



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Celebrating Animals | Confronting Cruelty

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HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL

Homes for Horses, Pre-Expo 2010, Nashville, TN

Basic Media Training and Strategy

[Markarian Clip](#)



Why Bother?

Because Communication Matters

- Visibility defines how community sees us
- Media coverage forms a first impression for new supporters, adopters, donors
- Positive media exposure increases support base/donations
- Every story is an opportunity.



Are Reporters the Enemy?

- Almost everyone has had a bad experience with the press, “being burned.”
- Makes it hard to trust a reporter again.
- So don’t trust them. Learn what they want and how to use it to your advantage.



The Reporter's Goal

- The bottom line is most reporters have one goal -- to get a good, interesting story -- and they need your help.
- Spell it out ---what is the news and why should I care?



Getting “the Call”

- Whether you or another staff person get a call or e-mail from a reporter, find out:
 - What is the subject of their story? Do they have an angle?
 - How can you help? What do they need from you?
 - How much of your time do they need?
 - What is their deadline?
 - Who else are they talking to?
- Don't talk without preparation. Postpone!
- Make an excuse, schedule a time to talk later.



The Game Plan

- Start with the end: What do you want to see in the story?
- Develop 2-3 messages that you want to get across no matter what the questions are.
- Specific -- clear call-to-action.
- While you can't script an interview, you control what you say.
- And, there are fewer variables than you think.
- Always take an opportunity to offer final comment



Message Example

Reporter is doing a story about horse slaughter. Possible messages:

- Horses are a symbol of American pride. They've carried us into battle, helped us deliver the first mail and helped us settle the west. They deserve better than this.
- Our goal is to educate people about horse ownership.
- Here are the resources we provide.



Getting Ready

- Before you talk with a reporter for the first time
 - Do your homework!
 - What stories have they done before? Do they have a bias or perspective? Have they covered your org?
 - Check their background -- where have they worked?



TV Appearance Tips

- Mainstream, professional image
- Wear a solid shirt, stripes can move on camera
- Neat hair, no big jewelry
- Remove unusual piercings, cover tattoos
- If you wear prescription glasses, clean them
- No sunglasses. Eye contact means trust
- Current logo on shirt or on background
- If they offer makeup, accept. If not, light powder will help.



Practice, Practice, Practice

- More practice = better interviews
 - Get a colleague or friend to play the reporter.
 - Brainstorm the tough questions you expect to be asked.
 - Practice your key messages and bridging to them.
 - Ask your partner to include “curve ball” questions.
 - Don’t memorize words but ideas.



Take It from the Top

- It's smart to take a few minutes at the start of an interview to confirm what the reporter wants to speak about
- Ask them what they think so far about the story. What have they learned from prior interviews?
- Angles are subject to change per new facts, previous interviews, editorial direction, etc.
- Don't be afraid of a little small talk. It can make interview more conversational and less confrontational.



The Playbook

(Block & Bridge)

[Bridging Clip](#)



Think Before You Swing

- Reporters might try and force you to pick between two provided answers, don't feel compelled to pick:

Reporter: "Is it black or is it white?"

Response: "Actually it's gray & here's why..."

- Reporters get to ask what they want. You answer how you want.
- [Leading Clip](#)



Pace

- Speak slowly and hit your key points. Most people start talking faster when they get nervous.
- Don't worry about being perfect in every response. Just keep circling back to your 2-3 messages.
- Print reporters need time to write down your quotes. TV/radio want brief and clear soundbites.



Wash, Rinse and Repeat

- **Repeat and rephrase**
- The more you repeat your 2-3 key messages, the more likely they will be used.
- Bridges can be helpful in repeating yourself gracefully:
 - “To be clear”
 - “Again, for emphasis,”
- Say the same point in a different way. Use multiple examples.



Oops!

- If the reporter says something incorrect, restate it but with the correct info. Remember, reporters are likely to ask uninformed questions.
- If you mess up, just stop and restate your answer.
- In a taped TV or radio interview: always begin again with a complete sentence.
- Quickly bridge between answers:
 - “Let me rephrase that more clearly...”
 - “Let me make sure I’m being accurate...”



Traps

- Off record? “Everything I give you, you can use today.”
- Filling silence = trouble.
- Don’t ever say don’t quote me on that. Or “No Comment.”

[Clinton Clip](#)

- Alternatives:
 - I don’t have the answer, but when I do, I’ll get back to you.
 - I wish I could talk about that, but .. (reason why not.)
 - BRIDGE: We’re not focused on that. We’re dedicating ourselves to [key message].
- Know which type of reporter you have in front of you.



False Premises/Paraphrasing

- If a reporter's question is based on a false assumption, correct the assumption rather than answering the question.

Reporter: "So the increase in wild horses mean the end to slaughter was a bad idea. What do we do about them?"

Possible answer: "We can do better for horses.. Let me tell you what we're doing for wild horses (contraception, hay for horses, etc etc)."

- Paraphrasing can go both ways - if a reporter paraphrases you inaccurately, don't let it slide; take time to politely correct the reporter.



Rapid-Fire Questioning

- If a reporter asks you a long list of questions at once, you don't have to answer them all.
- Try to pick the one(s) you like best -- the one that gives you the best platform for your messages.
- Then make them feed you the rest. "I think you had another question?"



Hypothetical Questions

- Avoid answering hypothetical questions -- don't get drawn in
 - *Reporter: "So if you had to choose between saving one sick horse and three healthy adults, which would you choose?"*
 - *Response: "The choice is never that clear. We try to save as many animals as possible, within our limited budget. But the more money people give, the more we can save."*



Absent Party Ploy

- Avoid buying into questions based on rumors/hearsay.
- You have no idea who the reporter has or hasn't spoken to -- play it safe, don't get dragged in.

Reporter: "I've talked to a lot of people who say Americans should be able to eat what they want. What do you say to that?"

Response: "I can't speak for anyone else, but I can speak to how many of our supporters (#) believe horses should be treated, and Americans on the whole, we know feel the same."



Correcting a Bad Story

- Ask the reporter or editor for a correction if it's factually -- and provably -- incorrect. (*Only for newspapers and mags.*)
- Write a letter-to-the-editor for a newspaper story, or ask supporters to do so.
- Call the reporter and explain the errors. Don't get angry.
- Fill the void. Create some good news.



Letters to the Editor

- In RESPONSE to a news item or other letter.
- Check and follow the rules (word count, deadline, etc)
- Be timely. Respond as soon as possible.
- Keep it short and on-message.
- Be personal/not emotional.
- State your opinion with conviction. Articulate, don't infuriate.
- Be clear.
- Be positive.
- Fact-check.





Other Hints

- If you have a live interviewer, always look at him/her, not the camera. If you only have a camera, focus on it.
- Don't gesture on TV, as it can exaggerate the movement. Instead, nod or shake your head gently.
- Try to avoid filler words like 'um,' and 'well.'
- Do not get upset. Illustrative but professional.
- Try not to argue or debate with reporters.
- Turn off cell phone during interviews, esp. live ones



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Questions?