

W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Food Systems and Rural Development

SPOKESPERSON TRAINING



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Pointers for Public Speakers

- **Eye Contact.** The reason you maintain eye contact with your audience is for feedback. The only way you'll know if your audience is getting the message is through eye contact. Look for eyes and heads nodding with you.
- **Smile.** Did your body language say you were approachable? It did if you smiled (at appropriate times).
- **Body Language.** A picture is worth a thousand words. Defensive body language is exhibited by "arms crossed," a fig leaf stand, or a military stance. These are all negative. Positive body language is seen through openness, gestures, moving away from the podium (unless you can't take your microphone with you), and taking off your jacket, if appropriate.
- **Don't forget that being nervous is normal.** Try to "reframe" your fear into excitement and enthusiasm.
- **Facial Expression.** It is impossible to hide your feelings when you talk about something you really care about. The kind of passion people feel and exhibit when they talk about their loved ones, their mate or children is the same passion that should be harnessed when talking about your issues. That kind of passion gives off energy, and energy makes you convincing.
- **Gestures.** Gestures help tell the story. Remember, 50 percent of what people retain is through your body language. Gestures reinforce and highlight your story and give you energy in your delivery.
- **Voice.** You have six different octaves — use them. Avoid non-fluencies such as "uhms," "ahs," and "you knows." Never try to camouflage a regional dialect. All you have to do is tell people where you're from and they'll expect you to sound the way you do.
- **Pauses/Silence.** There are four good times to pause: when you move from one subject to another; when you want the message to sink in; when you want or need to collect your thoughts; and when you receive laughter or applause.
- **Use of Humor.** Jokes and anecdotes make for an entertaining speech, but make sure you practice them. Choose material carefully, and never tell "off-color" jokes.
- **Avoid Distractions.** Don't fiddle with your hair, shuffle your feet, sway back and forth, jingle change in your pockets, or play with your eyeglasses.
- **Content.** Share information about yourself up front. This personalizes you to the audience and they feel that they know you. The introduction should be 15 percent of your speech, the discussion about 75 percent, and the closing, 10 percent.
- **Practice.** Practice, practice, practice. If possible, spend time alone just prior to your speech; take some deep breaths and think about your central theme.
- **Remember: you are the expert on your own story.** People have come to hear you talk about what you know.

An Interviewee's Rights

A spokesperson does have certain rights. Agreeing to an interview with the media does not mean waiving your right to courtesy and respect. Indeed, the vast majority of producers and reporters are professionals who appreciate your willingness to participate and will gladly agree to reasonable requests.

You have a right to:

- **Determine the scope of the interview.** What topics will be covered? Is the interviewer interested in your personal views, or will he/she stick to the subject at hand?
- **Know the show's format.** Is it taped or live? Will there be a studio audience? Will there be call-in questions from the public, and will they be screened? How long should answers be?
- **Know the length of the interview.** If the show is live, you probably will be given an approximate length; if it is taped, you have the right to know how much of the interview will be used. Knowing the length of the interview in advance helps you prepare appropriate answers to questions you anticipate.
- **Ask the producer or interviewer what specific subject areas will be covered,** understanding that you may not be given all the questions. Hosts usually discuss the issues they will touch upon ahead of time. If not, be prepared for difficult questions.
- **Pursue your objective.** When you agree to be interviewed, let the producer or reporter know of your objectives in being interviewed. If you are promoting a program or particular point of view, and time is getting short, you have the right to steer the conversation so that your concerns are met.
- **Offer visual materials** to enhance your presentation. Producers often welcome slides, film clips, photos, charts, and videotapes because they spice up programs. Some stations in small markets are not equipped to handle such materials; others may reject them for format reasons. Most talk shows, however, like visuals, which give you an excellent vehicle to illustrate your message.
- **Monitor the reporter's "cut-away" questions** in a taped news interview. Most of these interviews are shot with one camera, so reporters tape their questions after the interview is completed. Later, the tape is edited into the interview to give the impression that two cameras were used. Sometimes, a reporter alters questions. You have the right to be present while the questions are taped, and to object should they differ from the actual interview.
- **State your message.** You do not need to wait for the interviewer to ask the questions that will lead to the message she or he wishes to deliver. Take advantage of a pause in the interview to make a point. If interrupted before having a fair chance to answer the question, the interviewee has a right to complete the answer. Be polite, but firm. Use transitions to return to your message points.

An Interviewee's Rights, continued

- **Take control of the interview.** Don't be intimidated by a big-name journalist or a network producer. It might be their show, but it's your issue. You are the expert, and she or he can make the interview exciting by being assertive and enthusiastic. Use transitions.
- **Know who the other guests will be** on a talk show and their order of appearance.
- **Ask for a videotape** of what was aired once the show is over. Bring a VHS tape with you to the studio to make a duplicate on the spot. Radio stations may provide you with a cassette of the program. Many cities have monitoring services that will tape any show if you contact them in advance with air time and date. You also can ask someone in your *office or family* to tape the show.

Interview Skills: How to Stay in Control

- **Your campaign messages should form the basis of the agenda** that you want to get across in your interview. Remember that you are the expert and you are in charge.
- **Listen to the question.** People speak 125-150 words per minute. The brain processes 400 wpm. What do we do with the extra time? We start formulating our answer. Focus on what the person is asking.
- **If you don't understand the question, ask the reporter to repeat it.** This gives you time to think.
- **If you don't know the answer, say so.** But offer to get the information, and then make an appropriate transition to your message point.
- **You can't be quoted if you don't say it.**
- **Bat down any wrong information before answering the question.** Silence gives consent.
- **Never say "No comment."** Translation: guilty as charged. Explain if material is confidential, or refer to another agency, when appropriate.
- **KISS.** Keep it short and simple.
- **Don't answer statements.**
- **"Yes," "no," and "I don't know" are perfectly good answers.** Then transition to your information or reemphasize your message.
- **Don't answer speculative questions** unless you feel extremely confident about the future.
- **Personalize what you are saying,** and try to be informal. If you must use technical terms, explain them, and try to provide an analogy that the interviewer—and the audience—can relate to.
- **Multiple-part questions are the easiest to answer.** Answer those parts of the question you feel comfortable with and then move to the next question.
- **Don't volunteer more information than the question requires.**
- **If you know the reporter's name, use it, but not too often.**
- **You don't have to answer a reporter's hostile question.** Rephrase it and move on. Don't repeat the negative (for example, "I'm not a crook").
- **If you make a mistake, stay calm, admit it, and correct it promptly.**
- **Don't allow yourself to be interrupted.**



Interview Skills: How to Stay in Control, continued

- **Never answer for another person's organization.**
- **Remember, you are in control of the interview.**
- **Have printed materials to offer the producer or reporter that reinforce your message points.**

Remember Your SOCO (Single Overriding Communications Objective)

We've all experienced the luncheon speaker who presents way too much information—most of it over our heads. Or we've seen a TV talk show guest who has two minutes to get a point across but loses the opportunity because the interviewer led him or her on a tangent, ignoring the core message.

Studies have shown that an audience retains one, maybe two, key messages from a speech or presentation. Taking this into consideration and recognizing the inherent time limitations on all presentations, you must maximize the time you have to present your information.

To use your time efficiently and to ensure that your audience understands your key points, you need to first identify up to three messages that you wish to communicate through your presentation. One way to approach this task is to develop a "SOCO"—Single Overriding Communications Objective—for your program as a whole.

- The SOCO reflects your core program goals—the critical information about your project that you want to leave your audience with after a presentation or interview.
- SOCOs will help you organize your thoughts; after that, if necessary, you can develop a more targeted set of messages that tie to your SOCO to an individual speech or presentation.
- SOCOs are the reason you do a presentation or interview. If all roads lead back to your core communications objective, there will be no doubt in the audience's mind about what you stand for and how you want them to think and behave.
- Don't let reporters lead you away from your SOCOs. When an interviewer tries to lead you astray, use transitions to get back to your main point.
- SOCOs can also help you achieve the "KISS" principle—Keep It Short and Simple. People are flooded with information, both audio and visual; what is not immediately understood is often discarded. Only a small percentage of what is heard is retained, so make sure what you say is brief and crystal clear.

If you understand your SOCO thoroughly and can communicate it persuasively, you will be a dynamic spokesperson for your program.

Transitions: How to Keep an Interview Focused

In an interview, you need to have specific ideas to deliver to the audience. Set your agenda by listing the five basic points or messages you want the audience to know. The interviewer, of course, has her or his own agenda for the interview, and it may or may not mesh with yours. Nothing dilutes the strength of your messages—and loses the audience—like a tangential discussion. If your interviewer begins to stray from the point you want to make, use **transitions** to get back on track.

Simple transitions:

- “The real issue is . . .”
- “Let me explain . . .”
- “I’m also frequently asked . . .”
- “Let me add . . .”
- “A common concern is . . .”
- “For example . . .”
- “You should also know that . . .”
- “Equally important . . .”
- “One point I believe your listeners would be interested in . . .”
- “You can go one step further . . .”

Quotable Quotes: The Sound Bite

The **sound bite** is a product of the broadcast medium, where the day's news must be compressed into short segments that are strung together to give a brief overview of the day's events. Interviews, reporting, and coverage for news events and even lengthier programs are shortened to fit into tightly monitored time slots. With on-air time at a premium, the spokesperson who can convey a message in a lively sentence or two is more likely to be quoted than someone who rambles. It takes practice. Few people know how to talk in 12-second sound bites without practice.

Even in print interviews with reporters, colorful quotes and good one-liners are more likely to appear than lengthy and lackluster explanations. Reporters, editors, and headline writers like punchy lines and quotable phrases. Clichés and sayings often are used—check your local newspaper to see how sound bites are used.

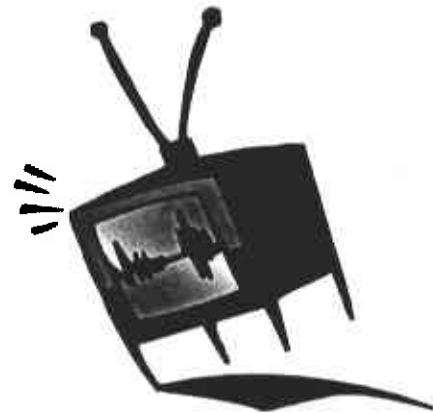
To help you become more quotable, follow these nine tips developed by Michael Sheehan Associates, Inc. of Washington, D.C.

- **Avoid exaggerations or puffery.** Give specific examples.
- **Use analogies.** The more homespun the better, especially on complex issues.
- **Use "The Three Cs."** Colorful words, Clichés, and Contemporary references.
- **Use one-liners.** Practice them and be prepared.
- **Use absolutes, superlatives, and summary lines if you can back them up.** Reporters and editors love "the best...," "the first...," "the only...," and "the greatest..."
- **Use proportionate numbers, or approximate numbers** ("about one-quarter," "nearly a thousand"). If a reporter needs the exact number, he or she will ask.
- **Use personal statements and anecdotes.** They reaffirm your authority and are difficult to challenge.
- **Quote your "enemies,"** especially if they agree with you. Your friends will always be on your side. If your enemy agrees with you, you've got a story.
- **Include a second-person perspective.** Let the reader or viewer know what will happen to her or him.



Special Tips for Television

- **Moderate gestures help make you interesting.** Smiling, pointing, and nodding are good to drive home a major point. Avoid nervous or exaggerated movements and keep your hands away from your face.
- **Microphones are sensitive.** Most TV stations use small clip-on mikes attached to your lapel or tie. If you move around a lot, or put your hand on or near the mike, it may sound to your audience like the tide is coming in. Don't talk into the mike, it will pick up your voice easily.
- **Use visuals—slides, maps, photographs, diagrams, and props.** Talk with the producer in advance to see what visuals are appropriate for station equipment and program format.
- **Simple, uncluttered artwork, and photographs televise best.** Take care to assure good contrast. Otherwise, graphics may be lost against the background. At least two steps of separation on the gray scale are needed for a strong impact.
- **Printing should be in bold heavy lines with a minimum of words.** Dull, matte-finish surfaces are more satisfactory than glossies, which reflect light.
- **Give the viewer a good chance to see any item by showing it steadily and slowly, pointing it in the direction of the camera with the red light on.**
- **Everything you do will be magnified. Pick a straight chair, if possible and sit slightly forward in your seat.** Keep your feet together and don't slouch. If standing—for a press conference or similar event—lean slightly forward and let your arms hang by your side.
- **Act as if you are on camera at all times.** Look at your interviewer throughout, not at the TV monitor or camera.
- **Imagine a good friend is in the place of the TV camera and talk in a conversational tone.**
- **Show the enthusiasm you have for your subject.**



Appearance Counts

When appearing on television, your attire should be pleasing, appropriate to the setting, and not distracting. Let your words be the focus, not your clothes. Wear a style and cut in which you feel comfortable.

Women

- Choose strong blues, grays, wines, and earth tones. Don't wear black, white, red, or pale pastels.
- Wear a matched suit or a dress in one solid color or other neat casual clothing for a sleek line. Avoid stripes, prints, and plaids; they jump out at the audience.
- Choose a comfortable skirt length, with enough fullness to drape well when you are seated.
- Avoid shiny fabrics and glittery jewelry, both of which glint blindingly on the television screen.
- Make sure your hair is carefully styled and doesn't hide your face in any way. If you dye it, remember that television lights are merciless with dark roots, so get a touch up.
- You'll need to wear more makeup than usual. Shading and eye makeup must be artfully applied and colors must be subtle—no aqua eye shadows, frosty blushers, or slick lip gloss.

Men

- Wear a well-tailored suit or neat casual clothing in a deep color such as navy, brown, or gray, and make sure that your tie and lapel widths reflect the current fashion. Also, watch for ties that are too short. Ties should come to the belt buckle.
- Select a quality tie in a quiet design that won't vibrate on screen. A blue, rose, or beige shirt is better than white.
- Think texture. Suits made of nubby wools or other "touchable" weaves look rich on television.
- Avoid busy stripes, plaids, and herringbone tweeds.
- Don't wear short socks that expose skin when you cross your legs.
- Men should also avoid bright jewelry, including tie bars.

Appearance Counts, continued

- Take care of your hair. Consider a neat, contemporary look. If you are bald, you can powder the shine from the head, but don't be self-conscious.
- Men need makeup too, in order to even out skin tones and define your features.
- Moustaches and beards should be kept trimmed. People usually photograph best if the entire top lip shows.

Tips for Radio Interviews

- **Focus on your words.** Be precise. Every “uh” and “er” is magnified. Use a normal conversational tone.
- **Remember—you can’t win them over with a smile.** Gestures don’t help, and nodding “yes” or “no” is a waste of time. Sounding friendly on radio is important, but it’s harder to sound friendly than to be friendly. Smiling while you talk will help give the right quality to your voice, but remember it’s the voice that counts.
- **Be personal.** As far as the listener is concerned, you are sitting in their living room or car. Don’t shout; don’t preach; don’t give a speech.
- **Maintain a distance** of 6-8 inches from the microphone.
- **Avoid shuffling pages.**



"Off-the-Record" Should You or Shouldn't You?

There is no such thing as "off-the-record." If you are promoting a program or initiative, there should be no item under discussion that can't be reported. The best way to handle off-the-record interviews is simple: don't give them.

If, however, you *must* go off-the-record for some reason (background, for example), remember to be explicit with the reporter about the ground rules. The chances of getting burned are great; you must establish exactly what kind of information you are providing. Here are several off-the-record terms you may want to clarify with the reporter:

- **Background briefing.** A briefing provided only for the reporter's edification to provide general background in covering the story or subject. The material is not intended for immediate publication or airing.
- **Deep background.** A briefing or interview intended to be used as part of a story. However, the source of the information (by name or organization) should not be mentioned in the story. No quotes are allowed.
- **Not for attribution.** A briefing or interview in which the source's name may not be used but everything else is on-the-record.



Spokesperson Training Resources



Spokespersons Book Resources:

Spokesperson : A Public Appearance Primer by Ken W. Huskey, Paperback 2nd Ed. edition, May 1986, K W Huskey Assoc. (ISBN: 0960484019)

Successful Spokespersons Are Made, Not Born: How to Control the Direction of Media Interviews and Deliver Winning Presentations by Hal Hart, Paperback, 100 pages, June 2000, Unknown. (ISBN: 1587213664)

Speechwriting Resources:

How to Write & Give a Speech, by Joan Detz, St. Martin's Press (NY), 1984. \$11.95

The Elements of Speechwriting and Public Speaking, by Jeff Scott Cook, Collier Books/McMillan Publishing Company (NY), 1989. \$10.95

Never Be Nervous Again, by Dorothy Samoff, Faucett Columbine (NY), 1997. \$17.95

Other Related Sources:

How to Handle Media Interviews by Andrew Boyd. Hardcover, April 1992, Mercury Books. (ISBN: 1852510609)

The Media Jungle : A Survival Guide by Carrie VanDyke, Spiral-bound, 87 pages, 1 edition, December 1996, Media Masters. (ISBN: 0966527402)