

TIPS FOR TALKING TO THE MEDIA

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FIRST: KNOW YOUR MESSAGE

Develop your key message. What is the most important point that you want to get across? When delivering your message, think in terms of PSA: Problem, Solution, Action. What is the problem your organization is trying to solve, what is the solution, and what specific action can the audience take to help? How will you get that message across in 10 seconds?

SECOND: PICK YOUR KEY POINTS/MESSAGES BEFORE YOU DO THE INTERVIEW.

Try not to tackle too many issues at once. Always have your key points ready and rehearsed. Know what you want to say ahead of time. Too many messages might get confusing, so try to pick three key points to prepare in advance. These are the things you want to make sure you get across clearly during your interview. Practice, practice, practice.

THIRD: TELEVISION TIPS

You know the saying “Image is Everything”? There is some truth in that cliché. How you look on camera is an important part of how your audience will perceive you and your message. Studies show that people are more receptive to messages delivered by people using positive body language (like nodding “yes”), so be conscious of your movements.

Be visually positive. Unless it would be inappropriate, smile. Project confidence by standing tall or sitting forward. Look at the reporter, not the camera. Speak in a conversational tone. If you’re bringing animals on to the set, be sure to practice with them before hand. If there will be multiple animals on set, introduce them prior to going on air.

When delivering you message, try to make it personal to develop a connection with your audience. You might say, “As a mother and a pit bull guardian ...” Slow down. It’s OK to pause and take a deep breath or to pause and start over again. In fact, every time you start to say “um,” just take a breath instead. The slower and steadier your response, the more reasonable and in control you will come across. This is particularly important if you are answering difficult interview questions. The goal is to look calm and collected, not hostile or defensive.

FOUR: TROUBLE SHOOTING SKILLS

The best way to avoid being misquoted or edited poorly is to remember: Keep it Simple and Short (KISS). The more you ramble on, the more likely it is that you’ll be misquoted. You don’t need to explain everything, so keep it brief. Stick to your main points and key messages. When you’ve finished answering a question, don’t feel compelled to fill a silence by continuing to talk. On-the-scene interview segments are often cut down to 8-15 second sound bites. If you get asked a bad question, respond with your message, rather than stumbling on the answer (see page 2).

FIVE: HELPFUL TECHNIQUES FOR CONTROLLING YOUR MESSAGE AKA “THE BRIDGE”

No matter what you are asked, try to turn the question around so that you can share your message. If a question is leading you down the wrong path, you can use a “bridging” statement to turn things around. Bridging means that you are responding to a question by answering the question you want to answer, not the one that was asked.

The following example of bridging statements will help you to keep the interview on track and get your message out.

“I think the real issue/concern is ...”

“Another thing to remember is ...”

“What’s important here is ...”

“Our main priority/commitment/goal is ...”

“The fact is ...”

“Good question, but let me remind you that ...”

SIX: PIT BULL SPECIFIC POINTS

Avoid sharing images of dogs engaged in fights. Ask ahead of time if the producers plan to use this type of footage and ask that they refrain.

Avoid describing the dogs in ways that evoke negative images that scare the public. Instead of “fighting dogs” or “bait dogs” use “victims of cruelty.” This reminds the audience that the dogs did not perpetrate crimes, human beings did.

Focus on the positive work you are doing and the impact it has on the dogs. Share success stories. Instead of focusing on past neglect or dog fighting rings, bring the positive to the forefront. You want the audience to connect with and adopt pit bull type dogs, not fear them.

Have a call to action. Tell your audience how they can help: adopt, donate, foster, etc.

If there has been a dog-related incident in your community or the reporter asks about an attack, here are some ways of dealing with risky subject matter:

Place the responsibility on the humans. Any dog, of any breed or breed mix, can become dangerous in the hands of a reckless human.

Put the size of the risk in context. The number of dog bites are at historic lows this country. We are safer now than ever before.

Focus on the individual. The actions of one dog do not represent an entire breed or mix of breeds. All dogs are individuals.

Make it personal. “I have children of my own, and I care deeply about the issue of safety. I share my home with a pit bull type dog.”

Check your message for myths. Refrain from perpetuating myths about pit bull type dogs. Pit bulls are not naturally aggressive; they do not have locking jaws or bite differently than other dogs; they do not have a higher tolerance for pain than other dog, etc. There are no physical or behavioral traits that are unique to pit bulls.

Offer an alternative for the listener. Give them an opportunity to take some positive action. “We believe that our communities are safe, but we encourage anyone that is concerned about dog safety to advocate for breed neutral, dangerous dog laws which have proven to be the most effective way to create safer, humane neighborhoods.”

Now that you’ve crafted your message and practiced with your key points, you’ll be ready for your big moment with a reporter. Remember to breathe, smile and be honest. You’ll be helping the public to rediscover the pit bull in no time!