



## The Media and You

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### Media Overview

- While media is ubiquitous, often criticized, and even feared, it is at base a business
- Reporters are “doing a job”
- For the most part they are highlighting something that – at least to their editors – will be of interest to readers and/or viewers
- A common saying: “If it bleeds, it leads” (and we’ll come back to that in a bit.)

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### Media Overview

- There are various forms of media
  1. Newspapers
  2. Television
  3. Radio
  4. Internet
  5. Social media postings (a new and scary area)
- Many of these overlap – often citing stories from one another

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### Media Overview

- While we are bombarded by media, you need to take a step back and consider what the media does
- As noted – in most cases (social media being less so) these are commercial ventures
- Reporters are doing a job and have certain professional goals and training
- Indeed, those goals and training make working with the media somewhat predictable

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### Media Overview: Goals

The media pursue various roles

1. *Signaler role*: basically just reporting that something has happened
2. *Agenda Setting*: Generally focusing on stories of a common topic which media reports start to link (into a frame). The media is in a sense telling their readers/viewers that this is something to think about
3. *Framing*: A handy heuristic for how stories link. This is the angle where multiple stories can fit an ongoing narrative
4. *Investigative Journalism*: More in-depth coverage of some topic

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### Media Overview: Goals

- The primary goal, though, is to get the story right




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### Media Overview: Goals

Reporters are the key

- They are generally under-paid
- They operate on deadlines that limit what they can really uncover
- They operate on word limits which shapes how stories get presented
- They are looking for key facts and then supporting quotes which tell a story in an interesting way
- Those “supporting quotes” are a key in dealing with reporters

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### Working with the Media: Four Perspectives

- So you get called by a reporter, now what?
- It somewhat depends on your role.
- A basic question you can ask yourself, why is the media interested in me?
- If you are an official spokesperson for your entity then you know the game
- If not, then there are ways to view and respond. I will break these into four general perspectives

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### Working With the Media

**PERSPECTIVE ONE: The media is not the enemy**

- As noted, reporters have distinct limits – recognize this and work with them
- If they come to you for factual information – provide it within the scope of the law. Much of what you likely will be asked about concerns public data. Don’t get into a fight over public data.
- You can, though, note some items cannot be shared at a particular time (i.e. personnel reviews)

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### Working With The Media

- Reporters can be biased, but the bias is generally linked to how they are trying to frame the story. *Don't be adversarial*
- Indeed, you can actually aid reporters doing their job (data, references to others and reporters like this because it saves them time)
- If you can, try to see their perspective, but DON'T automatically assume the worst (and the more you know about specific reporters or how a story is unfolding the better)
- In fact, I have often had reporters call and tell me "Here is how I am thinking about story x..."

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### Working With The Media

- **PERSPECTIVE TWO: You don't have to explain what you don't say** (Sam Rayburn)
- If called, try to get some background as to what the call is about (again, don't assume the worst or be defensive)
- In essence, try to figure out (from both the reporter's and your perspective), why you are being interviewed
- Answer questions directly but be careful about giving too much (Think of talking in sound bites)
- Most complaints about being misquoted comes from saying too much

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### Working with the Media

- NEVER LIE** (This could actually be its own perspective)
- Don't make stuff up
- If you don't know, say so
- Know if you are the SME (subject matter expert)
- If you are then you actually have the opportunity to help frame the story
  - Reporters also look for quotes that the reporter could easily just say in a story but instead they want an informed person giving the quote (examples)

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### Working With the Media

**PERSPECTIVE THREE: Be Courteous**

- Again, don't assume the press is out to get you
- Reporters often take up time – and they are trying to get facts and perspective – but then they have to condense all the interviews and data into a relatively brief story
- The story – in most instances – isn't about you. (You may talk to a reporter for 20 minutes and then nothing you said gets directly used. Live with it.)

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### Working With the Media

- Return phone calls, even if after the deadline
- NEVER LIE (Yeah, I already said that)
- And if you have given the press data or something that is factually wrong – call and correct it
- However, don't call about amending a quote (you have to live with what you said)

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### Working With the Media

- **PERSPECTIVE FOUR:** Dealing with a bad situation
- Sometimes bad things happen and you are either directly or indirectly involved – have a planned response
- These plans are sometimes called “talking points”
- Talking points can give you some cover, but they can also come across as being really phony. If that becomes the perception then you make a bad situation worse.

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### Working With the Media

- If part of an organization, have a common response
- If there was a mistake, admit it (within the limits of personnel and legal parameters.)
- A caveat, however, lawyers will often want stone walls. I think this is often a bad strategy
- The goal is to make a bad story a single story. You don't want it dragging out

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### Working With the Media

- Don't play the diversion game: trying to get the media to look at something else (the "bright, shiny object")
- Sooner or later you have to address the issue and you don't want to lose credibility – yours or the organizations
- Don't try to shift blame or obfuscate (Washoe School Board might be an example)
- In fact, you can even take the blame (Kirkland example) but be careful

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### Summary

- Reporters are doing a job
- If they have a bias, it is generally that they want a catchy quote to help make a story more interesting: YOU are the source of such quotes
- If you don't know something or are not the right person – say so – but also direct the reporter to the correct source
- NEVER LIE
- Be courteous

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THANK YOU



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