

8 tips for spokespersons

What you say and how you say it are critical to the success of your organization's marketing efforts and can directly affect the value of your brand. What your organization promises and how effective it is at delivering on that promise are at stake every time someone opens their mouth on behalf of the enterprise.

Being a good spokesperson is a learned skill. It can be taught, practiced and honed. Take it seriously and you will do well. Remember that ultimately, the "win" for a spokesperson is to influence your audience with what you say. If done well, that influence can be like ripples in a pond when a stone is dropped in: wide and far-reaching. Whether speaking to the media, or to any group, here are eight tips to consider before stepping to that podium, standing in front of that camera or turning on that microphone.

Define key messages

Whether delivering a prepared speech or fielding questions from a group of reporters, clearly identify a few (we recommend no more than three) key messages that you want to make sure break through and are heard. State them early and often, and always frame them as succinct takeaways for the audience.

Prepare

This may seem simplistic, but don't "wing it." You may know the topic, but preparing will enable you to provide the important information in the most efficient and effective manner. It isn't easy to ensure that your message reaches the audience thoroughly and appropriately. While not an option for all, advance preparation with outside experts can be very helpful.

Practice

Say what you plan to say in front of actual people. It will help to work out the kinks and identify places to dig more deeply or to avoid altogether. At a minimum, it will help you to realize that you simply aren't quite as funny as you think you are.

Anticipate

Anticipating certain questions is imperative for media interviews, as well as for larger audiences. Usually, your presentation will answer these questions, but maybe not. See if you can anticipate the questions and how you might address them. Having thorough yet concise answers ready is helpful to the media, appreciated by audiences, and critical when conveying your brand promise.

Build a bridge

Knowing how NOT to answer a question can, at times, be as helpful as knowing how to provide an answer. You should never lie, but you can "bridge" to one of your key messages. Useful bridging techniques might include saying: "While I cannot answer that question at this time, what I can tell you is ..." Or "While that's important, what we are focusing on today is ..." Remember that bridging is a technique to help you to say what's important to you, not necessarily what the questioner thinks is important.

Be quotable, but don't quote

No one wants to hear what Socrates said about a similar situation. He doesn't live here. Actually, he's dead. Audiences want to hear what you have to say about something that's happening now and about which you may have something interesting to say. Make it short, sweet and meaningful. That's being quotable.

Numbers make things real

It's always good to share some relevant – and current -- statistics. It helps make complex content easier to digest and makes you sound authoritative.

Evaluate

As with any communications outreach, it is always good to determine what success looks like ahead of time, and then be sure to evaluate whether you reached that or not. Were you able to convey all three of your key messages? If not, why not? And then let those results frame what you say – and how you say it -- the next time.