sundays, Oct 1, 8, 29, Nov. 5, 5 p.m.)
- 7) Deanne Porchay, Resources to IL, ILC in New Orleans, LA. (504) 522-1955. Interested in getting this into our community. Has some questions. Had Laura call her back.
- 8) Cindy Cupit, McComb, Mississippi, (601) 684-3079. Lives in a small town. Has called several PBS stations and none of them are planning on showing it--she doesn't think they know how to download it off the satellite. Had Laura call her back.
- 9) Dan Johnson (608) 267-9582. Called to clarify which month to notify PBS people. I pointed out on the flyer the September 19 & 20 dates.
- 10) Rick Considine, New Jersey Protection and Advocacy (609) 292-9742. Received a delayed letter. Is it too late to contact the PBS station?
- 11) Center for Accessible Living in Murray, Kentucky (502) 753-7676 re the REAL LIFE series. She did not leave a name.
- 12) Leslie, College of Alameda Disabled Students Program, Alameda, Calif. (510) 748-2103. Received the wonderful letter and great flyer. Wants the name and number to contact.

- 13) Kay Carroll, Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation, Wichita, Kansas, (316) 688-1888. She's training coordinator. Dr. Leslie (her boss) wants to get it down-loaded. The University where she works has the capability to do this. Is this ok to do? They also have an apartment complex for people with disabilities. This would really get disseminated to many people.
- 14) Julie Reffage, a rehab hospital in PA. (412) 749-2235 or leave a message. Needs info on the REAL LIFE series. Is our PBS station carrying this?
- 15) Vicki Turner, Montana (406) 444-4175, re REAL LIFE. Needs to know who to contact and what ban, audio transmitter, and transmitter telestar. Gave message to Laura to call.
- 16) Andrew Balbor (202) 388-0034 re REAL LIFE. What channel in the DC area would that be? Gave message to Laura to call.
- 17) Eva LaBouff, (504) 389-3114, Baton Rouge, LA, City of Baton Rouge. Parish attorneys office. Gave message to Laura to call.
- 18) Joan Patterson (804) 485-8466. Gave message to Laura to call.
- 19) Woman in Professor's office at the University of Delaware called to say their PBS station wasn't carrying the REAL LIFE show, so she was wondering how she could get it. I told her it would be on sale for \$80 for all four shows. Call ILRU and ask for Tajauna to order or Laura for questions.
- 20) Mike Prokop, Cordeley, Idaho, (208) 64-6761 called to say he received the letter dated August 25 on Saturday, Sept. 16--what can he do in 2 days? He was a little upset. I told him that I was sorry he just got it, but we had to have a mailing service send out the letters and there may have been a delay there. I told him I'd have Laura call him with contact people at his local PBS station.
- 21) Gary Owens, Las Cruces, (505) 526-5016. Needs more info on REAL LIFE. Gave message to Laura to call.
- 22) ***Needs a call back after the show. Betty Gary, (309) 378-2961 Accent on Living magazine. For her December issue, would like any feedback from the viewers, and number of viewers they may have gotten.
- 23) David Moore, Rehab Services, West Virginia (304) 766-4907. He's tried to pick up REAL LIFE at 6:00, but his local PBS station is not going to carry it. Can you tell him how to pick it up off the satellite? Gave the message to Laura.
- 24) Damien Pickerey (sp?) Coordinator for Telecommunication Services Dept. at the Rose Wesnic Lighthouse for the Blind, San Francisco, CA, (415) 431-1481 X250. His local PBS station, KQUD (?) doesn't have it in their data base as an option to put it on--where should they be looking for it? They want to support it. Gave the message to Laura.

- 25) Gene Cramer, Minnesota Rehab Services, (612) 296-1718. Received the letter re REAL LIFE. Sounds interesting. Will contact their PBS station, but not sure if enough time--will it be available for broadcast later? is this the actual broadcast? Gave the message to Laura.
- 26) Elizabeth Spencer, (305) 759-8500, Association for Retarded Citizens of South Florida, has some questions re REAL LIFE series. Gave the message to Laura.
- 27) Lucy in Pittsburgh. Just informed about the PBS 4-part series. Would like to know if it is too late to contact her PBS station. I told her to call them and ask. If she had other questions, please call Laura Smith. (I asked if Laura could call first, she said she'd check with the station first.)