

Playing the Media Game

How to be an Effective UCubed Jobs Activist

No matter how many times you are interviewed, if you are not quoted, if they do not use the information you provided, then you are not being an effective jobs activist. Being an effective jobs activist is not as difficult as you might think. Media is a game. You arrive prepared with a game plan. You have practiced a few plays. You execute the plays. And you know how you want to finish the game.

To win at the media game there are two principles you need to master. You must develop a focused message and you must deliver your message in a believable manner. If your message is strong but the delivery is poor, you lose credibility and lose the interest of the audience. You may have perfect delivery but if your message is weak, too long or complicated it runs the risk of not being used, or worse, being edited and then misused.

How do you develop a strong and usable message? Whether you are being interviewed for a short news segment or a guest appearance on a longer segment program, the process for developing a focused, usable message is the same. In its simplest form, message development can be boiled down to either a triangle or a square -- three points or four, depending on the length of your interview. For each of your three or four points write a message outline.

This is what you do:

1. Create a headline statement.

Look at newspapers and magazines to get some ideas of the type of "punch" a headline statement should have. Then put the headline statement in sentence form so it sounds natural.

2. Prepare three talking points

(the "because" points) to support your headline statement. Use facts, figures, examples, analogies - anything you feel supports your position clearly, strongly and succinctly.

3. Finish with a strong summary statement

(the "therefore" statement). The summary statement should tie together the headline statement and the three support statements and offer a conclusion to your entire message.

Remember when you are developing your message, keep it short and simple. Following the message development strategy outlined above will properly prepare you for short news interviews or you can elaborate on your position for a longer feature interview.

When preparing your talking points for a news interview, the news media will use a 20 second answer. They can't use three minutes. They can use three or four talking points. They won't use eight. And remember, you have the right to know exactly what you are expected to talk about in your interview.

Now that your message is prepared

you are ready for the interview. The most important thing to do now is practice, practice and practice some more. Then stick to your message no matter what curve the media throws at you. The nice thing about this message development system is you don't have to worry about the questions anymore because you know what you are going to say.

There is no need to be on the defensive. You are in control. No matter what you are asked, keep bringing the interview back to your three or four points. The best politicians have learned how to control an interview in this manner. How many times have you heard a politician completely ignore a question or acknowledge a question but continue with their own agenda? All the time - and you should too.

One caution - the easiest way to be misquoted is to repeat a negative or untrue fact a reporter states. If you don't say it, you can't be quoted.

An effective delivery is as important as a usable message. Bad eye contact or a deadpan look can kill an otherwise good interview. Fortunately, a good delivery can be accomplished by following a few simple rules:

- Sit squarely in your seat, then lean forward just a bit.
- Use facial animation. It's *okay* to move your head, to nod, or raise your eyebrows. If you don't you'll look unnatural, too serious and uncomfortable to watch.
- Be aware of eye contact. Look at the reporter. Don't look at the camera.

Don't look up when thinking of your answer. Eye shifting makes you look less believable.

- Smile when appropriate. But even when you are not smiling, have a pleasant, interested look. If you look interested in what you are talking about, the audience will be more likely to listen and pay attention to what you are saying.
- Place hands comfortably in your lap.
- Gesture with your hands only if you feel comfortable. If you do use your hands, keep your gestures around your upper chest and close in to your body. Remember the TV screen is a little box. Movements need to be close in to be seen.
- If you are still feeling nervous about being on TV, start with radio. With radio you only need to be concerned with your message and you can get used to being interviewed.