

How you communicate and behave during a media interview can massively impact both your individual reputation and that of your organisation. This guide provides top tips and best practice advice on mastering media interviews from three different perspectives: the communications trainer, the equality organisation and the media agency.

THE COMMUNICATIONS TRAINER

Linda Rose has spent 35 years in the media industry and has an extensive background in both journalism and public relations.

KNOW YOUR MESSAGE

For many groups getting positive and consistent media coverage can have a real impact on the work they do. A good interview can get your message out to decision-makers as well as to potential funders or users of your organisation. It can raise your profile and help persuade the public to your point of view.

WHAT JOURNALISTS WANT

Journalists want clear, reliable information that will interest their audience. The information doesn't have to be totally new but it does need some new aspects (angles). Journalists like human-interest stories (case studies), some selected

data to back up the story and a knowledgeable spokesperson who can communicate effectively.

BEFORE AGREEING TO THE INTERVIEW

Before saying yes to an interview you need to find out the following from the journalist:

- **Which media outlet is it?** Have you dealt with them before?
- **Who is the journalist?** Get the journalist's name, email and phone number so you can add to anything said in the interview or approach them with a future story.
- **What is the story/angle?** Knowing what the journalist thinks is significant and will help you frame your answers.
- **What is the journalist's deadline?** Are you available? How much preparation time will you have?
- **How long will the interview be?** This will help with planning your interview content.
- **Who else has the journalist spoken to?** If the area is controversial it may help to know who the journalist has spoken to/ intends on speaking to.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Once you have agreed to an interview, preparation can ensure that the interview is effective and successful. Decide on the most important messages for your organisation and audience and condense these down into three to five bullet points. Rank these bullet points, or key messages, in order of importance and prepare some supporting arguments for each one.

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

Do	Don't
Try to insert at least one key message in every answer...or at least every second answer!	Use highly specialised 'jargon'
Repeat your top key messages during the interview	Guess or hypothesize
Keep answers short and precise	Repeat a journalist's negative language (eg 'scroungers', 'dole bludgers')
Correct factual errors tactfully & immediately	Become defensive or aggressive
Tell real peoples' stories (case studies)	Use 'no comment'
Use colourful, emotive language	Go 'off the record' (i.e. telling a reporter something you don't want attributed to you by name)

KEEPING CONTROL OF THE INTERVIEW

During interview preparation it is important to think about potentially challenging questions particularly if the topic is controversial. Decide how you will answer these questions ahead of the interview.

Experienced interviewees often use one of three techniques:

- **Context** - putting the issue in a different context

(re-framing) may take the heat out of a question (e.g. comparison with other similar organisations/ countries or an appropriate statistic such as 'this is true in only 1 in a 100 cases').

- **Keep the interview 'at the right distance'**- it may help to switch between taking a broader view (e.g. 'In most of Europe, we...') and a more narrow perspective (e.g. 'in my role, I ...').

- **ABC - Address/Bridge/Communicate** - address the question, do not ignore it (e.g. 'I do understand where that question is coming from...'), then use a bridging phrase ('however', 'more importantly' etc.) to move on to communicate a key message. If they ask the question again, repeat ABC but vary your choice of words.

THE EQUALITY CHARITY

Emma Harrison is the Director of IMiX. Emma has significant personal experience of media interviews having been a spokesperson at various charities including Consumers' Association, Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), Mencap and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO).

FIND THE STORY

GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS IN MEDIA INTERVIEWS

In today's climate talking about immigration can be tough – it's sometimes a very charged topic – and everyone has an opinion. On the plus side, this means there are always outlets for both IMiX and the groups we support to get our views heard. We work with organisations who support migrants and refugees to think through how they approach talking publicly about these issues to encourage a more positive approach to immigration.

Core to our success is being clear about messaging and using authentic language. I would advise any organisation reading this guide to jot down your key message using a variety of different words and sentence structures to see which one fits best.

Media professionals approach us because we are responsive and help them find and



interview the right spokesperson with the best-suited story. I cannot stress enough the importance of quick responses to journalists – they're crucial! During the recent Windrush scandal, IMiX was on call 24/7 to introduce journalists to organisations they hadn't worked with before and prep them to speak to "case studies". (My colleagues and I may hate the phrase case studies, but it's a journalistic short cut).

There are some standard questions that journalists ask, so ask a colleague to run through them with you.

To help you better understand, here is an example of how one of the organisations IMiX supports answered a journalist's questions:

What is the problem?

Right now, people who have lived and worked in the UK for decades are losing their jobs, having benefits removed, being refused medical treatment and even at risk of deportation because they can't prove their right to stay in the UK.

Who is affected?

Thousands of people from the "Windrush generation", who arrived here decades ago to live and work in the UK are struggling to prove their right to stay due to changes to immigration policies. Many arrived as children; they went to school here, have worked here and now are being told to leave. They are worried for their future, but the Government is ignoring them.



Top tip -

Remember you are the expert, the journalist wouldn't want to speak with you if this wasn't true, so be confident in what you say.

Why is this happening?

Due to the "hostile environment" policies put in place, it is impossible to rent a home, open a bank account or get health care if you don't have the right paperwork.

Many people from the Windrush generation do not have the right paperwork. They arrived here legally – at the request of the UK Government – but don't have up-to-date paperwork.

Why does it matter?

The Windrush generation was invited to the UK by the government at the time, they were British subjects, they are British. They have been caught up in a set of policies designed to put migrants off coming to the UK, the so-called "hostile environment". The Windrush generation came to live and work here and have contributed to our society, they do not deserve to be treated like this.

What is the solution?

The government must take immediate action and issue paperwork to everyone from

the Windrush generation and apologise for the distress caused. We are calling on the Secretary of State to commission an independent review into what went wrong.

“THE PROBLEM IS THAT THERE ARE TOO MANY ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ISN'T IT?”

Being asked this sort of question can make you feel that however you answer, you're saying something you don't want to.

This is where the ABC technique Linda referenced is crucial. Here is an example response to the question above: "I know that's a common question [acknowledge] but I think a more useful way of looking at this [bridge] is that the Home Office has chosen to treat people who come to Britain to live and work with a level of hostility that ... [communicate message]."

TAKE AN AUDIENCE FIRST APPROACH

The best interviews happen when you know the audience. The interviewer is not your audience. The people you are trying to reach are those at home or work or wherever people plug in.

Watch or listen in to the programme you will be

appearing on in advance and try to match the programme's tone. When I did interviews on hearing protection for RNID on Channel 4's *Embarrassing Bodies* I used more informal language. I wanted to get across that hearing is precious and can be protected while not being stuffy and serious. When I talked to the *Today* programme, I talked about the need for more information from MP3 manufacturers to encourage safer listening.

Remember that most of your audience won't know a lot about your issue. Don't use jargon or acronyms. Practise, perhaps with friends or family, explaining the problem and solution you want to communicate in language that someone who knows nothing about your issue would understand.

IMiX is a not-for-profit communications hub that focuses on supporting organisations working with refugees, migrants and people seeking asylum to produce better communications.

Top tip -

Never say "no comment" it makes it look like you're hiding something, you can always say something!

THE MEDIA AGENCY

Patrick Harrison, Director of Reputation Management & Strategic Media Relations at Weber Shandwick provides some key pointers on how to ace a media interview.

THE THREE PS - PRACTICE, PREP AND PERSONALITY



1) What are your top five tips for preparing for an interview?

Thorough and effective preparation is the key to giving successful media interviews.

My top five tips are:

1. Find out as much as you can about the journalist interviewing you and the subject matter (and context) in question.
2. Prepare three key messages, with illustrative case studies and comprehensive Q&A.
3. Be very clear what it is you want to get from the interview.
4. Be very clear about the

logistics (location, timing, format etc.) and have as much influence over these as possible.

5. Practice.

2) What kind of stories do journalists want to be told?

Journalists want to be told stories which are focused on people. If you only talk in "policy speak" and only tell them information that they could find on a website, you will have wasted their time and run the risk of a negative story and reduce the likelihood of interview opportunities in the future.

3) Should you share everything about your organisation in an interview?

No. You should be very clear

what level of detail you wish to give and focus on that.

4) What advice would you give for overcoming any pre-interview nerves?

Prep! Nerves often come from a fear of failure. Be properly prepared, including all logistics - an aspect that can trip people up. Give yourself time immediately beforehand to focus, and back yourself as the expert in the conversation.

5) Sum up the perfect interview in three words

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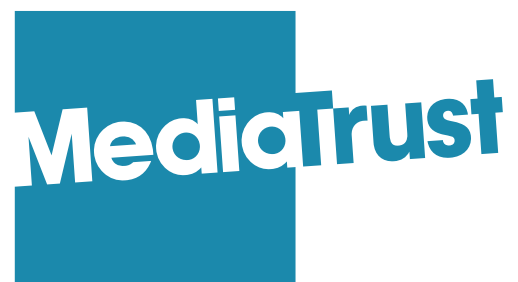


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This guide forms part of **Stronger Voices**, a training programme created in partnership with the Equally Ours and funded by City Bridge Trust, designed to help strengthen the voices of London's equality sector.

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