



Dealing With The Media: Do and Don't

BY RICHARD P. BURKE

Yes, most of the broadcast and social media outlets are biased toward the left. Sometimes their memories will be selective. Sometimes they will be unfair.

Fortunately, there are things you can do to increase the odds that you will be treated fairly by reporters, editors, and bloggers. Follow these pointers, and you will be able to navigate these waters more successfully.

1 REMEMBER MOST LOCAL REPORTERS ARE JUST TRYING TO GET THROUGH THEIR DAY

Most reporters are almost always stressed, writing four or five stories against a hard deadline. Believe it or not, most local reporters only have two real concerns:

- a. When will they be able to finish their day and go home and,
- b. How can they complete their work and avoid getting fired. It is THAT simple.

Most reporters may be liberal, but they are not are not crazy TV personalities. Most of them are young, inexperienced, overworked, underpaid, and are anxious as they know they are in a dying profession. If you can make it easier for them to get through their day and look competent to their boss, they will value you as a source and tread you better.

2 KNOW WHO TO TALK TO

Do not assume the editorial page department is connected to the news department. At most newspapers, they have nothing to do with each other, so feeding your news-related releases to the Editorial Page doesn't help. Find out who needs your press releases, who covers the news beat for the races you are working on, who the editors are, and who needs photographs. They are almost always different people. If you learn who these people are you will not waste your time or theirs and you will be more influential as a source.

3 MAKE SURE EVERYTHING YOU SEND MEDIA OUTLETS IS TYPED AND LOOKS PROFESSIONAL

Believe it or not, people still submit hand-written press releases and letters to reporters and editors. Unfair as it might be, handwritten releases don't get top priority. The people who have to type them in dislike having to decipher.

4 GET GOOD PHOTOGRAPHS

If you are a candidate or group leader, have nice color and black-and-white photos made of yourself. Have glossy 5" x 7" photos and digital versions available. A decent quality publicity photo lends credibility. If a newspaper wants to publish a photo of you as a local leader, having a prepared photograph lets you control your image. If you rely on a news photographer to take your picture, or force a reporter to find one on the Internet, the photo used might not present you at your best.

5 HAVE A SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

If you are a candidate or a group leader, it is important to maintain a website or basic social media pages you can refer reporters to. These sites should have photos reporters can download, videos they can link to, and any other information you would like reporters to see when they come to your sites.

6 BE ACCESSIBLE

Reporters will often quote the person they can reach first. If they call you, answer immediately. If they don't reach you and leave a message, get back to them immediately. Always be available for interviews. If you develop a reputation as a news source who is easy to reach, reporters will start calling you first.

7 DON'T ALIENATE REPORTERS

Remember that reporters are stressed, fighting to meet deadlines, and are usually more concerned about finishing their day and not getting fired than anything else. Reporters will take calls asking legitimate questions or announcing real news, but anything less gets bothersome to them even if it is critically important to you. Though sometimes unfair, if you start to be thought of as a pest, you will be marginalized. If they screw up, don't scold them. Even if you are right, you won't win the day.

8 BE PATIENT WITH REPORTERS

During an interview, reporters will sometimes mix up who you are, spell or pronounce your name wrong, get confused about which campaign or issue you are working on, or mess-up some other detail.

8 BE PATIENT WITH REPORTERS (CONT)

Remember that the same reporter probably is covering five or six other stories, each with two or three people offering their views, many of whom he or she likely spoke with just hours or minutes before speaking with you. When reporters make mistakes, be patient, do not assume they are messing with you, and do your best to patiently and calmly correct them.

If the mistake they make is insignificant, it is sometimes best to let it go. Remember, if you make their job easier, they will almost always treat you and your story with more professionalism and objectivity.

9 DON'T TRY TO DANCE WITH THE FACTS

Never try to “B.S.,” trick, dazzle, impress or otherwise belittle the reporter. Be your best self, talking to someone struggling trying to do a complex job well. Speak clearly and directly. Reporters usually are not trying to unearth some terrible secret when they interview you; they just want good, concise answers.

That said, if a reporter does ask hard questions, remember that’s part of his job, too. If you don’t know the answer to a question, be honest about it. Tell them you don’t know, have not thought about it before, or some other answer and that you will get back to them – then get back to them quickly.

10 DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE POLITICAL PERSUASIONS OF THE NEW DEPARTMENT(S) OR INDIVIDUAL REPORTERS

Editorial page departments are supposed to have a political bias. But news departments aim to remain as neutral as possible (or claim to). Individual reporters can and do belong to political parties, but they aren’t supposed to favor one view over another.

As many have seen, bias often creeps into what are supposed to be objective news stories. But avoid making assumptions about the leanings of the reporters you talk to. Occasionally, you will speak to one that agrees with your world view. Sometimes, though the reporter does not agree with your world view, they will agree with you on a particular issue or may acknowledge the legitimacy of particular arguments being advanced by the project or campaign you are working on.

Conclusion. Following these pointers will not guarantee favorable or even fair news coverage or your campaign or project by reporters and bloggers. They will, however, assure that you will be treated more fairly than if you do not observe them. If you practice these pointers consistently, over time, you will find that you will be treated more seriously. You will also become a regularly consulted source for stressed-out reporters who need information or quotes quickly from a person who has your perspective to round out a story.