

# A GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Being interviewed by the media can be positive *if* you know what's expected of you. You can accomplish much for your program and LSS.

## **When a reporter calls you directly ...**

Take down the reporter's name and place of employment. Make notes on what the reporter is calling about. Inform him/her that the LSS public relations department handles all media inquiries, and that someone will return the call as soon as possible. Media inquiries are channeled through Public Relations to:

- § Ensure that the appropriate people are acting as spokespersons.
- § Negotiate interview time, place and other requests from reporter.
- § Compile factual and accurate information for the reporter.

This ultimately saves you time and frustration, and allows us to present a unified approach to the media, with consistent messages. This is a communications goal which is vital to the success of your ministry and Lutheran Social Services.

## **Preparing for the interview ...**

Once an interview has been set up for you through PR, you must prepare for the interview. We will assist you to:

- § Get a clear understanding of what the story is all about, the topics to be discussed and what your primary communication objectives are.
- § Find out who else (if anyone) was interviewed on the topic, and what they said.
- § Think about your area of expertise and develop simple, positive statements that help define your service or program and LSS.
- § Determine who your audience is and what you want them to know.
- § Develop a list of questions that may be asked.
- § Create concise answers to the potential questions.
- § Practice the answers out loud. If you wish, PR will conduct a mock interview with you beforehand. Just ask.
- § Arrange to have an audio or video recorder available to tape the interview if we believe it is necessary.
- § Select someone to be present during the actual interview who can remind you of facts and retrieve needed information, but not participate.
- § Set aside enough time for the interview so you can be mentally prepared before the reporter arrives.

No one can successfully "wing" an interview. Without preparation you will have no message (or an unclear message), and your chances of success will be slim. Your comfort level is directly related to the amount of time you've spent getting ready for the interview. Remember, much can be accomplished *with proper preparation*.

## Appearance tips for TV interviews ...

- § Conservative business attire (blue, grey or brown) is most appropriate.
- § Wear off-white shirts or blouses.
- § Stay away from bold or intricate patterns and tight-fitting clothes.
- § Avoid flashy, shiny jewelry.
  - Make-up (men and women alike) may be required if the interview takes place under bright studio lights. Please cooperate with the make-up artist. It is to your benefit.

## During the interview ...

The words you use are important, but the impression you leave is most important. Common sense must always prevail. Remember that the reporter is not your audience. He/she is the person who sends your message to the audience you want to reach.

- § Be the best of what you are. Don't try to become someone else during the interview.
- § Treat the reporter as you would any other professional.
- § Look at the reporter -- not the camera, the floor or the ceiling.
- § Speak concisely using language that anyone can understand. Don't use industry jargon or complicated words.
- § Deliver your message so clearly and simply that there is no room for misinterpretation.
- § When answering a question, make your point immediately and then elaborate if necessary.
- § Have notes handy for reference.
- § Keep statistics to a minimum.
- § Be open and honest, but remember nothing is ever really "off the record."
- § Gesture as you would in normal conversation.
- § Don't feel rushed. Answer each question completely. Pause briefly after the question is asked to collect your thoughts before speaking.
- § Use examples.
- § Clarify questions you don't understand.
- § Ignore silence.
- § Give good quotes by making them entertaining, conversational and short.
- § When objectionable questions arise, turn a negative into a positive by saying, for example, "Let's look at what's really involved here ..."
- § No matter what happens during the interview, don't lose your cool or walk out. If questions are unfair, say so.
- § Tape the interview for evaluation

Don't feel pressured into answering questions for which you are not the appropriate spokesperson. However, refer the reporter to someone who can. **Never say, "no comment."** Give the reporter a reason for why you can't answer a question. For example, "the matter is under litigation," or "it's a personnel issue," etc.

**Don't ask reporters if you can preview the story before it airs or appears in print. Mainstream media NEVER lets a source preview a story. Reporters find such requests offensive and they imply wrongdoing/guilt.**

## **After the interview ...**

- § Review the tape you made of the interview and critique your performance.
- § Discuss the content of the interview with the PR staff. PR can then do follow-up work, such as monitoring coverage and sending thank-you notes.

## **Tactics used to obtain information ...**

At times, reporters tape record phone conversations. Be aware of this fact and act accordingly. It is not illegal to tape a conversation as long as one party in the conversation (the reporter in this case) is aware it is being taped.

Ambush interviews are rare, (when you're approached while getting out of your car, etc.) but they do occur on occasion. If you're questioned in this fashion be courteous and smile, give the reporters your business card and tell them to call Public Relations to set up an interview with you or another person.

Whenever you speak before a group, remember that reporters could be in the audience and what you say could be publicized. You may be approached afterward to elaborate on the speech. However, if reporters ask you probing questions on another topic, explain that they will need to call PR to schedule an interview time.

## **Conclusion ...**

LSS maintains an "open door" policy with the media. We rarely refuse an interview since every story contributes to the perception that the public and our stakeholders have about LSS. A media interview is an **opportunity** to share the mission of our agency, our services and ourselves. We welcome and invite this visibility.

