

In the Spotlight: Media Tips for Religion Communicators

A Workshop of the RCCongress 2010

Presented by Anuttama Dasa, Religion Communicators Council (RCC)
Director of Communications, International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE MEDIA INTERVIEWS

1. **PRACTICE OFTEN** (with a video/tape recorder; colleague/or mirror)
2. **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE**
3. **KNOW YOUR THREE MAIN POINTS** and convey them early
4. **BE READY TO TURN QUESTIONS** to make your point
5. **MAINTAIN A POSITIVE, FRIENDLY DEMEANOR**
6. **SMILE, SMILE, SMILE**
7. **AVOID “NO COMMENT,”** except for legal or ethical considerations
8. **THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “OFF THE RECORD”**

BASICS FOR SUCCESS

Be helpful to reporters. They have come for a story. Help define it for them. Be open and engaging without revealing sensitive issues. Reporters know you have boundaries. You can be in control without appearing defensive, hostile or evasive.

1. Have the reporter define the story. If it is print interview, set a time limit. Do not leave the interview open-ended so that the reporter can continue to grill away until you say something you don't want to.
2. The reporter will come with an agenda. You need your agenda, too.
3. Do whatever it takes to put your self into a calm, purposeful state before an interview. For example: Visualization, prayer, deep breathing, etc.
4. Be prepared to "turn" the questions so that you get your point across. Remember, no matter how the reporter poses the question, you are in control of the answer.
5. Speak with energy and vocal variety. Avoid a monotonous delivery. An energized voice makes you sound enthusiastic and sincere.
6. Take your time before answering questions. Brief pauses can be effective.
7. When awaiting questions, maintain a pleasant expression. Do not look defensive.
8. Do not repeat or nod affirmatively to a false premise or misleading question. Immediately correct the questioner politely and firmly.
9. Do not volunteer specific figures or facts that you don't want revealed.
10. If asked something you are not comfortable answering, tell the reporter that you will check it out and get back to them. Do NOT say "No comment".
11. Use stories, anecdotes, and personal experiences to make a point. Give a "for instance..."
12. Make sure your messages are consistent with other organization spokespersons.

TIPS FOR PRINT INTERVIEWS

1. In print, what you say is more important than how you say it.
2. Remember the reporter's assignment is to find a story, an angle, a need, or a hook, something to entice their audience.
3. Journalists are after news. It's their job to probe. They can be hostile, provocative, tenacious, even misinformed. Don't take it personally or be intimidated, it is your job to be objective.
4. Journalists don't stick to the information. They record such attendant items as your tie color, the cut of your clothes, even office details and conversations you may have before the interview; information that may appear in the article as "color."
5. When you are having an interview, even in print, project the image you want the reporter to see and hear, including following the time honored media axiom: you are "on" from the time you arrive to the time you leave.
6. In print, data and statistics come across because the reader has a chance to reread the information. Be sure you have your facts straight or provide the reporter with what he or she needs to get the facts straight.
7. To establish your credibility to use statistics and resources as references. For example: if your organization has increased its budget for pollution control, say "Five years ago we spent \$5,000 on research to stem pollution, now we spend \$50,000 on pollution control."
8. While reporters instinctively distrust "no comment," a recent poll indicated that most journalists feel "legal considerations" are justifiable reasons for withholding information.

TIPS FOR TV INTERVIEWS

1. Television is a visual medium. How you say things is as important as what you say. The viewer is most likely in a relaxed, home environment, so talk and act in a relaxed manner.
2. Sitting erect and occasionally leaning in connotes enthusiasm; slouching communicates boredom or lack of self-confidence. If you are standing, maintain a balanced “ready” position: feet planted comfortably, knees slightly bent, breathing deeply.
3. There are two points of view: yours and the interviewers. Interviewers may be looking for controversy, but do not be defensive. It’s your job to get your point across.
4. Maintain eye contact with your interviewer. Avoid “eye dart” or looking down which may be interpreted as lack of confidence.
5. Smile when introduced and be cordial. Let us know you consider this a friendly exchange. A pleasant facial expression is a key element.
6. Avoid “non-words” such as “like’s, uh’s, um’s, ah’s,” and “you know.”
7. Television is fast moving. Comments must stand alone in 10 to 15 second sound bites. A longer statement may be edited and misquoted.
8. Be familiar with your body language. If physical or vocal idiosyncrasies inhibit your presentation, work to eliminate them. If they enhance your presentation, capitalize on them.
9. On TV, an overload of data, figures, names, and dates only confuses the viewer. Use colorful language, impact information, anecdotes and examples to get your point across.
10. Depending on time allotted and the agreement of the producers, consider using visuals, props, slides and video clips to reinforce your message.
11. Avoid jargon. If you must resort to special or technical terms, keep them simple or explain them using analogies your audience will understand.

TIPS FOR RADIO INTERVIEWS

Logistics of radio interviews are similar to television interviews with a few important differences.

1. Be prepared to give the sound engineer a “reading” before the program. Talk at your normal tone because they will use that to set volume controls.
2. Radio studios are generally smaller than TV studios and more distracting. The technicians are in full view and visual cues are used.
3. Your dress is not a concern on radio. Whether you are in your office on your phone or in a studio with a microphone in front of you, your voice becomes the most important part of your presentation.
4. If you do an interview from your office or home, first clear your desk, turn off phones and similar distractions and be sure no-one interrupts your concentration
5. Use appropriate verbal illustrations and anecdotes. Remember, the radio listener has to paint his own mental pictures from your words.
6. In a studio, it is a good idea to practice good posture. Maintain eye contact with the interviewer if possible and to be totally present during the interview.
7. Speak clearly and distinctly. That is all the listener has to go on.
8. While you may have visual reminders with you, do not read from cards. It will sound like reading.
9. Keep your ideas moving. On radio “dead air” or silence is unacceptable.
10. Always talk with sincerity and enthusiasm.
11. Most of all keep remembering that radio is an auditory medium. It is your voice, words and inflections that carry the listener.

CONFRONTATIONAL INTERVIEWS

1. Plan what you want to say—your main points.
2. Consider at most you will get three points across.
3. Concentrate on the good news, your proactive position.
4. It is better to say the same thing several times than to say several things once.
5. Refute any incorrect statements.
6. Try to keep answers short.
7. Avoid jargon.
8. If the interviewer rephrases your statements, make sure he's got them right. If not, put them right at once.
9. Don't feel you have to fill embarrassing silences, that's the interviewer's job.