



Spokesperson

SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™

AL • CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION • INFECTIOUS DISEASE PROTECTION • IMMUNIZATION • INJURY PREVENTION • PRI
CHILD HEALTH • GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS • MINORITY OUTREACH • MONITORING HEALTH • COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE • SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE • SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE • SAFER • HEA
HEALTH EDUCATION • EPIDEMIOLOGY • WORKPLACE HEALTH • IMMUNIZATION • WORKPLACE SAFETY • TRAINING • C
LTH • PREVENTION RESEARCH • PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS • PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE • WOMEN'S HEALTH

Module Summary

- The role of spokespersons in emergencies
- Necessary spokesperson qualities
- Dealing with high outrage public meetings
- How to hold successful media interviews (press conferences, telephone, radio and TV)

Spokepersons

- They give your organization its human form.
- Effective spokespersons connect with their audience.
- Effective spokespersons are made; few are born.
- The spokesperson doesn't just read a statement; he or she is the statement.



Role of Spokesperson in an Emergency

- Take your organization from an “it” to a “we”
- Build trust and credibility for the organization
- Remove the psychological barriers within the audience
- Gain support for the public health response
- Ultimately, reduce the incidence of illness, injury, and death by getting it right



Emergency Risk Communication Principles

These are not the “facts” to be released; these are the tenets by which the spokesperson manifests his or her organization—what we stand for, not just what we know.

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Don't overreassure.

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Acknowledge uncertainty and/or fear.

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Express that a process is in place.

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Express wishes.

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Give people things to do.

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Ask more of people.

Emergency Risk Communication Principles

- Consider the “what if” questions.

Spokesperson Qualities

- What makes a good spokesperson?
- What doesn't make a good spokesperson?

Spokesperson Qualities

- It's more than “acting natural.” Every organization has an identity. Try to embody that identity.
- Example: CDC has a history of going into harm's way to help people. We humbly go where we are asked. We value our partners and won't steal the show. Therefore, a spokesperson would express a desire to help, show courage, and express the value of partners. “Committed but not showy.”

Spokesperson Qualities

- Be your organization; then be yourself.
- What's your organization's identity?

Spokesperson Recommendations

- Stay within the scope of your responsibility
- Tell the truth
- Follow up on issues
- Expect criticism



Pitfalls for Spokespersons

- Use of jargon
- Humor
- Repeating the negative
- Expressing personal opinions
- Showing off your vocabulary



High-Outrage Public Meetings

“Do’s”

- The best way to deal with criticism and outrage by an audience is to acknowledge that it exists. (Don’t say, “I know how you feel.”)
- Practice active listening and try to avoid interrupting.
- State the problem and then the recommendation.

High-Outrage Public Meetings

“Don’ts”

- Don’t take personal abuse. You represent your agency and you are not alone. Bring along a neutral third party who can step in and diffuse the situation.
- Don’t look for one answer that fits all and don’t promise what you can’t deliver.

Spokesperson and the Media

- Their job is not your job.
- Communicate with a purpose.
- Media are less critical in an initial crisis response.

Your Interview Rights

- Know who will do the interview
- Know and limit the interview to agreed subjects
- Set limits on time and format
- Ask who else will be or has been interviewed

You Do Not Have the Right To:

- Embarrass or argue with a reporter
- Tell the news organization which reporter you prefer
- Demand that your remarks not be edited
- Insist that an adversary not be interviewed
- Lie or cloud the truth
- Demand that an answer you've given not be used
- State what you are about to say is “off the record” or not attributable to you

Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- Don't repeat reporters' inflammatory or emotionally laden words.
- If the question contains leading or loaded language, reframe the question.
- Don't assume the reporter has it right. State, "I have to verify that before I respond."
- If a reporter leaves a microphone in your face after you've answered the question, STOP.

Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- There is no such thing as “off the record.”
- Anticipate questions. Put the answer on paper and then find the bottom line in that question.
- Make your point first. Have prepared message points.
- Don't fake it. If you don't know the answer, say so.

Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- Never speak disparagingly of anyone, not even in jest. Don't assign blame or "pass the buck."
- Don't buy-in to hypothetical questions that are near the nonsensical. Reframe the question in a way that addresses legitimate concerns.

Counters to General Media Interview Pitfalls

- Break down multiple-part questions
- Don't raise issues that you do not want to see in print or on the news
- Don't say "no comment" to a reporter's question

Counters to Electronic Media Interview Techniques

- Reporters are not adversaries. They are also not your friends. Some reporters will use well-known techniques to attempt to get a reaction from you.

Sensational or Unrelated Questions

“Bridges” back to what you want to say:

- “What I think you are really asking is”
- “The overall issue is”
- “What’s important to remember is”
- “It’s our policy to not discuss [topic], but what I can tell you”



Watch Out For . . .

- **Machine gun questioning.** Reporter fires rapid questions at you. You respond, “Please let me answer this question.”
- **Feeding the mike and the pause.** Seldom will dead air make scintillating viewing, unless you’re reacting nonverbally. Relax.
- **Hot mike.** It’s always on—always—including during “testing.”

Watch Out For . . .

- **Reporter asks a sensational question and gives you an A or B dilemma.** Use positive words, correct the inaccuracies without repeating the negative, and reject A or B if neither is valid. Explain, “There’s actually another alternative you may not have considered,” and give your message point.

Watch Out For . . .

- **Surprise prop.** The reporter attempts to hand you a report or supposedly contaminated item. If you take it, you own it. React by saying, “I’m familiar with that report and what I can say is” or “I’m not familiar with the report, but what is important” and then go to key message.

Media Availability or Press Conferences “In Person” Tips

- Determine in advance who will answer questions about specific subject matters
- Keep answers short and focused—nothing longer than 2 minutes
- Assume that every mike is “alive” the entire time

Telephone Interview Tips

- Know who is on the other end of the line
- Ask if you are being recorded
- Ask when and where the information will be used
- Spell out difficult names/technical terms/phrases
- Limit the time available for the interview up front
- Be certain to ask for feedback from reporters to ensure they are understanding your points

Radio Interview Tips

- A live interview is very different than a taped interview.
- Watch out for “Uh,” “Um,” and “You know.”
- Radio will not be as in-depth as print.
- Be careful NOT to repeat the negatives in a reporter’s question.

Television Interview Tips

- Do not make broad unnatural gestures or move around in your chair. Ask for a chair that does not swivel.
- Practice, practice, practice. Reply in 10- to 20-second phrases. With longer answers, pause every 20 seconds. Practice stopping the minute directed or suffer a hard break.
- Slow down. This will make the spokesperson appear in control.

Television Interview Tips

- Drive out monotone. The more practice, the less fear and the greater the prospect that animation will reappear in the voice.
- Don't look at yourself on the TV monitor.
- Look at the reporter, not the camera, unless directed otherwise.
- Do an earphone check. Ask what to do if it pops out of your ear.

What To Wear on Television

Men

- Avoid patterned suits, stripes, and checks.
- Button double-breasted suits; unbutton single-breasted suits. Sit on your coattails.
- White or light blue shirts are the most conservative, serious shirts.
- Neckties should be somber. Do not “advertise” a product or point of view on your tie—you know what they are.

What To Wear on Television

Men

- **Urgent:** Wear knee-length socks darker than your suit. You lose credibility with a “skin shot” of your legs when your pant legs creep up.
- Be clean shaven.

What To Wear on Television

Women

- Tailored clothes work best.
- **Urgent:** Short skirts kill credibility as quickly as short socks on men.
- Neutral colors and less pattern work best.
- Wear dark shoes.
- Avoid jangles.
- Wear regular makeup. For women who never wear makeup, consider color on the lips.

What To Wear on Television

Men and Women

- Neat, trimmed hair is best.
- If your skin is shiny under the lights, ask for powder. Men, don't forget powder for the top of your head.
- If you can take off the glasses without squinting, take them off. Consider nonglare glasses if you must wear them.

Assessing Your Communication Skills

Negatives that interfere with communication

- **Fear:** Fear of being judged, fear of appearing stupid
- **Assumptions:** A study of the 500 most common English words produced an average of 28 dictionary definitions per word.

Assessing Your Communication Skills

- **Egotism:** Egotism conveys no true respect for another person, no genuine interest in hearing the other person out. The listener will feel used, as if the speaker's words serve only an ulterior motive.

Assessing Your Communication Skills

What adds to communication?
It's attitude and skills.

Attitudes

- **Self-awareness:** “Why do I hold that view?”
- **Understanding:** Repeat what you think you’ve heard and ask for clarification.
- **Care for others:** If you can empathize with your audience, they will listen.

Choose To Listen

3 barriers to effective listening:

1. **Stress.** When our minds may be going in a million different directions, it's hard to give full attention.
2. **“Me syndrome.”** The person doesn't seem to care about others.
3. **Brain speed.** The speech rate for many people is about 200 words per minute.

Effective Nonverbal Communication

- Do maintain eye contact
- Do maintain an open posture
- Do not retreat behind physical barriers such as podiums or tables
- Do not frown or show anger or disbelief through facial expression
- Do not dress in a way that emphasizes the differences between you and your audience



Assess Your Communication Habits

1. Write down the problems that you can identify about your communication habits.
2. Consider tape-recording some of your conversations to look for negative communication patterns.
3. Ask for feedback. “What do you feel are some of my strengths or weaknesses in my communication patterns?”