
SINGER ASSOCIATES, INC.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS & CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

Communications and Protocol Guideposts for Public Servants

Sam Singer

If you don't tell your story,
someone else will

(And, mostly likely they will get it wrong)

Everything you say can (*and will*)
be used against you (*by someone*)

The three C's of communication:

Clear
Concise
Correct

It's always about the message

Public Benefit: It's not about *you*,
it's about the public and how it
benefits *them*

Repetition is a good thing

(Don't worry about being 'boring')

Speed: What's news today – is
gone tomorrow

Study and Listen

Silence is indeed golden

Even though you are a private
citizen, you are always
representing the City

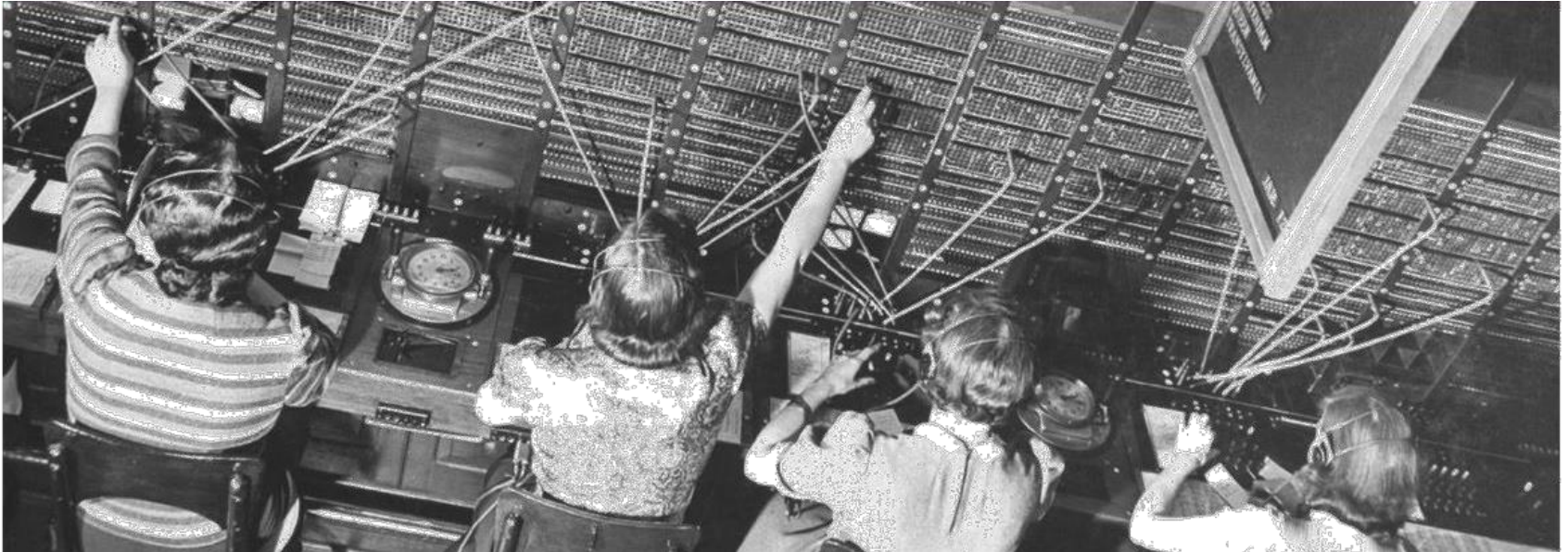
Graciousness in Victory, Graciousness in Defeat:

The keys to maintaining good relationships
throughout a public career

Always remain calm – especially in
the face of disaster, an angry
public, or other difficult moments

Remember: You are the face of the City and
the people look to you for guidance

Media Guide



About The Media

UNDERSTANDING THE JOB OF THE REPORTERS:

Reporters...

Don't hate everyone in the world but they don't love you, either

Aren't out to make you look bad but they don't get paid to make you look good

Don't have a hidden agenda but they think they know what news is and what their readers, viewers, and listeners want

Don't seek to misquote you but they won't rewrite a bad quote into a good one

Don't intentionally quote you out of context but their context often comes from you

About The Media

UNDERSTANDING THE JOB OF THE REPORTERS:

Remember...

Reporters are your conduit of information to key audiences

Some reporters are polite, some are brusque, some work harder than others and some are better trained than others. Most reporters, however, do share certain traits: they see themselves as a stand in for their readers, viewers, or listeners; asking questions the audience or readers would ask if they could

They are also trained to have a healthy skepticism about the story they are covering and the people they are interviewing

Their skepticism becomes keener when they face evasive or confused storytellers

Reporters want a good story

They want to get a good story—generally, not get you. What makes a good story? Think about the stories you have read or news that you listen to closely. What catches your attention? It's the conflict, humor, danger, a tug of the heartstrings—human emotions that send a message

One key to your success is to confidently direct your message to the audience the reporter represents, not to the reporter

Interview Preparation

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVANT:

A Good Spokesperson Knows...

His or her audience

The role and needs of the media

Media interview “rules of the road”

His or her message and how to communicate it no matter what question is asked

How to use specific interview techniques to manage the interview

When to stop talking

Interview Preparation

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVANT:

Before Any Interview...

Never go to an interview unprepared

If possible, read articles by the reporter and make an effort to know all you can about the interviewer

When a reporter calls looking for a comment, ask questions

Find out what they are covering, why they called you, who else they will call, when the story will appear, and what background information they have

Practice answering questions

Try to predict the reporter's questions and prepare answers

Review your message points

Set the goal of clearly communicating your message, no matter what is asked

Interview Preparation

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVANT:

Interview Strategies – Do

Do: Remain In Control

DO: Prepare. Practice your answers

DO: Answer all questions on a positive note

DO: Stay calm, courteous and cooperative

DO: Talk in simple terms and keep it short

DO: Keep statistics to a minimum

DO: Face issues squarely. Be honest, responsive and factual.

DO: Offer to obtain additional information when appropriate

DO: Give brief answers – they will be most easily understood and most likely to be unedited

DO: Animate your feelings and speak from your heart. Emotions help build empathy with the public and credibility with the interviewer

Interview Preparation

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVANT:

Interview Strategies – Don't

DON'T: Improvise; stick to your message(s)

DON'T: Repeat negative examples or words used by the questioner. This may only serve to reinforce ideas in the public's mind. Instead, answer with a positive response.

DON'T: "Over talk"; deliver your message and stop talking

DON'T: Ramble; say what you want to say as clearly and as quickly as possible

DON'T: Tell jokes or give glib responses

DON'T: Overlap a reporter's question; begin your answer a few seconds after the reporter is finished

DON'T: Look at the camera; look at the interviewer.

Interview Preparation

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVANT:

Dress – How you look is as important as your message

WEAR: Conservative clothing, solid colors, hair neat and away from the face

AVOID: White shirts; flashy colors, stripes, checks, plaids or floral prints; distracting jewelry; carrying bulky items in pockets; light-sensitive sunglasses; chewing gum; carrying papers, cellular phones, PDAs, especially during TV interviews

REMEMBER: Check your appearance before any interview

Interview Preparation

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVANT:

Body Language

Good interviews are greatly aided by:

High energy

Occasional direct contact with the interviewer

Hand gestures to emphasize your point attentive

Listening while others speak

Interviews can be derailed by:

Slouching or sitting ramrod straight

Shifty eyes, gazing into the distance, or rolling eyes

Playing with pencils, glasses, buttons, microphones or pocket change

Interview Techniques

BRIDGING TECHNIQUES

What is “Bridging?”

Bridging is a technique that enables a good spokesperson to get his or her message across, regardless of the question

To be an effective spokesperson, answer the question, then use a bridge (or transition) to state your complete message.

Interview Techniques

BRIDGING TECHNIQUES

Simple Bridge Expressions

But...

In the meantime...

Meanwhile...

However...

Our real focus is...

The real issue is...

What I'd like to point out is...

Interview Techniques

BRIDGING TECHNIQUES

Bridging From Touch Questions

Answering Questions With Your Message:

You know, I see it another way...

I Can Understand that point of view, but...

There's another side to this issue. It's...

Well, let's take a look at what's really involved...

Interview Techniques

BRIDGING TECHNIQUES

Flagging

Make sure you repeat your message by flagging. Don't hesitate to bring the interview back to your key message points by flagging them.

I've said it before...

Let me emphasize that...

It's important to understand...

The important element to focus on it...

Controlling the Interview

SOME CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Message

What's the most difficult idea to remember in a media interview? That you came to deliver a specific message to key audiences.

Don't simply respond to questions. Tell your story.

Convey your message in concise, non-technical language.

Positive impressions are created by spokespersons who honestly project confidence and concern.

Controlling the Interview

SOME CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Hostile Questions

Never lose your temper or argue.

Remain calm and remember to direct your message to the public, not the reporter.

A universal response to any hostile question is: “Let’s take a look at what’s really involved” or “I think what you are really asking is...”

Controlling the Interview

SOME CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

“No Comment”

Never use this phrase.

It is like “taking the Fifth” under oath and will only make a reporter suspicious and appear that you are trying to hide something.

If you really can’t answer, give the reason why:

“I don’t have that information now because the results are not in yet.”

“That’s under study. I’ll be happy to share any information as soon as it becomes available.”

“I don’t know. I’ll find out and get back to you.”

Controlling the Interview

SOME CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

“Would You Say”

“What if” questions are dangerous.

Never comment on the hypothetical.

Your answer should be, “No, I wouldn’t say that. But what I would say is...”