

### 7. Know the Program.

Look at the interview show or newscast ahead of time. Observe the style of the interviewers, anchors, and reporters. Get a sense for how much time is usually allowed to make points.

### 8. Try to Relax.

You might have butterflies. Try to get them to all fly in the same direction. Remember, you're not a TV professional, but you are important and have something newsworthy to talk about. Be relaxed, but also passionate about your subject.

## Radio

#### 1. It's Easier Than TV.

Remember, in radio there are no lights or cameras and, in the case of talk shows, more available time to make your points. Radio is an excellent compromise between TV and newspapers.

#### 2. Work From Note Cards.

Have facts and examples on note cards that you can quickly flip to in making your points.

#### 3. Know Your Audience.

Who's out there listening? Male, female, young, old, educated, low-income? Tailor your remarks to the interests and concerns of the audience.

#### 4. Be Conversational and Brief.

Make your points in a conversational way. You may also want to repeat or rephrase the question, especially if it comes from an "open line."

#### 5. Assume You're Always "On-the-Air."

When you enter the studio or take the phone call from the radio station, assume anything you say is being broadcast.

## Channels to the Media

**Informal Briefings**—These can be conducted for individuals or groups and may be in-person or by phone. The purpose of the briefing is not to make an announcement, but to explain or clarify certain points. These should always be on the record.

**News Releases**—These are written announcements distributed to the media, usually used for non-major news events. Don't mail them—fax them or phone them out.

**Query Letters**—With a query letter, you suggest an idea to the media outlet and offer your organization as an example.

If you want some coverage of your new "X-tron Widget," you might send a letter that discusses how widgets are changing the lifestyles of Americans, and then give an example of a family that uses the X-tron and how it has impacted them.

## If the Media Gets it Wrong

Your best bet, in most cases, is to let it go if the press misquotes or misinterprets your remarks. Letters to the editor, editorial replies, and retractions usually don't get much attention. The best strategy is to call the reporter's editor and complain, but be specific.

## Five Tips for Preventing Misquotes

- Use a written statement.
- Take your time.
- Stick to the facts; don't ramble on.
- If you don't know an answer, say so.
- Assume everything you say will be quoted.

### About Communications for Management, Inc. Int'l

Communications for Management offers on-location media, crisis and other communications training programs for clients throughout the U.S. and abroad.

#### The Author

*Frank Corrado is President of Communications for Management and author of "Getting the Word Out: How Managers Can Create Value with Communication" and "Communicating with Employees."*

**You can reach CM at 800-875-0570,  
by fax at 312-641-6915 or  
on its Home Page WWW.C4M.COM**



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360 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 601  
Chicago, Illinois 60601

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# MEDIA FOR MANAGERS

A C4M POCKET GUIDE

by Frank M. Corrado

## Why Talk with the Media?

The world is wired for communications like never before—and that means that space and time are being redefined. There is no information “float” anymore: events are communicated as they happen, in real time, across the world’s boundaries. Organizations now find it more difficult than ever to hide the impact of their actions. Prudent management requires working with the media, if not out of a sense of public responsibility, at least out of a reasonable fear of being done-in by the impact of negative news coverage.

There are three media strategies: “Do nothing,” “React when something happens,” and “Stay ahead by being proactive.” Different organizations adopt different strategies depending on how they perceive the potential for problems. It’s a judgment call, but history supports a proactive approach.

## When You Get a Call From the Media

1. Find out what they want to talk about.
2. Ask them when their deadline is.
3. Try and get the right spokesperson.
4. Go over possible questions with the spokesperson.
5. Make sure the spokesperson has key points to make.  
(This whole process can take less than 15 minutes)

## Rules for Interviews

### 1. Prepare Thoroughly.

Know your subject. Try and figure out what questions are most likely to be asked and know what key points you want to make. You should have both a **strategic statement** that explains your organization’s mission and **tactical points** you want to make concerning your subject.

### 2. Speak to be Understood.

Answer questions in complete, easy to understand sentences, without using jargon. Try to speak in terms of the audience’s interests. Reporters like colorful language, and it keeps your meaning intact. Identify what you say as either fact or opinion.

### 3. Be Positive.

If a reporter asks, “Why haven’t you corrected this problem?”, don’t answer with, “We haven’t corrected this problem because...” A better way to answer is to say, “We have been moving as quickly as possible to obtain the necessary permits...” Make as many positive points as you are able to.

### 4. Tell the Truth.

An organization is only as believable as the people who represent it. Once caught in a lie, it’s very difficult to regain credibility, and years of positive image building can be destroyed. Don’t

speculate or guess an answer. If you don’t know, say so. Then commit to getting the information as quickly as possible.

### 5. Stay “On-the-Record.”

Don’t go off the record with a reporter unless the reporter has as much to lose as you do if the agreement is violated. Avoid playing favorites: giving one reporter a “scoop” can sometimes make enemies.

### 6. Use the “Devil’s Advocate.”

Practice with someone who can play the role of the reporter. Have them ask the toughest questions and then formulate answers together. Also practice making your points.

## Interview Traps

When you’re going through an interview, there are some interview traps to watch out for:

### 1. The “Set-up.”

**Example:** “Considering the low regard people have for your industry, how do you, as a major industry spokesperson, expect people to believe you are not ripping them off?”

**Solution:** One solution is to break in politely and challenge the premise. (Don’t nod your head when the question is being asked—viewers will think you agree with what is being said). The second approach is to wait until the question is finished, then go back and knock down the preface: “Yes, it is true that some people don’t think much of our business, but in fact, profits in the last two years have been flat.” Or simply, “What you have said is just not true. Let’s look at the figures.”

### 2. The “Empty Chair.”

**Example:** “Mr. Nader has said that your product is a health hazard and should be recalled immediately.” Or, “Congressman X says your industry is notorious for price fixing...”

**Solution:** You can simply respond, “I have not heard those remarks,” or “I cannot believe the Congressman said that, but I believe the facts will show...” Don’t attack an opponent who is not present.

### 3. The “What if” Question.

**Example:** “What if gasoline goes up to two dollars a gallon?”

**Solution:** The best advice is to move to your main point: “I think that such a question is pure speculation. Our real problem is conservation...”

### 4. Inconsistency.

**Example:** “Your firm issued a press release indicating that you would not leave this community and move to Arkansas.” Or, “You previously stated that there were absolutely no health problems associated with your new drug.”

**Solution:** Clearly explain the reason for the change, whether it was due to a change in policy or circumstances. For example, “Our intentions have always been to maintain a plant in this community. However, the difficult economic conditions nationally and the flood of competing imports have forced us to consolidate our operations.”

### 5. “No comment.”

**Example:** “Is it true your company is considering buying our local television station?”

**Solution:** If the answer is “no comment,” it can be done smoothly. For example, “Our firm has a history of attempting to expand in many areas. It is a major decision and one in which there must be a consensus within the company. At this time, there has been no decision about buying the station.” Talk about policy, procedures, and processes, NOT specifics. But never say “No comment.”

## Television

### 1. TV Covers the News Differently.

Newspapers tend to present a “world view” of events. They stress an **information** approach. For example, in reporting on a famine, the newspaper would tend to present facts as presented by agencies, officials, and experts. Television, on the other hand, focuses on individual “**stories**” to convey information. In covering a famine, TV would tend to focus on the suffering experienced by a particular family or a particular village.

### 2. Pictures Rule.

Pictures are everything on TV. Doing your interview against some type of visual “background” is important.

### 3. Be Brief, Focused and Enthusiastic.

Thirty seconds on a television news interview is considered a lot. The downside is that many things cannot be explained in that short time period. Try to open your interview with a brief summary of your key point. Be enthusiastic for your point of view. Go “live” on radio and TV if you can—it’s safer.

### 4. The Camera is Always “On.”

Never assume the recorder is off, even if it seems to be. Anytime there is a camera or tape recorder nearby, consider yourself “on-stage” and act and speak accordingly.

### 5. Look at the Reporter, Talk to the Audience.

Don’t look at the camera. Speak and look directly to the reporter. However, address your remarks with the audience in mind.

### 6. Dress Conservatively.

Blue or gray suits are a good choice. Women should avoid shiny jewelry or loud patterns. If you wear glasses, tinted lenses will help cut lighting glare.