



***3...2...1... You're on!***  
***The Dynamics of Live Interviews***

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One of the most intimidating interviews imaginable is the live television interview. I've spoken with hundreds of executives about the news media and nothing strikes greater fear into them than the prospect of doing a "live" interview. While a live interview presents risks, there are also significant rewards. First and foremost is **unedited time with your audience.**

The audience has the opportunity to hear what you say as you say it, without the interpretation or filtering of the reporter. The challenge is to stay *on message* and not get sidetracked. You are talking with the reporter because the program reaches audiences you deem important. Use your limited time in a live interview (usually 2-4 minutes) to connect with your audience wisely.

Here are a few tips that can help you survive the live interview:

1. **Keep your audience with you.** With oral communication, there are no punctuation marks or bold type in oral communication. You must give shape to your words with pauses and emphasis. After you make a key point, pause for a moment to give the audience a chance to absorb the information. Use phrases like "The most important thing I can say is..." or "Our primary concern is..." or "We are committed to..." Phrases like that make it easier for the audience to absorb your key messages.

2. **Give complete answers.** Yes and no answers or short bursts of information can make for a long interview. The more you speak, the fewer questions you will be asked. Make sure your answers not only

provide the information the reporter seeks, but also the context in which you want the audience to hear that information. For a typical live television interview, each response should be about 30 to 45 seconds in length. Remember the 20/80 rule: spend 20% of your time answering or responding to the questions and 80% of your time delivering your key messages.

**3. Answer or respond to every question.** By agreeing to the interview, you agree to answer or respond to reporter's questions. This does not mean you have to accept the premise of the question or answer it on the reporter's terms. You can answer or respond, and then transition to one of your key messages.

**4. Don't repeat the negative words.** Human beings "mirror" back words during conversation to signal their understanding of what has been asked. In a live interview, this natural communication instinct can work against you. A negative word uttered by the reporter, then mirrored back by you, becomes *your word*. The world won't remember that the reporter said it first; it will only remember that *you* said it.

**5. Demeanor is important.** The audience will remember about 10% of what you say – but they will have a lasting impression of you long after you say it. The audience will also believe what they *see* over what they *hear*. So make sure your demeanor is appropriate for the situation. If you are pitching a new product, your demeanor will be one of excitement. If you are dealing with a crisis, your demeanor will be more subdued.

**6. Be conscious of time.** Broadcasting is a slave to time. In a live situation, there is a finite amount of time for the interview. Make sure you know how long the host intends to go and find out if there are others that will appear with you during the interview. Tip #3 advised to give complete answers. Complete answers can also be brief. If you go on too long, the reporter may be forced to interrupt you. If you get interrupted while answering a question, avoid talking over the reporter. At that point, no one is listening to either of you. If you want to come back and finish what you were saying, use a transition phrase like... "I'll come to that in a minute, but I want to finish my last answer because it's important information..."

Follow these tips and when the red light blinks to life on the camera and you have a much higher chance of connecting with the audiences that are important to you and your organization.