



THE SPIN PROJECT

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Projecting your voice over the airwaves

Broadcast Media and Spokesperson Skills

There's no denying that the rise of online communications has had a huge impact on how Americans get their news—according to the Pew Center for the People and the Press' 2006 survey of news habits, nearly one in three people regularly get their news online. But the dot-coms aren't king. The same research shows that the growth of online news audiences have slowed considerably since 2000. People are turning to online news as a supplemental source to traditional media and use it more for speed and convenience, not for in-depth reporting. While nearly half of all Americans spend at least 30 minutes getting news on television, just 9% spend that long getting news online. Broadcast media (television and radio) is still the news source that most people turn to for more comprehensive coverage about what's happening in their local communities, the nation and the world at large.

Pew's 2006 survey found that 34% of respondents got their news from the cable news networks, 36% said radio and a whopping 54% said they got their news from local television. For reaching the biggest number of people in the shortest amount of time, you can't beat broadcast media.

Knowing the Newsroom

While many of the same rules that apply to pitching print and online outlets apply to broadcast, each of these media sources have their own special set of needs and structures that you'll want to understand. Knowing who to call and where to go in the newsroom is important information for identifying reporters who might cover your story and for responding to media coverage. If you haven't yet, take a look at our [Developing Relationships with Reporters tutorial](#) to learn more about how to develop relationships with broadcast reporters and how a newsroom works.

Knowing your Audience

Being an effective spokesperson is all about preparation and practice. Preparation involves a few different elements, and, as we discuss further in our [Strategic Communications Planning tutorial](#), knowing who you want to reach and identifying your audience are key to being an effective spokesperson.

So, when in doubt: research. Before going on air, be sure to ask the producer questions about who their show reaches, what the demographics are, where the show is aired and at what time of day and any other questions that will help you get a better understanding of who you will be addressing. Watch or listen to the show beforehand-get a sense of the hosts' style and know what the format of the show is (is it live, call-in, a one-on-one interview?). If you'll be on with other folks, find out who they are.

While we're offering general practices and tips, context is important. How one interviews or speaks in front of a rally, on local news, national news, progressive or alternative media, community media, ethnic media or a long-form radio shows vs. short interview radio shows will impact the choices you make as a spokesperson. Inevitably, you'll become a smarter, more sophisticated and more seasoned spokesperson.

The more you know ahead of time, the more effective you'll be in reaching and changing the hearts and minds of that audience.

Practice, Practice, Practice

We can't emphasize enough that practice is the key to becoming an effective spokesperson. Great spokespeople aren't born-they're truly made.

Learning how to use an interview as a platform to reach a larger audience with your message-and to not just simply respond to the interviewer's questions-is a skill that takes time to develop. With practice comes confidence, and with confidence comes great interviews.

Image Isn't Everything, but It's a Lot

How you look on camera is an important part of how your audience will perceive you and your message. When it comes down to it:

- 60% of what an audience perceives is visual.
- 30% is auditory, or what people hear.
- 10% is what an audience perceives is the message.

When we break this down more, what we understand is that how one looks on camera-meaning how you use your hands, how you sit or stand, your choice of clothing, how you do your hair- impacts how people respond to you as a spokesperson.

Messaging

Framing and messaging are helpful tools for creating powerful soundbites. The SPIN Project believes that an effective message includes a statement of the Problem, a vision of the better world (Solution), and something your audience can do to help you bring about a solution (Action). To create an effective message, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the problem your organization or campaign is trying to solve?
- How do you propose to solve the problem? Make sure to include your description of what your community will look like after the problem has been solved and include the values your organization shares with your audience.
- What is the specific, concrete action you are asking your audience to take to help you solve the problem you have identified?

Who Are your Spokespeople?

Spokespersons aren't just your messengers. In many cases the spokesperson is just as important as the issue. It is important not only to learn how to be a better spokesperson, but to develop the skills of a wide and diverse array of your community members to have many messengers with a unified message to push forward your goal. Reporters often do not have time to call a lot of different people to find out more information or quotes for their stories.

Don't just identify your key spokespersons, make sure that they are directly available to reporters.

Many Messengers, Unified Message

Developing the skills of a wide range of spokespeople will only strengthen the work that you do, as well as your opportunities to reach a number of target audiences. Think about who you want to have speak, who they represent, who they will reach and how it will fit into your larger strategy. Who your spokespeople are might also depend on what type of organization you are-meaning, if you're a membership organization, it's important to empower members to be key spokespeople in the media. Think also about who is contributing a wide breadth of voices that are speaking to your issue. Have a diversity of spokespeople, including women, people of color, LGBT people, people of faith and immigrants. You'll want to be sure to have organizational figureheads, including board members, executive directors, members (if applicable) and key program staff, along with community members, religious leaders, political leaders and community leaders. If you have support from local businesses, ask them to speak on your behalf, especially if it's an "unlikely ally," or voice that is not often heard speaking out about your issue. Be creative! Multiple messengers from many walks of life, all echoing the same unified message, will help foster a wider base of support.

Tips for Television

As with all interviews, context matters. We offer some general guidelines, but some circumstances might call for a different practice. Work from what you know and who you are trying to reach. Before the show begins, think about your audience, the format of the show, how long you'll get to speak and your key messages. With most TV opportunities, you'll have a short amount of air time, so be prepared with a key message that you can repeat comfortably and with confidence.

When interviewing on TV, image and body language are just as important as what you say

Becoming a Powerful Spokesperson

Project confidence. Projecting confidence is key to winning over an audience. Being nervous while speaking to the public is normal, and many say it's positive to feel that way before you speak. But showing it is another thing-that's why it's important to project confidence (even if you're not feeling it). People believe in those who are perceived as confident, who know the issue and can show how they are personally connected or affected by it, able to reach people's hearts and minds. Remember to stand tall, or if sitting, sit forward in your chair. Commanding a strong presence assures your audience that you are a credible spokesperson and shows that you believe in yourself and your expertise, that what you have to say deserves and needs to be heard.

Keep it short. You don't need to explain everything to be heard. Rather, it's better to keep it brief. Think about what you want to say beforehand, create short soundbites (eight seconds in length) that capture your main points and your key message about the issue or campaign. And practice, practice, practice.

Personalize your message. Add something personal at the beginning of your soundbite to create more of a human connection between you and your audience. Some examples are: "As a working mother..." or "As a first-generation immigrant..."-be sure that this is a genuine connection that people will resonate with your audience.

It's OK to say that you don't know. If you don't know the answer, it's OK to say so. Remember nothing is "off the record," but it's better to be honest about what you don't know than to say "no comment." Keep it slow and steady. Remind yourself to speak slowly. It is OK to pause and take a deep breath. Practice annunciating, and even over- annunciating, each syllable so that your words will be clearly articulated. If you catch yourself speaking too quickly, it's OK to pause, take a breath and start again. Remember, slow and steady.

Keeping it slow also helps keep you steady under more aggressive or difficult interview questions. It's always better to look more reasonable than your "opponents" or a somewhat hostile interviewer. Calm, cool and collected is the way to go.

The goal is to learn how to do this while also being confident and strong in your message, from beginning to the end. Even if you're on long-form radio shows, it's important from the very beginning that you respond with your message, not simply answer the question.

Practice, practice, practice!

Television Tips

- Clothing matters: Dress for your audience. Wear neutral colors that don't distract (NOT black or white).
- Avoid patterns, florals, stripes or dots and no big jewelry, buttons or slogans.
- Wear make-up.
- Smile!
- Use natural hand gestures that don't distract. Don't address the reporter personally.
- Don't be distracted by reporter or crew. Every blink, twitch and "uh," is magnified.
- Always respond with key messages/soundbites: If you make a mistake, stop and start over.
- It's not a conversation, but use a conversational tone with a personal inflection.
- Remember that the audience is the target, not the interviewer.
- Always be more reasonable than your opponent!

in setting the tone. If you're at a rally or press conference, make sure that you are positioned so that the cameras pick up the visual posters and banners behind you, strengthening your message. How you might use your hands at a rally is different than when you're interviewing in a studio. You'll want to move your hands for emphasis, but not be overly dramatic, distracting people from hearing your message.

Be sure to look at the reporter, not the camera. Stay poised not only in your stance, but also your eye contact to demonstrate your confidence and comfort with the issue.

Always remember: Don't answer the question, respond with your message. Interview segments are often only 8-15 second soundbites. Don't get thrown by the reporter and get caught answering a bad question. Remind yourself that your audience is never the reporter, it's the people on the other side of the camera, and this is your chance to speak to them. Repeat your message, and you control the interview.

When ending the interview, thank the reporter, and wait until the camera is turned off before saying more to the reporter or offering further background information.

Radio Rules

While many of the tips for TV also apply to radio, without a visual component, it's your voice that "sets the stage." Ask yourself many of the same questions you would for TV, particularly in terms of preparation, research, listening to the show ahead of time, greeting hosts warmly and thanking them at the end. Practice on tape-record yourself so you can learn your strengths and areas you need to improve before the interview.

Radio often allows more time for you to talk about your issue and deliver your message. You could be on air for as long as 60 minutes, so be prepared with your soundbites, but also be ready to share stories that convey the points that you are trying to make. If you're on a longer show, remember that radio audiences change every 10-15 minutes, so repeat your messages often.

The host will often repeat who you are and who you represent, but don't rely on them to do so. Be sure to mention your organization's full name and a way for people to be in touch (preferably a Web site they can visit) at the beginning and end of the program.

When using statistics to help convey the larger impact of the story you are sharing, translate the numbers. For example, say "one-third" instead of "33.3 percent."

If there are opportunities for people to call in, organize your supporters to do so. It's a boost to you and the messages you are trying to convey to have friendly people call in to ask supportive questions, driving your message even further. Be sure to ask for an air-check, or if the show will be archived, so you can keep a copy for your news clips. Also, listen to the show afterwards so that you can use it as a learning tool, as well as a way to celebrate your successes!

Radio Rules

- Respond with key messages/soundbites.
- Do your phone interviews from a quiet office.
- Don't use a cordless or cell phone-use a landline and disable call waiting.
- Don't listen to the show while you are being interviewed.
- Speak slowly and with extra emphasis.
- Clarity, intensity and emotion make good radio.
- Smile-it still comes through on the radio.