

When a reporter calls...

- *If a reporter reaches you directly:* Obtain the reporter's name, medium and phone number, and ask exactly how you can help.
 - If the query is about a topic in which you have expertise, if you expect that it will not reflect negatively on the institution, and if you feel comfortable responding, do so. After the interview e-mail or call the Media Relations Office and briefly describe what happened.
 - If the query is negative, or if you suspect that it may result in a negative story, tell the reporter he/she has reached you at a bad time. Find out what the reporter wants, explain that you'll call back soon, and call the Media Relations Office. Explain what the reporter wants and the background to the issue. You and the media relations officer will develop a response and will decide who will return the reporter's call.
- *If a reporter leaves a message for you to call back:* First call the Media Relations Office. Explain the reporter's message and any background that you know. You and the media relations officer will develop a response and will decide who should call back.

Before the interview...

- *Be knowledgeable, sincere, compassionate and energetic.* Audiences (especially television viewers) are won or lost by the attitudes of those interviewed.
- *Have a message.* A news story can convey only two or three points effectively. Prepare a single communications objective and two or three secondary points, and then make them, regardless of the questions you are asked.
 - "This new program strengthens our mission to promote learning through effective teaching, scholarship and research. It helps our students by preparing them for public- and private-sector leadership. It helps the state by increasing the local supply of productive managers. And it improves the world by providing inspired managers with creative solutions."
- *Anticipate tough questions* and formulate answers. If you are asked a question that you prefer not to answer, bridge to what you want to say, or restate the question and then answer it.
 - Example: "I don't know about that, but the important thing to remember is that this project has helped thousands of Minnesotans, and will help tens of thousands more."
 - Example: "If you mean 'How much impact does this project have?' The answer is that it has helped thousands of Minnesotans, and it will help tens of thousands more."

- *Try to see a reporter in person* if you're discussing complex material that requires in-depth explanation.
- *Don't cancel an interview because you change your mind.* The reporter won't call you again.

During the interview...

- *Use simple language*, and speak in short sentences. Don't use technical terms and jargon.
- *Be brief*, especially for broadcast media. Newspaper reporters can present more information than can radio or television reporters.
- *Talk to the reporter, but speak to the audience.* Remember that the reporter is a conduit. Tell the reporter information that his or her audience needs to know – even if the reporter doesn't ask for it.
- *State your position in positive terms.* Reporters sometimes frame questions to bring out the conflict in a story. Don't repeat negative words or phrases in the reporter's question. Don't unintentionally fan controversy.
- *Don't go "off the record."* Assume that everything you tell a reporter will be quoted and on the record. (*Reporters' Rule:* The reporter, not you, decides what is on and off the record.)
- *Be honest.* If you don't know the answer to a question, say so.
- *Avoid a "no comment" answer.* It suggests you are trying to hide something. If you can't answer, say "I can't answer that question, because I wasn't there."

After the interview...

- *Don't ask the reporter to expunge certain quotes* and other information that you provided on the record. It could draw additional attention to those points; it may result in bad feelings and distrust; and it may end what could have been a good relationship.
 - If you have second thoughts about something that you have said, tell the reporter: "I don't think my answer to your earlier question was entirely clear. Let me clarify . . ."

- *Don't expect to review a story before publication.* A journalist's code of ethics generally doesn't allow that. If you fear the reporter doesn't understand something, repeat the point or ask the reporter if you can clarify in any way. Encourage the reporter to call you for further clarification while he or she is writing the story.
- *If you're misquoted,* try to contact the reporter, not the editor. Don't overreact, especially if the error is minor or not quite the choice of words you would have used. Contact the reporter even if there's no need for a published correction. If not corrected, the reporter could repeat the misinformation in another story at a later date.

Taking the Initiative ('Pitching' the Story)...

- *Talk to the Media Relations Office* if you'd like to pitch a story to a reporter. With your help we can create a pitch that meets the needs and fits the deadlines of the media.
- *Don't promise an exclusive* to a reporter or editor when you've already talked to another publication.

Please Call Us: 389-2523!

- If an event or an activity in your department has the potential to generate adverse publicity, consult with your department supervisor, your dean and your vice president, and call Jeff Iseminger or Michael Cooper. With your help, we can define a strategy and a message that will prevent the press from overreacting, and will communicate the truth to the public.