

If you cultivate a good working relationship with reporters they will be more willing to work with you when you really need to communicate with your public.

### **Develop a good relationship with your local media**

- Get to know reporters well. Be friendly and cooperative. If they get to know you, they will look to you for story ideas.
- Know the deadlines of all media in your community.
- Learn what kind of information they want, what kind of photos they want.
- Do they want story ideas or do they want finished stories they can use themselves?
- Give them ideas for feature stories. Tell them in advance.

### **Be prepared for crisis and controversy**

- Talk with staff and students about how to respond appropriately to reporters
  - Remind staff and students they don't have to talk, and what they say reflects on their school.
  - Staff should know whom to direct media inquiries.
- Make sure someone is available as a spokesperson.
- Give reporters home phone numbers of people who are necessary contacts.
- Prepare a brief statement for the press that can be given to everyone; it will ensure that information provided is consistent, it will make the reporter's job easier, and it will help ensure greater accuracy.

### **Media RESPECT tips**

#### **Return calls promptly**

- Deadlines are important – find out when they are.
- Make yourself available – where and when can you be reached for further comments, clarifications.
- Don't avoid talking with reporters because your input is valuable and it can change the whole slant of a story.
- If you avoid them they will think you are trying to hide something and will dig deeper.

#### **Everything is on the record**

- Even if a reporter says he will keep it confidential, it **is** on the record, especially if you tell them something that they feel they have a duty to report.
- They can't always remember what you said is off the record.
- If you can't answer a question, tell them why, don't just say "no comment;" a no comment response leads people to believe that you have something to hide.

#### **Speak with confidence**

- On TV, the overall perception that viewers have:
  - 55 percent comes from your persona
  - 38 percent from voice
  - 7 percent from your message.
- We need to know what we are talking about, but whether or not we are memorable depends primarily on other factors.

- You know what you are talking about, you are the expert, sound like it.
- Be positive, not defensive.
- Look at the reporter when answering questions; turn to the camera when delivering a keypoint.
- Steady eyes suggest honesty; blinking, darting eyes suggest nervousness and dishonesty.
- Relax. Take a couple of deep breaths and compose yourself.

### Prepare information

- Frequently you will be called in advance. If not, and you feel you need some time, be sure to ask about deadline and call back with the information.
- Ask questions about what the reporter wants to know so that you know what to prepare
- Do your homework. Get background information.
- Decide what the key points of your message are and keep bringing them back into the discussion. Choose two or three – **never** more than five.
- Answer questions quickly and use a “bridging” technique to get back to your key points. (Go from the answer to your key point by bridging with the reporter’s name, or with words such as “and”, “but” and “however”.)
- Present your main point first, then the supporting points.
- Be concise. Don’t ramble on. If you find yourself rambling, go back and repeat your main point.
- Think about ways to present ideas that will be understood. Explain – don’t use jargon (IEP, interdisciplinary curriculum, performance based assessment, AYP).

### Expect challenges

- Reporters may come with a hidden agenda, assumptions or misconceptions. Try to anticipate these and develop responses.
- Smile and appear relaxed.
- Don’t get defensive.
- Don’t get angry. Count to 10 if you need to. Be patient.
- Avoid an argument.
- Don’t pass the buck. Deal with it.
- Don’t let the reporter put words in your mouth.
- If it’s a complex or sensitive issue, politely ask the reporter nicely to repeat what you have said. (You might say, “could you please repeat that...I want to make sure that what I said made sense.) Listen carefully. If you don’t agree with the way the reporter paraphrases your ideas, say so.
- If you get a multi-part question, start with the part you like best. Don’t feel you have to remember everything.

### Choose catchy quotes

- Short phrases will be remembered and used in a story far more often than long detailed explanations.
- The average length of a quote in a TV news story is about seven seconds.
- Try to prepare some in advance.
- Don’t use jargon.

**Tell the truth**

- It's the right thing to do.
- If you don't, you can get in big trouble and lose credibility.
- If you don't know, don't guess. Say so and offer to find the answer.
- If you accidentally say something that is incorrect and realize it later, make immediate attempts to correct the misinformation.