

INSIDER STRATEGIES
FOR THE CONFIDENT
COMMUNICATOR

HOW TO MASTER MEETINGS,
PRESENTATIONS, INTERVIEWS, AND ADVOCACY

ED BARKS



**Insider Strategies for the Confident Communicator:
How to Master Meetings, Presentations, Interviews, and Advocacy**
Ed Barks

Published by:
Ogmios Publishing
Falls Church, Virginia

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ISBN 979-8-9856154-0-1

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Barks, Ed

Insider Strategies for the Confident Communicator: How to Master Meetings, Presentations, Interviews, and Advocacy

1. media relations
2. communications
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Today's Leaders into Tomorrow's Influencers*

*The Truth About Public Speaking: The Three Keys to
Great Presentations*

More than ever, to Celeste and Polly for their love and support
through these trying pandemic times

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Preface

Why write a book? And why write this book?

I hear these questions every now and then and, having penned three books previously, have grown accustomed to them. I pursue authorship in general for a number of reasons. I've always been a writer, whether it's news copy, executive speeches, research reports aligned with my consulting business, or any number of other vehicles. The simple fact is I enjoy the craft of writing.

Who did I have in mind when writing the book? You are likely to benefit if you see yourself in any of the following profiles:

- An executive who speaks in a wide variety of public forums, in person and remote
- A corporate or association spokesperson who deals with the media
- A professional who wants to shine during video meetings and presentations
- A C-suite leader seeking to advance your company's business goals
- A government relations pro charged with attaining public policy objectives

- A subject matter expert who tends to drift when addressing audiences, reporters, and public officials
- A developing executive motivated to climb the corporate ladder
- An entrepreneur newly accustomed to attention from the press and public

My hope is that you will gain career and business dividends, no matter your current station in the professional world.

You may have noticed that this book is free. It will remain forever so. This sometimes leads to puzzled looks or makes people wonder, “What is this guy’s angle?”

I’m quite transparent on the answer to this question, and have openly shared my reasons for the “forever free” approach with those who inquire. My goal is for this volume to give you kernels of knowledge that help you advance your company’s communications and public policy goals. Consider it your go-to deskside reference.

By no means do I anticipate you will carefully examine each segment, for some will apply to your situation, others not. As a reader, I consider reading a business book a worthwhile endeavor if I get even a small handful of practical ideas. If you find such benefits here, I’ll be a happy fellow.

There are also business reasons for publishing this book. Communications and public affairs strategy consulting has been my business since 1997. The books I author are intended to drive clients my way. As a matter of fact, I won one of my largest contracts because a client bought one of my books, read it, and knew I was the consultant he wanted. No hesitation. No competition. Love it.

Furthermore, I have a professional reputation burnished over several decades. I’m quite fond of it (we authors do tend to have healthy egos). Authorship boosts that reputation.

One more thought about the notion of a free book. Some have advised me to charge for it, even suggesting the bargain basement price

of 99 cents. Nope, not interested. A low price, to me, connotes a cheap, worthless book. There's no way I want to be tagged with that image.

Which leads to a logical question: How good can it be if it's free? I'll stack up this advice against any other ready reference. You be the judge.

Plainly stated, I hope the value you find here will lead you to examine my other books. So, yes, I want to sell books. Any author who tells you otherwise is either playing it too cagey or is an artiste in the extreme.

What are [those other books](#)? Here's the roster:

- *Reporters Don't Hate You: 100+ Amazing Media Relations Strategies*
- *The Truth About Public Speaking: The Three Keys to Great Presentations*
- *A+ Strategies for C-Suite Communications: Turning Today's Leaders into Tomorrow's Influencers*

I make them available wherever you prefer to buy your books. Some authors consider selling them solely on the largest online bookseller enough. Count me out. I don't want to force you into any single option. Consumer choice matters, so purchase them wherever you like.

My name goes on the cover and I hold responsibility for the content. But this is by no means a solo endeavor. I receive ongoing support and encouragement from my colleagues with the independent authors group I launched at the National Press Club.

In particular, my thanks to Jody Beck, Elizabeth McGowan, Mackley McKenzie, Edward Segal, and Carol Stevens for generously contributing as beta readers. Your observations have been immensely helpful and made this a better resource.

Once again, my gratitude to exceptional copy editor Sheryl Bauerschmidt. This book — the third we have worked on together

— would suffer were it not for her eagle eye, common sense approach, and encouraging words.

And, as always, the biggest debt of thanks goes to you, dear readers. Without you, I'd just be shouting into the void.

Introduction

The foundation of this book is a series of Insider Strategies briefs I've published and updated over the years. They encompass the range of sometimes vexing issues that communications and government relations pros confront.

Some of these passages might be familiar if you have requested one of the briefs from me. You may have read certain passages on my [C-suite Blueprint blog](#) or in some form in my previous books.

I decided to offer the advice here in one complimentary resource to give you a one-stop guide for all your communications endeavors, whether you interact with audiences in overflowing auditoriums (or Zoom offerings), one-on-one conversations, or anything in between. This may encompass customers, clients, the press, policymakers, direct reports, C-suite executives, and much more.

The first section deals with public speaking strategy. Are you looking for a ready-made checklist to help your issue experts prepare their presentations? Got it. How about guardrails for your executives who use slide shows? It's here. You're not sure how to coax your CEO to deliver a full text speech? Read all about it.

The second section covers media relations — what it takes to shine in the press. Maybe your chief operations officer needs some ideas for controlling interviews with reporters? Yes, you'll find it here. You'll also

benefit by learning what to do when invited to appear on a radio talk show or podcast. I'll even discuss the positives and negatives of going "off the record" (and how to behave when you do).

The third section is all about advocacy. Are you stuck when it comes to organizing your public affairs strategy? You won't be after reading here. Are you a membership organization that sends members to Capitol Hill or your state legislature to plead your case? This has the advice you need. Is there a critical round of Congressional testimony in your future? Check out the recommendations here.

Then there are the bonus sections. The first one has the lowdown on how to perform on today's never-ending video presentations. I'll even show you what it takes to successfully organize and moderate a Zoom conference. And if you're being interviewed by the media remotely, you'll want to read how you can excel.

Other bonus content includes advice on your nonverbal tools, the structuring of quotable quotes ... even how to find and work with your communications strategy consultant.

Don't feel obligated to read this book from front to back. In fact, I encourage you to skip around as befits your situation from month to month and day to day. You may have a big media campaign starting on Monday, a Washington fly-in (or Zoom-in) on Wednesday, and a crucial speech by your CEO to your association's convention next weekend. You have my license to hop from page to page as needed.

Before we dive into the main content, I want to ask something of you that you won't find in every book. Some authors prefer to write in a vacuum. Not me. I love hearing from readers. So get in touch. That's one way I advance my professional development and my chops as a writer. There are lots of avenues for you to chime in. For instance:

- Post a mini-review on the website where you downloaded the book
- Share your reaction (and this book) with communications and government relations experts you know

- Post reviews on the large online booksellers' websites
- Leave a comment on my [C-suite Blueprint blog](#); there will be several posts about this book, so choose your favorite
- [Email me](#) with your thoughts
- Call me at (703) 533-0403 (I answer my own phone)

If you want to support content like this, here are some ways you can help (hey, you are getting this book for free, after all):

- Buy one or more of [my other books](#) from your favorite bookseller
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- Tell your local bookstore to stock a few copies of my three previous books
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My thanks in advance for your help. Now, on to the good stuff.

Ed Barks

February 2022

CHAPTER 1

Public Speaking Strategies

He was troubled. I could hear it in his voice.

My prospective client was about to pursue a new round of financing for his firm. The company was a recognized industry leader and had raised funds previously. But something told him they could do better. Their presentations weren't registering at 100 percent. After reviewing some of them, I could see why.

Their speakers leaned on their slides, making that inanimate presentation software — and not the company — the star of the show. Moreover, the panels were stuffed with complex graphs, tiny fonts, and a gazillion numbers.

How to motivate change? Working on their mindset. These were all smart people, so once they realized that their pitches were not as elegant as they could be, they were receptive to a better, more profitable path.

We magnetized their messaging, making it compelling for listeners. In addition, we decluttered the slides, ramped up their presentation skills, and encouraged them to reinforce their primary messages at every turn.

The result? A funding round that exceeded their already ambitious goal.

After our work together, the executive who hired me invited me to attend when he presented at a conference (a marvelous signal of his commitment to sustained professional development). His stage

personality was much livelier than in the past and his slides stood out visually from other presenters. He even got a few laughs — on purpose — from a fairly staid audience.

You can get there, too. Your speaking objective could be something as basic as a talk to colleagues around your office conference table or Zoom link. Or you could be steeling yourself for a speech to a packed ballroom. No matter the forum, your reputation and your livelihood depend on the ability to share a magnetic message using solid communications skills in public situations.

If you see yourself in that description, you're in luck. That's what this section is all about.

Before you bound up to the stage, it is helpful to know the reasons for tackling that initiative. Let's start there.

Why You Need to Speak in Public

Many people get the shakes when asked to deliver a presentation. If you are among them, it doesn't make you a weirdo.

Think about it. The rewards vastly outweigh any potential negatives. If you don't care about higher salaries, workplace promotions, or a heightened reputation, feel free to neglect your speaking abilities.

Different people have different motives for spreading their message. And to be sure, there are many more ingredients to your professional success than an ability to communicate commendably. Still, you are more likely to benefit in these areas the next time you step to the front of a room or take the lead in a video conference:

- **Seize a leadership role** in your workplace, association, or community
- **Refuse to lose that big new account** to your chief competitor
- **Get that new promotion** complete with pay raise and fancy title
- **Persuade public officials** to enact your favored legislation or bend regulations to your liking
- **Gain the presidency** of your professional society
- **Secure a new job** thanks to sharp messaging and communications skills
- **Win election to any office** from your local school board to Congress
- **Harvest more contributions** for your favorite charity
- **Honor loved ones** by offering a heartfelt wedding toast or eulogy

Whatever your motivation for reaching out to your target audiences, it's important to understand how to assemble a presentation. Let's examine that next.

A Handy Presentation Preparation Checklist

There are many moving parts to pull together as you prepare to deliver any type of talk, live or remote. This checklist is designed to help you streamline the process.

- **Make a considered decision** whether you want to address the organization that invites you. There's no law that says you must accept every overture.
- **Research your audience.** Who are they? How many are expected to attend? What is their level of sophistication relative to your topic? Are they attending voluntarily or are they compelled to attend?
- **Will the presentation be in person or remote?**
- **Forge your message** before you begin to draft any remarks.
- **Settle on the format of your presentation:** Full text speech? Outline? Notes? Extemporaneous?
- **Never default to using slides every time.** Use them only when you wish to emphasize something visual and when appropriate for the specific occasion.
- **Punch up your remarks** with quotable quotes, using tactics like stories, numbers, case histories, third party references, and current trends.
- **Practice your remarks diligently** numerous times. Then practice some more.
- **Request the room (or Zoom) setup you want.** Do you prefer classroom or theater seating? Need a projector and screen? What type of microphone? If remote, do you want to be able to see the audience and interact in real time?
- **Keep in touch with the event organizer** to stay current with any changes. Time slots have a way of shifting slightly on occasion.

- **Study notes and videos from your past presentations.** Emphasize what you do well and either minimize or work to improve your challenges.
- **Stay up to date with any last minute developments** on your subject. You don't want to be surprised if events have evolved.
- **Keep a spare copy of your remarks close at hand** in the event your notes go flying or technology fails you.
- **Confirm a few days ahead of time all logistics**, such as the date, time, and length of your remarks. Also confirm any agreed upon specifics with regard to matters like your microphone preference and room set up.
- **Obtain an emergency contact number** for the day of your presentation in case you are unavoidably delayed or an emergency arises.

We'll get into more detail on some of these items, starting with the formats you have at your disposal.

6 Methods to Organize Your Remarks: The Pros and Cons

You have choices in how you structure your presentations. Don't let anyone tell you there is one proper method for every circumstance. And don't fall into the trap of using the same format every time. What suits one audience may be wholly inappropriate for another. The top choice is what works best for your audience and what suits your style and comfort level. Let's talk about the advantages and disadvantages of each method:

1. Full text

PRO: All but impossible to go off message; convenient to distribute the text to your audience and beyond.

CON: The most difficult format to carry out since it is a challenge to read a speech out loud while sounding natural. Be ready to commit to a great deal of rehearsal time.

2. Outline or talking points

PRO: Avoids the canned sound of a full text speech while keeping you on track with your message.

CON: You can sometimes lose your train of thought. It can be difficult to get that train chugging again when using this bare bones tactic.

3. Presentation software

PRO: Allows you to readily demonstrate visual concepts.

CON: Too often a slide show turns into a mind-numbing litany of bullet points that lulls the audience to sleep.

4. Extemporaneous (remarks prepared but not written)

PRO: Useful if you speak about the same topic to the same type of audience frequently.

CON: Strong temptation to veer off into uncharted waters.

5. Stump speech

PRO: Maintains consistency of message while allowing you to tailor matters to a specific audience. With this approach, as much as 90 percent of your speech remains the same, while the “doughnut” is filled with material specific to the given situation.

CON: Since this is a variation of the full text speech, you must rehearse rigorously so as not to sound canned.

6. Impromptu (nothing prepared)

PRO: None. I vehemently discourage this “winging it” method.

CON: You will lose your train of thought, fail to deliver your message, and look like an unprepared amateur.

Now that you have the mechanics of your format in mind, we should spend a few moments discussing who really matters: Your audience members.

Audience Essentials Every Presenter Needs to Grasp

Every audience is different. Whether seeking to persuade, educate, inform, or entertain, executives who speak in public need to determine who is in the house and what they need to understand. These principles apply whether you speak before an auditorium filled with hundreds of people, a more interactive venue, or a remote setting.

Here are must-know necessities capable of giving you the insights you need into any audience:

- **Who are they**, both as a group and individually?
- **How many are expected to attend?**
- **What is the age range?**
- **Do they already know each other** or are they meeting for the first time?
- **Is attendance compulsory?**
- **How much do they know** about my topic?
- **What is their viewpoint on my topic:** Supportive? Hostile? Ambivalent? Uninformed?
- **Is there likely to be someone in attendance who may know more than I do** about certain aspects?

Of course, it's important to avoid alienating your audience from the get-go. Next, some words of advice on that subject.

8 Opening Lines Guaranteed to Turn Off Your Audience

Accomplished presenters know that they need to get the audience on their side the moment they step on stage or appear on the screen. Here are some openers to *avoid at all costs* (and some positive techniques that can get you off to a solid start):

1. **Open with a joke.** I've always found it surprising how many people think this is a good idea. Forget about this technique unless you have experience as a stand-up comic. The fact is few of us can tell jokes without falling flat. Why not begin with a surprising, intriguing, or seemingly contradictory statement as an alternative?
2. **Say "Good morning" or "Good evening."** Your audience already knows what time of day it is.
3. **Recite a dry litany of facts.** You are better off grabbing audience members' ears with a personal anecdote or a provocative thought.
4. **Begin with a long, convoluted story.** It's better to start simple and expand as appropriate during the balance of your presentation.
5. **Ask a confusing question** to which no one knows the answer. Opening with a question is fine. Just be sure its complexity isn't baffling.
6. **Recite a ribald tale.** Bawdy language has no place in a professional environment.
7. **Mention religion or politics.** Even if your audience is religious or political in nature, these topics are the third rails of public speaking.
8. **Belittle the previous speaker.** Do unto others ...

A solid start opens the audience to your message while boosting your confidence. Lots of people have asked me about combating stage fright. Yet there are more mental blocks than that. It's time to examine some of them.

12 Roadblocks to Speaking Success — And How to Overcome Them

People sometimes ask me how to combat “stage fright.” Upon hearing that question, I try to dig deeper, realizing that stage fright is often used as a catch-all for a host of causes. The fact is there are many reasons even the boldest of individuals dread public speaking. Here are some of the leading causes along with remedies to help cure them:

1. **Stage fright:** Combat this “fight or flight” reaction with lots of practice. Also, release your nervous energy by slightly boosting your vocal pitch and volume and by suitably enhancing your gestures and facial expressions.
2. **Shyness:** Former shrinking violets realize that hard work and conscious effort can conquer bashfulness. Remind yourself that a presentation is an opportunity to grow both personally and professionally.
3. **Uncertainty about your topic:** Keep up with the latest news in your field. Connect with experts who can give you insights into the latest trends. Write articles, columns, op-eds, and books to establish your expertise.
4. **Arrogance:** No matter how long you have been speaking in public, there are always things to learn. Swallow your pride and acknowledge that you need to continually sharpen your communications edge.
5. **Being a bore:** Deliver a magnetic message with solid nonverbal tools (see the section on “Taking Inventory of Your Nonverbal Skills” for specifics), and boredom will cease to be a cause for concern.
6. **Judgment day:** Realize that your listeners will generally be on your side unless you give them reason to turn against you.

7. **Ill-prepared:** You have no excuse for not being equipped for a speaking engagement. Preparation and practice are the basic solutions.
8. **Lack of passion:** Accept a speaking invitation only when you are invested in the outcome.
9. **Reluctance:** Ask a friend to offer some encouraging words. Read a passage that inspires you. Find some way to psych yourself up.
10. **Never been taught:** None of us is born with the skill to speak in public. It is a matter of sustained professional development. If you have not taken advantage of any formal training, that is the place to start.
11. **Bad advice:** Carefully check the credentials of anyone who tries to offer public speaking counsel to you. Ask about their experience working with executives who present, philosophy on professional development, and ability as a speaker.
12. **Poor facilities:** Arrive early to prepare and you may be able to cure a stuffy room, missing projector, or naïve Zoom host's shortfalls.

It's not just opening lines and mental barriers that can tank a speaking engagement. Now we'll look at some additional alienating devices and how to sidestep them.

Don't Make Your Audience Head for the Hills

Sad to say, some speakers make for better sleep aids than a warm glass of milk. Others offend their audience and remain clueless. This applies both to in person presentations and video talks.

Here are some of the speaking sins that are sure to make an audience head for the exits or click that “Leave Meeting” button, and deservedly so:

- **Punish those who arrive on time by beginning the program late.** This one really drives me nuts. Refuse to be an enabler to those who fail to be seated punctually or give themselves insufficient time to log on.
- **Leave the temperature in the room so stifling** that audience members are fanning themselves and gasping for air. The converse also holds true; don't freeze everyone to the point of shivering and turning blue.
- **Tell a story that rambles pointlessly** before it eventually dies of boredom. Rehearse every tale you plan to spin. It's also a good idea to have different length versions — for instance, 30 seconds, one minute, and five minutes — in case time gets tight or you have some extra moments to fill.
- **Fumble with your technology** because you neglected to practice with it in advance. Microphones, laptop connections, and share screen functions are just some of the logistics you need to sort out ahead of time.
- **Ignore the technical crew.** Whether it's a videographer or a moderator for a remote program, know what they can and cannot do. And be sure to acknowledge them and treat them with the respect they deserve.
- **Talk to the slides instead of engaging the audience.** You are

not there to converse with an inanimate projector screen. Pay attention to those in the room.

- **Insult the audience** by insinuating that they are a bunch of stupid, unsophisticated rubes, either with your words or nonverbally.
- **Mumble so that no one can possibly understand.** Articulate clearly, even if you are using a microphone.
- **Yammer non-stop for 60 minutes or more.** Unless you are a former Secretary of State or trending celebrity, the odds of you holding the audience at rapt attention are close to zero if you prattle on endlessly.
- **Ramble on past the allotted time.** No, it's not okay to say, "Oops, we're running a little over time. I can finish in just another five minutes." You entered into an agreement with attendees to end by a time certain. It's up to you to organize your remarks to meet that time frame.

These are just some of the ways to alienate an audience. Methods specific to how you display slides also come into play.

A Dozen Slide Show No-nos

Using slides during your presentations — both live and online — must be a conscious decision. Never assume you need to deliver a slide show every time. It makes sense in some situations, not in others. If you find them useful in a particular environment and you feel comfortable with the equipment, great. If you are frightened by your laptop or video services like Teams and Zoom, or you simply don't care for the technology, keep it out of your repertoire. Here is a handy list of things to avoid when you opt to use slides:

1. **Never assume that people come to see your slides.** They come to see you and to gain from your point of view.
2. **Never exhibit slides that are so dense** or complex that your audience finds them incomprehensible.
3. **Never talk to the screen;** talk to your audience. Pro tip: In a remote presentation, keep eye contact with the camera lens, not the image on screen.
4. **Never appear without a backup of your slide show on a USB drive.** If your PC, laptop, or tablet dies, you can try it on another device.
5. **Never be without a hard copy of your slides as a backup.** You will still be ready to go even if every iota of technology fails.
6. **Never forget Plan B.** Plot out in advance how you will continue with your talk in the event something goes wrong.
7. **Never darken the entire room,** only the area near the screen. Otherwise, you've just given everyone license to take a nap.
8. **Never use fonts that are too small** to be viewed from the back of the room or on a mobile device.
9. **Never leave home without the remote control** that allows you to advance slides without being tethered to the keyboard.

10. **Never say “next slide please”** if someone else is advancing the slides for you. This is highly annoying and exhibits a distinct lack of advance preparation.
11. **Never get carried away** with animation, emojis, and sound effects. These are too cute and, for the most part, have no place in a professional setting.
12. **Never neglect to hold a technical run through** in advance of your talk. This applies both to in person events and video conferencing.

Whether presenting with slides or without, the question sometimes arises, “Should I use a lectern?” In those rare cases where that is advised, following are some lessons for lectern life.

Laws to Lighten Life Behind the Lectern

Working with a lectern is a daunting proposition for many speakers, both experienced and beginning. These tips will help put you at ease when you decide to step behind that large piece of furniture that represents a barrier between you and your audience.

- **Stand up straight.** Adjust the lectern to your height, not vice versa. You do not want to appear overly short or tall.
- **Use a riser if the lectern is too high for you.** Practice stepping up to it and down from it a few times beforehand; this minimizes the odds of an embarrassing pratfall.
- **Place your materials — script, notes, laptop, remote, props, and so forth — on the lectern,** then leave them alone until you need them. No fiddling allowed.
- **Do not clutch or grab the edge.** That white-knuckle look does nothing to enhance your prestige.
- **Do not lean on it.** You are not at a bus stop. Leaning collapses your posture, thereby decreasing your vocal abilities.
- **Take a moment when you first arrive to arrange things the way you want.** Is there a reading light on a gooseneck you need to adjust? Where do you want to place your glass of water?
- **When using a microphone attached to the lectern,** position it so that your voice remains audible if you turn to face a screen to emphasize a slide. You want your voice path crossing the microphone, not aimed directly at it.
- **Stay squarely behind the lectern at all times** unless you have planned in advance to walk away from it to conduct a particular piece of business. No aimless wandering allowed.
- **Place the lectern near the left front of the room** (as the audience sees it) and angle it toward the center. Why the left

front? You want the attention on you as the expert speaker. Since our eyes tend to scan from left to right, the crowd will look at you first and foremost.

- **If the facilities staff has placed a lectern in the room** and you do not plan to use it, have them remove it. You do not want your audience wondering why that huge fixture is on stage.

If you are speaking in a large hall behind a lectern, you may also use a Teleprompter occasionally. How can you enhance your use of that device? Read on.

Taming the Teleprompter

Whether it's your first speech using a Teleprompter or you're a veteran user of the technology, here are some points to help you look and sound as natural as TV newsreaders. This advice pertains both to a speech in a large venue and to presentations conducted via video conferencing:

- **Gain a comfort level with the equipment** by doing lots of practice rounds. This is vital especially if you have never or rarely used a Teleprompter previously.
- **Be aware that you will be reading your text** from one or more screens that, during in person presentations, appear transparent to your audience.
- **If presenting remotely, make sure your text is closely aligned with your camera's lens** so that it appears you are looking directly at your audience. Also, bring in the margins so your eyes scan a smaller field, again making your eye contact appear more natural.
- **For in person remarks, rehearse with the operator who will run the Teleprompter** to establish a rhythm that matches your rate and style. This is not optional. Refuse to settle for someone who just happens to be at hand during rehearsals. You need to become simpatico with whoever runs it at your performance.
- **Provide your operator with your text well ahead of time.** This allows them to enter the text into the scroll and to get a feel for your flow.
- **Make sure you can read the scrolling text.** There are two factors here: Size and speed. Regarding size, determine in advance whether you will need eyeglasses or a larger font. As for speed, work with your operator to find the pace that feels comfortable for you.

- **Rehearse with the actual equipment you will use during your talk.** You can do this as the crew conducts light and sound checks for in person presentations.
- **Notify your operator of any last minute edits.** Experienced operators can quickly and easily accommodate minor changes, though you should avoid large scale teardowns.
- **Strive to sound conversational.** This takes practice, so conduct a few run-throughs.
- **Don't stress if you miss a few words.** At the same time, don't plan to go off script. Every word should be written with an express purpose. The crowd cannot see your text so they will never know that you've deviated from the script.
- **Remember to make the most of your nonverbal skills.** Don't focus so much on the technology that you submerge your speaking strengths.
- **Have a hard copy of your remarks ready as a backup** in the event your Teleprompter breaks down while you are speaking. This prevents you from hemming and hawing until the tech crew gets things working again (assuming they can).

I've talked a lot so far about solo presentations. Now let's take a gander at panel discussions.

A Dynamic Dozen Panel Moderator Methods

How many times have you witnessed a panel discussion fall flat because the moderator lost control? It takes skill and forethought to wrangle a panel of experts, whether in person or by video conference. Few dedicate time to refining the skills required to successfully guide both panelist performance and audience Q&A. Here is a quick primer to put you on the path to becoming a master moderator:

1. **Set expectations with event organizers and panelists** by clarifying your role. Inform them that you are there to guide the discussion (not to opine yourself), make sure things don't get off track, and enforce time limits.
2. **Collect concise bios from all panelists well in advance.** You need a solid 30- to 60-second intro, not an exhaustive curriculum vitae regurgitation. If one of the speakers still insists on submitting a lengthy tome, it's your right to trim it as you see fit.
3. **Do your homework.** Gain familiarity with the issues and personalities. Conduct research online on sources ranging from their LinkedIn profiles to a news search to determine if they have been in the public eye — for better or worse.
4. **Introduce panel members to each other prior to the event,** whether it is in person or on a video platform. Devote a few moments to letting them introduce themselves at one of your rehearsal sessions.
5. **Start promptly.** This demonstrates respect for your audience. Never punish those who arrive on time. If a panelist is late, start without them. Don't worry about bringing them up to speed or giving them added time. There is absolutely no reason to treat such disrespect with equanimity.

6. **Inform your audience of the day's format** right from the top. For instance, tell them who the panelists are, how long they will speak, and if you plan to entertain questions verbally or in writing.
7. **Treat all panelists courteously**, no matter your opinion of them. The moderator's job is to foster an enlightening conversation, not take sides.
8. **Play the friendly traffic cop** by involving all panelists in the discussion. Some tend to dominate, others to disappear. At the same time, each person's time does not need to be precisely equal. The fact is some individuals are more interesting than others.
9. **Enforce agreed-upon time limits**, both for the overall event and for each panelist's remarks. You may have to play the "heavy" at times. That's the role you accepted, so don't shy away from it.
10. **Take charge during audience Q&A.** Insist upon questions — no diatribes. In rare cases, you may need to cut off rants from those with a personal agenda. Rest assured, most attendees will be on your side.
11. **Come prepared with questions of your own** in the event the audience is slow to engage. Sometimes all it takes is one query to prime the pump.
12. **Handle disruptive audience members diplomatically yet firmly.** If you anticipate trouble, appoint a "sergeant-at-arms" charged with handling any flagrant offenders. If your meeting is remote, mute any blatant offenders or, in extreme cases, kick them out.

Some panelists draft their own remarks. Others, especially higher up the corporate ladder, employ speechwriters. Next, some methods to implement when you get the call to craft a speech for one of your leaders.

Succinct Steps to Speechwriting Success

Before you sit down at your desk, crack your knuckles, and put fingers to keyboard to write that big speech for your CEO — think. Crafting an effective talk demands several steps. This list serves as a starting point.

- **Know the audience.** Aim the remarks toward them. Are they intimately familiar with the topic or do you need to start with the basics?
- **Know your principal.** You must be able to capture the speaker's voice. Whether you are writing for your CEO, a medical researcher, or political candidate, your styles must mesh. It's no sin if that chemistry doesn't develop; that's life. When that's the case, find another capable writer who might be a better match.
- **Delve into your research.** Review your principal's previous speeches and public utterances. Dig into what any opponents are saying about the issue at hand. Review relevant news accounts.
- **Build your speech around your message.** No distractions. No detours.
- **Open and close with command.** A dynamic introduction and conclusion are mandatory. Learn what tactics best suit your executive — beginning with a powerful personal anecdote or controversial fact? An emotional close or an uplifting parable?
- **Enliven remarks throughout the speech.** Use appropriate stories, analogies, personal narratives, third party endorsements, and famous quotes.
- **Remember that you are writing for the ear,** not the eye. Some writers have a gift for making words jump off a printed page. That's not your job. You are aiming to capture listeners' ears. Read it aloud yourself or for a trusted colleague to check the flow.

- **Decide on the best format for your speaker.** Do they work best from full text, notes, slides, or extemporaneously? Whenever possible, place them in the format that best suits them.
- **Sit in on practice sessions.** This is mandatory. Never let anyone else try to bigfoot you out of this vital step. Redraft the speech as needed based on what you observe.
- **Never default to slides.** It is nothing more than an occasionally useful visual tool. If you have strong visuals, great. If not, stick to the script.

You may find yourself tasked with drafting a full text speech that your C-suite officer reads verbatim. That demands some special attention, so read on.

A Simple System to Streamline Your Full Text Speech

Four score and seven years ago, speakers wrote their remarks in longhand. Today you have numerous advantages to help format the text of your remarks when deciding to deliver a full text speech.

These ideas can make the script easier to follow in front of any audience, whether presenting in person or via video:

- **Move in the left and right margins.** This makes it easier to follow since the eye does not need to scan back and forth across the entire page. It also helps with the illusion of eye contact, especially when dealing with remote audiences.
- **Use a larger font than normal to follow your text more easily.** The specific size depends on the presenter. Test a few options to see which one proves most comfortable.
- **Give each sentence its own paragraph** for two reasons. One, it breaks up the text on the page, making it easier to scan. Two, it alerts you to long, run-on sentences that can be a problem when presenting the speech.
- **Insert section headers as a reminder** when a shift in topic is imminent. You can also insert reminder notes such as “pause here,” “slow down,” or “breathe.”
- **Leave the bottom third of each page blank** when reading from a hard copy. That means the eyes don’t need to scan so far down the page, facilitating better eye contact with the audience.
- **Include page numbers on every sheet** to keep your pages in order.

You may find this format works for you or you may decide some adjustments better suit your needs. That’s fine. There is no single right way to format your script. For instance, some people with vision

difficulties might prefer a much larger font. The important thing is to devise a means that maximizes your ability to deliver a powerful speech. Go with the system that is most comfortable for you.

CHAPTER 2

Media Relations Strategies

The doctor lacked confidence. Oh, not in his scientific knowledge. He was a preeminent medical researcher who took the lead in developing a groundbreaking new therapy. Why was he so shaky?

His native language is French, and, as the lead researcher on the study, he needed to interact with English speaking reporters. He understood the language well enough. Speaking it was another matter.

He spoke with a thick accent and, as with many who speak a non-native language, it took a few beats for him to understand fully what his conversational partner was saying.

How to give him that needed dose of self-assurance? We fine tuned his message and developed a quotable quote to use with the English language press. The relief on his face was palpable.

Best of all, it resulted in that very quote appearing nearly verbatim in *The Financial Times*, one of the campaign's primary targets.

Our doctor put into play many of the principles covered in the previous section on public speaking since they apply to exchanges with reporters, too. However, media interviews exhibit some unique characteristics. Anyone who speaks to the press must be familiar with these tenets if they have any hope of advancing their business and public policy goals. We're going to dig into that doctrine next, beginning with advice on how to ace that big interview.

11 Pro Level Media Interview Techniques

When the reporter opens a notebook, fires the third degree at you under the klieg lights, or poses questions over Zoom, it's your job to deliver your company's magnetic message powerfully and succinctly using these rules:

1. **Stick to your message throughout the interview.** Return to it in response to every single question. Different portions of your message should be responsive to any query they can come up with. Important note: Remember that your job is to deliver your message, not to let the reporter lead you astray with random questions.
2. **Utilize your Message, Audio tools, and Video tools effectively.** This mix of verbal and nonverbal devices leads to success. To be sure, your words matter. So, too, does your body language; use it to maximum effect.
3. **Serve up answers that are concise and to the point,** neither too short nor too long. Avoid any lengthy diatribes unless you want to see the scribe's eyes glaze over. Also keep away from monosyllabic replies that add no value to the interview.
4. **Maintain your professionalism.** No matter how ruffled you become or how rude the reporter, let civility rule the day. If the reporter acts in a juvenile manner, it's up to you to remain the adult in the room.
5. **Disseminate your message in an engaging fashion.** A good story, a fun fact, a critical number, or a key endorsement stands a better chance of appearing in print or on the air than a dry recitation of words.
6. **Never guess at an answer.** At the same time, don't leave your response at "I don't know." Add some value by offering to

supply the information later or referring the reporter to the proper source.

7. **Avoid talking in jargon.** Plain language is a virtue, even with the wonkiest trade reporter. Begin with the basics. If you then sense the reporter is familiar with your concepts, you can go a bit deeper. Just bear in mind that jargon-laced phrases are unlikely to show up as quotes in their story.
8. **Monitor your rate of speech.** Some people tend to speed up to the point of incomprehensibility when the lights shine and the nerves surface.
9. **Remain honest at all times.** If you lie, you lose your credibility. Your days as a news source are over, and rightly so.
10. **Speak in quotable quotes.** Colorful stories, action verbs, and clear images rule the day. Create these bon mots as part of your message development preparations, then sprinkle them throughout your interviews.
11. **Bridge to your message** in response to challenging questions. Here's how: First, acknowledge the query. Second, build the bridge with a transitional phrase like, "The main point here is ... Finally, dive right into your message. Think of that message as your "safe harbor" when the grilling gets hot.

Next, let's dig deeper to discover how you can better gain control of your exchanges with the press.

10 Steps to Gaining Control of Your Media Interviews

Positive media interviews don't just happen. Even experienced news sources prepare for their business deals with reporters. Here's how:

1. **Build your magnetic message on four solid points.** Put your story into context for readers and listeners, then educate them, entertain them, or motivate them to take action — whatever your objective may be.
2. **Practice diligently and resolutely for every interview.** There is no substitute. This is by far the best way to sharpen your skills.
3. **Stage simulated interviews to prepare for the real thing.** Involve former reporters now on your communications staff or, if you lack that vital expertise, ensure your consultant has a newsroom background.
4. **Insist upon a sustained media training program for all spokespeople.** A one-and-done session will not do the job. Ongoing professional development is mandatory if you hope to attain your business and public policy goals. Your business benefits when spokespeople internalize effective messaging and communications skills.
5. **Record all of your media training exercises to video.** Play back and critique immediately afterward and as a refresher in weeks and months ahead. Never let those simulations go unwatched.
6. **Anticipate and prepare for both tough and routine questions.** Decide which part of your message best applies to each, then practice volleying questions at your spokespeople. They must become accustomed to the back and forth.
7. **Search out insights on the reporters who cover your issue.** Learn what beat they typically cover and how well they know

your situation. Have they been dealing with the topic for years? Or are they new to the beat?

8. **Think in terms of your ideal headline first.** That's how a reporter's mind works. Cut to the chase right away. Then share that ideal lead paragraph, followed by the facts and figures that back your contention.
9. **Target your media opportunities.** There are only so many hours in the day, so prioritize methodically. Bottom line: You want to reach out to those outlets that your target audience heeds.
10. **Set time limits in advance of your interview** and charge the communications advisor who accompanies you with enforcing them. Open-ended interviews encourage aimless wandering destined to get you off your chosen path and into trouble.

Taking charge of your business deals with the press doesn't mean taking a heavy-handed approach. It's important to realize that you do have certain customary rights when talking to the media. Let's review them.

Your Media Rights and Responsibilities

In any interview situation, you have certain rights to which you are entitled during your business deal with a reporter. At the same time, you have responsibilities — standards to which you must adhere if you are to be viewed as a valued source. Here's a checklist of those rights and responsibilities.

Your Rights

- To know the subject of the interview and what areas the reporter might cover
- To set time limits in advance of the interview
- To ask clarifying questions during the interview
- To record the interview for your records
- To abide by any ground rules to which you and the reporter agreed
- To ask who else the reporter is interviewing

Your Responsibilities

- To be honest
- To respond to reporters in a timely manner
- To learn about the reporter and their media outlet
- To foster a civil atmosphere
- To say you don't know rather than guess at an answer
- To maintain a sense of professionalism at all times

If you violate any of these rights, you are likely to create an adversarial relationship. In fact, there are plenty of ways to get off on the wrong foot. Take a look at some of them now.

Phrases that Alienate Reporters

There are certain expressions guaranteed to grate on any credible journalist. Utter any of these code words and you will bear responsibility for turning the interview into a negative experience:

- ***“No comment.”*** Picture yourself waving a red cape in a bull ring. These two small yet inflammatory words convince reporters that you have something to hide.
- ***“Why are you asking that?”*** It doesn’t matter why they delve into an issue. If the question is hostile or off-point, it is up to you to skillfully redirect the interview.
- ***“The earliest I can get back to you is next week.”*** Rapid response to media inquiries separates the pros from the wannabes. Unless the reporter has indicated their deadline is, in fact, next week, reply quickly.
- ***Take the long route to answer a short question.*** Like the rest of us, reporters are crunched for time. Give them your headline right up front. Make your answers succinct; avoid a wandering tour of your issue.
- ***“Our end-to-end solutions create functionality for enterprises using IT platforms across all vertical channels.”*** You might as well be speaking Martian. Use everyday language and leave the jargon back at the office.
- ***“I’m not sure, but I would guess ...”*** You are now in the process of digging a deep hole. Don’t speculate. If you don’t know, say so, offer to get back to them with the information, then move on to familiar territory.
- ***“I can’t tell you that.”*** You may not be able to discuss certain issues due to legal, personnel, or proprietary concerns. Reporters understand this, but you need to tell them why you

cannot discuss a specific issue while remaining open to talking about other areas.

- ***“You’re not going to misquote me, are you?”*** This is akin to asking your doctor if they prescribed the wrong medication. Questioning a journalist’s professionalism is a sure way to get on their bad side.
- ***“I don’t have any background material on that.”*** Reporters are always seeking to flesh out their stories. They may not write about all the in depth information you furnish, but your materials — contact lists, fact sheets, relevant data points, or specific URLs (since many corporate websites are difficult to navigate) — can help put matters into context for them from your point of view.
- ***“You’re publishing fake news.”*** A desperate ploy and a refuge for scoundrels with something to hide.
- ***“That’s a dumb question.”*** There are few dumb questions. But plenty of media sources come up with dumb answers. Don’t be one of them.
- ***“Tell me the name of your publication again.”*** If you don’t know this one, you haven’t done your homework and don’t deserve to qualify as an expert news source.
- ***“Call me back later; I’m too busy to talk to you now.”*** Don’t sit by your phone waiting for that return call.
- ***“You’re just playing gotcha journalism.”*** If you can’t stand the heat of Q&A, step out of the line of fire and let someone capable do the job.
- ***“I’m not the right person.”*** If you leave it at that, you have left the reporter hanging and missed an opportunity to get your company’s story out. Always be sure to give them the name and contact information of the appropriate individual.
- ***“But we bought advertising in your publication.”*** The polite term for this is “conflict of interest.” Another good expression

is “stupid.” Buy an ad if you want. But don’t expect coverage or preferential treatment as a result.

- ***“I didn’t realize you wanted an on camera interview.”*** When a TV producer sets up an interview, always assume it will be on camera. Dress accordingly.
- ***“I’d like to review a copy of your article before it is published.”*** You are not the editor. Standards of good journalism, at least in the U.S., dictate that news outlets have the final say. That is as it should be in a society with a free press.

When you opt to appear on a radio talk show or podcast, there are certain specific preparation steps to keep top of mind. For instance...

How to Prepare for Your Next Podcast or Radio Talk Show

Radio talk shows and podcasts present valuable opportunities to get your message out to segmented, highly targeted audiences. Use the following preparation techniques to point you down the road to talk show success:

- **Target producers at outlets that make sense for your issue** and that your target audience listens to.
- **Approach them with a succinct pitch** for an interview that outlines why you are a good fit. Include links to past interviews so they can get an idea of your on-air presence.
- **Give the producer your spokesperson's name**, title, telephone number, and email address once the interview has been secured.
- **Listen to the program beforehand** to get a feel for the host's manner. Radio talk show hosts tend to be professional and well-prepared for the most part; podcast hosts' skills vary widely as most have neither broadcast training nor experience.
- **Produce a mock talk show in your office** in which your "host" peppers the "guest" with tough questions. Do this a few times to ensure the guest attains a comfort level responding to questions.
- **Send a confirmation to the producer.** Include all pertinent facts such as the guest's name, the date and time agreed upon, and the location of the interview. If the interview is to be conducted in person, confirm the address including suite number if any. If you are connecting remotely, confirm the link.
- **Forward concise background information that tells your story.** Don't overload them with a data dump. And remember to append a brief biographical sketch.

- **Submit a list of sample questions for the host.** You will be pleasantly surprised how frequently these are used.
- **Use the online recording of your program** to conduct a post-interview assessment so you can do an even better job next time.
- **Confirm your booking 24 to 48 hours before air time.** Even once confirmed, prepare to be bumped from a radio program at the last minute should breaking news occur. Don't be offended; that's why they call it "news."

Now that you've prepared adequately, let's examine some advice for how to act in the studio or on your remote link.

Perfecting Your Radio and Podcast Performances

You are in the radio studio or on a podcast, ready to perform. There is nothing to be apprehensive about. Rest assured, your host wants the interview to go better than you do. Their professional standing depends on it. Here's what to do when the "On the Air" light clicks on:

- **Repeat your message numerous times**, even during a short interview since audiences tend to listen actively for only short bursts of time.
- **Use notes if you like**, but remember to keep them concise, containing the outline of your message. Otherwise, you risk sounding scripted.
- **Write your notes on index cards**. They make less noise than paper. On an audio podcast, it's okay to reference them on your device rather than on a hard copy.
- **Write out the call letters of the station** or name of the podcast, and the name of your interviewer. Keep it in front of you for easy reference.
- **Leave it up to the host and producer to initiate any small talk**. They may or may not be rushed for time, so let them dictate the pace.
- **Keep a glass of water nearby**. It will cut down on excessive mouth noise. Just don't sip loudly on mic.
- **Ignore the beehive of activity**. Most radio stations run at a frenetic pace. That hustle and bustle has nothing to do with you.
- **If something of a technical nature goes wrong, ignore it**. Don't get rattled. It is the producer's problem, not yours. Be of good cheer and patience, and hope the snafu is solved quickly.
- **Don't call your host by name too often**. Two or three times per half-hour is plenty so as not to sound obsequious. When you do, use their first name, and be sure you can pronounce it

properly. A mispronunciation can offend their loyal listeners as well as the host.

- **Assume your microphone is always live.** Additionally, no snide remarks about your interviewer. Not only may the microphone still be on, the recording might still be in progress, even if you have exchanged thank yous and goodbyes.
- **Leave the listeners with a phone number,** website URL, digital media handle, or email address so they can readily contact you for more information.

Radio talk shows and podcasts are not the only forms of specialized media relations tactics. What about the news conference?

A Roundup of News Conference Niceties

News conferences often revolve around a high stakes issue. Use these techniques to help you and your company succeed during your next large scale press briefing:

- **Choose your spokespeople wisely.** Maybe it's your CEO, maybe not. It depends on the top dog's ability and what your bench strength looks like. And might you need issue experts on hand to speak to technical issues? If so, impress upon them that they are in attendance to speak to narrow issues only, not to serve as a prime mouthpiece.
- **Hammer out your magnetic message.** The importance of this cannot be overstated. It must be airtight, succinct, and easy to deliver if you hope to survive rigorous media scrutiny. Spend plenty of time getting it right. Your message is your most important ammunition.
- **Organize a media training program** to deal specifically with your upcoming news conference. Decide whether you have the expertise to handle this internally or need to bring a consultant on board. And recognize that a single workshop is unlikely to get the job done. Message refinement and skill sharpening require significant time and dedication.
- **Make the rehearsal as authentic as possible.** Bring in cameras and klieg lights, and a handful of co-workers to portray probing reporters. Set up your training facility as close to the real thing as you can.
- **Fire questions at your spokespeople.** Sprinkle in some expected issues and some real hardballs. Assess how they handle themselves. You'll need a number of run-throughs to fine tune performance.

- **School your spokespeople in Q&A techniques**, such as bridging, flagging, deflections, and sneak peeks. If your internal communicators are unschooled in these terms of journalistic art, bring on board a communications strategy consultant experienced in walking your executives through them.
- **Make sure you have access ahead of time** to the room where your event will take place. This gives you the chance to iron out any technical kinks, offers your spokespeople time to get acclimated, and allows for a dry run. Just be sure all the doors remain shut and no reporters can eavesdrop on the dress rehearsal.
- **Instruct your spokespeople how to control the crowd and direct the flow.** They should be the ones to call upon questioners and to bring the proceedings to a close (though you can have one of your media relations staff conclude matters with a simple “Thank you”). Practice this during your preparations. Some people feel uncomfortable if they are not skilled at taking control of a room.
- **Spell out the ground rules** for reporters in attendance. For instance, how long will the news conference last? Are follow up questions permitted? You can lean on those rules for more effective control when needed. Rely on your communications staff, not your spokespeople, to enforce them.
- **Decide who gets in.** It’s your event. You paid for the room. Should you restrict access to credentialed reporters? Or will you also admit bloggers and podcast hosts who may not comprehend or abide by journalistic norms or ethical principles?

Speaking of those rules of the road, what does it mean to go “off the record” with a reporter? When should you use that technique? That important discussion is up next.

Can We Talk Off the Record? Definitions for Journalists and Media Relations Experts

Reporters and media relations professionals can be hobbled by a lack of consistent definitions for frequently used journalistic terms. Much blurring of lines exists over such terms of art as off the record, “on background,” and “not for attribution.” Following are suggested standard definitions designed to help achieve consistency and avoid misunderstanding.

Note that only experienced media relations pros should negotiate these ground rules. Spokespeople who do not deal with the press routinely are tempting fate if they attempt to do so.

It is imperative to agree on a common perception of the definition each time you use any of the above techniques since different news outlets or reporters might have different interpretations. I’ve always found it useful to define it for the reporter by saying, “Here’s what that term means to me.” That is closely followed by the question, “Is that how you understand it, too?” Then you must wait for the reporter’s assent before the ground rule takes effect. This all has to happen before your interview starts, or before answering the question you may not want fully on the record.

I encourage you to distribute these definitions to colleagues and professional organizations to which you belong:

On the record: This is the default position. Anything a source says can be quoted and any information supplied can be used with no restrictions. Documents and nonverbal signals are also fair game. Unless there is a compelling reason forbidding it, on the record interviews are the safest way to proceed.

Off the record: Nothing provided off the record can be used in print or broadcast. This is most frequently used to steer reporters in a particular direction while attempting to leave no fingerprints. Only

experienced practitioners should go off the record, and then only if they know and trust the reporter and media outlet.

On background: The reporter can use freely any information a source provides orally or in writing. However, the reporter cannot quote the source either by name or by other identification. Going on background is useful for front-line media relations personnel who deal with the press but prefer that quotes come from others in the company.

Not for attribution: The reporter may publish information provided by a source. In addition, the source can be quoted, though not by name. The reporter and media relations practitioner must negotiate how the source is to be identified (e.g., a company vice president, a source familiar with the negotiations).

Now that we've defined these useful terms, let's dig into how to handle off the record interviews.

Can We Talk Off the Record? Common Sense Recommendations

Reporters and their sources deserve a system that resolves conflicts about the use of off the record media interviews. In doing so, it also seeks to foster understanding between journalists and communications practitioners, as well as within the communications profession. Here are recommendations to help achieve these goals:

- **Keep media interviews on the record unless** there is a compelling reason to do otherwise.
- **Develop and adhere to recommended standard definitions** of off the record and other media relations techniques (see previous section).
- **Distribute those definitions to reporters, communications experts,** and to professional organizations to which they belong in an effort to achieve greater consistency and to minimize misunderstanding.
- **Educate communications officers,** especially those with no media experience, on both the meaning and the value of conducting interviews off the record when warranted.
- **Enter into off the record arrangements only** with trustworthy reporters and sources.
- **Agree to ground rules** before beginning an interview.
- **Ensure that both parties explicitly agree** to abide by the ground rules.
- **Confirm that both parties are empowered** by their organizations to enforce the confidentiality of off the record interviews.
- **Negotiate ground rules before every interview,** even if simply renewing the conversation after a short break.

- **Refrain from using such canards** as “there is no such thing as off the record” or “off the record is a lie.”

You may need the services of a veteran communications strategy consultant if your in house staff proves unfamiliar or unfit to bring your executives up to speed as media spokespeople.

Some businesses are flummoxed when it comes to finding the right expert. Read on to learn how you can secure the advice you need.

What to Look for in Your Media Strategy Consultant

You need a sustained professional development program capable of teaching your C-suite and other spokespeople the essentials of acing media interviews. When you decide it's time to call in a veteran media strategy consultant, what should you look for?

- **Secure the right consultant for your specific situation.** For instance, some may be good at message development and discipline; others not so much. Some specialize in working with large enterprises, others with small non-profits. Some try to get away with teaching only acting techniques, neglecting the message. Smooth media relations requires the full range of proficiency.
- **Collaborate with a pro who emphasizes your company's long-term business and public policy goals.** Consultants need to have the big picture in mind, and that goes beyond simply making your executives talk pretty.
- **Work solely with experienced consultants who have been in the game for a good number of years.** Otherwise, you are likely dealing with a freelancing job seeker who will leave you high and dry when a job offer materializes.
- **Go for consultants who are thought leaders in their field.** They should offer content such as research reports, articles, blogs, and the like. Bonus tip: You give yourself a real advantage when you work with an authority who has published books specific to dealing with the media.
- **Treat your consultant as a respected advisor,** not a vendor. You need an adult with gravitas capable of telling hard truths to your executives. If you insist on pinching pennies, go ahead and risk your business goals by hiring an inferior freelancer; see how that works out for you.

- **Find someone with reporting experience.** It is simply impossible to grasp the media's job without having been there. Your consultant needs to know firsthand the rhythms and norms of a newsroom.
- **Visit their website.** No website or meaningful online presence? You're looking at a fly-by-night (no, a simple LinkedIn page isn't enough). Things to look for on their site include their background, philosophy, ethical approach, and links to their books, blog, etc.
- **Seek a proper fit with your company** and those executives your consultant will work with (cautionary note: That seemingly perfect fit can still do you harm if the individual lacks the expertise you need).
- **Avoid generalists, no matter their level of seniority.** And watch out for "PR" agencies that use the big guns to win your business, then turn you over to untested substitutes.

For more detail on how you can find the right consultant for your project, see my report titled ["A Buyer's Guide to Communications Training Consultants."](#) The publication also features a comprehensive series of questions to help you select the individual who best suits your needs.

CHAPTER 3

Advocacy Strategies

One of my all-time favorite exchanges during a Congressional hearing occurred some years ago when an association I was advising went up against one of Capitol Hill's legendary inquisitors. We were in for a grilling featuring plenty of pointed questioning.

Our panel generally held its own, but one witness in particular demonstrated an aptitude for standing toe-to-toe with the hard-edged chairman. He gave no ground, consistently delivering the message we had crafted no matter the question posed.

Many would think the chairman took umbrage. That wasn't the case. Although the differences of opinion were not resolved, a sense of civility prevailed. Our star witness, in fact, approached the chairman at the hearing's conclusion. The two spoke congenially for several minutes with smiles and chuckles prevailing, wrapping up with a warm handshake.

The other witnesses were gobsmacked. How could their peer be so bold as to approach the sworn enemy, especially in light of their tense Q&A exchanges?

The lesson they learned? Never back down. Remain diplomatic and polite (understanding that in today's toxic political climate you may be tossed into a maelstrom not exclusively of your own making). These may be the most important business meetings you will ever have, so

stick to your message and the good manners Mom taught you (I hope) even when under blistering interrogation.

There are several elements to consider when it comes to advancing your public policy goals — testifying before Congress and state legislatures and regulatory bodies, and Capitol Hill fly-ins (and Zoom-ins) among them.

First and foremost, you must have a strategy in place. That's what we investigate now.

Fine-tuning Your Capitol Hill Strategy

Mapping out a Congressional strategy is no easy task. There are lots of moving parts in the ever-changing field of play known as Capitol Hill. The current toxic political stew adds an even trickier dynamic.

While your messaging must be clear and your government relations staff and grassroots advocates must be prepared, you should also take into account logistics like these:

- **Devote time and energy to effectively targeting critical members of Congress.** You don't have the bandwidth to pursue 535 offices. Be selective and be precise.
- **Sort targeted members into numeric categories.** The 1s support your contention and are with you no matter what. You'll never win over the 5s so don't waste time with them.
- **Concentrate on the fence-sitters** (the 3s) since these are the members you need to sway if you hope to achieve victory. Determine as best you can what might tip them in your direction.
- **Develop professional relationships with key Congressional staffers**, both in a member's personal office and on committees. Senior Capitol Hill staff, in particular, has likely earned the trust of the member. While meetings with the officeholder get all the glory, contacting staffers who deal with your issue can prove golden. These are the people who do the actual work and should know the issue intimately. In fact, you may find sitting down with staff even more productive at times, depending on your issue and the member at hand.
- **Remember that Congress is not a behemoth**, rather a collection of 535 distinct offices with their own policies and procedures (h/t [Tommy Goodwin](#)). How offices are structured often has little to do with party affiliation.

- **Understand that House and Senate offices have different staffing levels.** Senate offices feature more legislative assistants, meaning those individuals are more specialized and often (though not always) more steeped in the issues than their House counterparts.
- **Get a grasp on which offices have a hospitable attitude** and which are impenetrable (one senator, for example, is famous for keeping the door to his office closed even before the pandemic).
- **Monitor the level of public access to Capitol Hill.** The complex is, for all intents and purposes, closed to visitors as of this writing. Things are likely to open up as we adjust to the pandemic (though Congress did use the September 2001 attacks as an excuse to permanently shut down parts of the campus to the public). Stay abreast of these shifts.

The ability to buttonhole members of Congress and their staffs will continue to evolve as the pandemic recedes and surges. Keeping the above guidelines in mind no matter the level of accessibility can keep your public affairs plan on the right track.

Essentials of a Capitol Hill Fly-in

Your organization's success — as well as the success of your grassroots advocates — hinges on your public policy efforts. Washington fly-ins, in which your troops visit Capitol Hill either live or via video conference (which I've come to call a Zoom-in), represent one of the most powerful means for delivering your message to policymakers. Equip your officers, executives, and rank-and-file with this advice:

- **Arrange a training session** that includes advocates participating in mock Hill visits. Your intent is to familiarize them with pertinent legislation, messaging, and logistics.
- **Conduct and record to video a round of mock Hill visits** starring some of your senior members. Review the video in front of all participants, pointing out learning moments.
- **Supply bios and photos of the legislators your team plans to meet**, and inform your advocates of any love/hate relationships with lawmakers or Hill staff. Your troops need to know if they are walking into a love fest or a snake pit.
- **Show up on time and get right to the point.** That scheduled 15-minute meeting may be cut to a 15-second trot to the elevator with the lawmaker or a brief cameo appearance on Zoom.
- **Assign roles beforehand so you know who will talk about what.** In potentially contentious meetings, assign one person to be the “cooler heads prevail” designee. If things get heated, it's their job to bring the temperature down.
- **Find someone aligned with the member's politics whenever possible.** Which of your advocates has the best connections in the home district? How can you leverage them to advance your public policy objectives?
- **Prepare them for the fact they may meet with staffers who**

are quite young. Explain that these folks have the boss' ear and must be treated with respect.

- **Always “make the ask.”** Politely force your elected official to take a stance. Be realistic about your request. It may vary from member to member. List one minor ask you can use even with staunch opponents.
- **Provide a one-page leave behind** that succinctly delivers your message.
- **Take a moment to jot down notes** immediately after each visit. Do this after you leave the room and get to a relatively private location.
- **Afterward, assess the effectiveness of both your efforts and your advocates.** Was someone a bad fit with one member for whatever reason? Change it up next time. And assign someone else to follow up with that office.
- **If you advocate on a Zoom-in rather than an in person fly-in,** hold a separate call using a different link to review matters. Do not do this on the same link as your meeting with the member. Take no chances that someone who doesn't belong is eavesdropping.
- **Coordinate your follow up actions and next steps.** Staff who knows you plan to see things through are likely to pay more attention to you and your issue.
- **Send a thank you note both via surface mail and email.** Remember that civility rules, so be gracious in your follow up despite any contentious meetings or ideological differences.
- **Leverage your efforts back home** by inviting your elected representatives to site tours, remote meetings, ribbon cuttings, luncheons, and the like.

When your issue's status rates a high profile, your top executives may be invited to testify before a Congressional committee or subcommittee. Next, how to best take advantage of that top of the line opportunity.

No-nonsense Steps for Congressional Testimony

Congressional hearings — whether held in a Capitol Hill hearing room or via remote video link — directly impact laws and regulations that stand to make or break your business. You have a scant five minutes to deliver your message in most cases. Take advantage of the following steps to help you achieve your public policy objectives:

- **Devote plenty of time to framing key messages.** What you develop in these messaging sessions not only forms the core of your oral statement — it also serves as your lodestar during Q&A. Importantly, it also gives you a roadmap on the issue for media outreach and executive speeches on the issue.
- **Insist that your communicators write your oral statement.** They should be skilled at weaving a coherent message and at writing for the ear. If they are not, farm it out to a consultant, then move to hire staff capable of doing the job next time.
- **Stage a mock hearing workshop** to infuse your witness with your message, familiarize them with the mechanics of testifying, and provide a needed shot of confidence.
- **Perfect your five-minute oral statement during your practice sessions** — whether conducted in person or remote — to ascertain that you have both your message and your timing at the witness table down pat.
- **Never speak off the cuff.** You worked long and hard on that oral statement in order to nail your five-minute time limit. Don't waste that effort by neglecting your meticulously crafted words.
- **Use your main message points in response to every question** lawmakers toss your way. Not only does this buttress your argument, it also prevents aimless, wandering responses.
- **Treat members of Congress with due deference.** At the same

time, refuse to be intimidated. Say what you have to say with firmness and conviction, and do so respectfully.

- **Leverage your testimony after your appearance.** Broadcast your message through print and broadcast media, your website, executive speeches, digital media tools such as Twitter and Instagram (obviously, use channels that best reach your target audience), your newsletters (both external and internal), and other public forums.
- **Regularly update members of the Congressional committee,** committee and personal staff, and key constituency groups. This helps keep your issue front and center in their minds.
- **Send thank you notes** to the chair, ranking member, any home state members, and other key lawmakers. Courtesy counts.

CHAPTER 4

Remote Communications Strategies

We've all been subjected to it. The Zoom meeting where one participant positions their tablet on a table, offering you a view up their nose. The TV interview where the subject piped in on a video link is lit so poorly you can't tell who it is. The remote Congressional hearing where one senator goes off on a cuss-filled tirade when his technology baffles him.

Granted, the deal with the senator was entertaining. Still, you do not want to be the person yammering away with your microphone on mute (yes, I've done it, too) or muffled on that key media interview because you try to get by with the cheap microphone that came with your device.

The coronavirus pandemic has tested us all (in oh-so-many ways). Most of us had to adjust our communications styles on the fly. The fact is some are still not quite comfortable with the tools.

Success in remote exchanges involves more than logging on and hoping for the best. Whether you are an observer or participant, the organizer of a video program, or the session's moderator, you want to exude a professional profile.

These standards also apply to those specialized occasions that require you to put your best foot forward, such as when dealing with the media during remote broadcasts.

This section sheds light on the strategies and tactics capable of helping you look and sound your best. Let's get underway with a look at what to do when you go live before your camera and microphone.

Become a Video Conference Pro

Video conferencing services like Skype, Teams, Webex, and Zoom are now everyday meeting tools. Yet some workers still feel a bit uneasy on screen. What steps should you take to exude a professional persona when participating in a remote session from home or elsewhere?

- **Familiarize yourself ahead of time** with such logistics as how to log in, mute and unmute your audio, turn your video on and off, ask questions, and use the chat box.
- **Record a practice session** and play it back to ensure you look and sound your best.
- **Sign on at least 10 minutes before the start time** to give yourself a few moments to sort out any technical snafus (this assumes you are an attendee; if you are the organizer or speaker, give yourself a minimum of 30 minutes; see subsequent sections for more detail).
- **Dress and groom like a grownup.** Mussed hair and ratty t-shirts are no-nos. Business attire, a shave, and makeup convey a professional look and feel. Easy to remember rule of thumb: Sport the same wardrobe you would if you were attending in person.
- **Keep kids, dogs, etc., at bay throughout.** Some background noise may be inevitable, but minimize it as much as possible.
- **Silence all noisemakers.** This includes phones (mobile and landline) and other devices.
- **Inform family members and roommates** when you plan to participate in a video call so they can avoid hollering across the house, traipsing across the background, etc.
- **Mute your microphone when you are not actively participating.** That way, no ringing phones, doorbells, street

noise, or lawn mowers (or those gawd-awful leaf blowers) disturb the proceedings.

- **Remember to unmute yourself** when you want to speak. We are all guilty of this on occasion.
- **Leave your video camera open** if you are an active participant in the meeting. Otherwise, you come across as a lurker or someone with no genuine interest in the program.
- **Corollary to the above: It's okay to turn off your video temporarily** if background disturbances occur or you need a moment to take care of personal business.
- **Position your camera so that it is level with your eyes.** Set your monitor, laptop, or tablet on a stack of books if need be. No one wants a view up your nose.
- **Look into the camera, not your screen.** The temptation is to stare at your image or the image of the speaker. That skews your eye contact, diminishing your connection with viewers. Find your camera's lens and fix your gaze there 100 percent of the time.
- **Understand that you may be on camera for the entire meeting,** so avoid incessantly touching your face and any embarrassing actions or camera shots that may display more of you than you wish.
- **Aim for an attractive, professional looking background.** Green screens can work if you have a physical backdrop. Take a pass on those virtual backgrounds and blurred effects offered by some services. The technology isn't good enough yet, making it too easy for you to merge into the background with comical results.
- **Lighting is important.** Avoid glaring bare bulbs that make you look ghostly. And don't keep things too dark. Place a soft light in front of you and, when possible, a soft backlight on the floor behind you. A ring light or umbrella light can get the job done.

- **Do not sit in front of windows.** The glare during daylight hours leaves you looking like a dark shadow. Plus, the dazzling brightness proves taxing to viewers.
- **Similarly, do not sit in front of a mirror.** Activity across the room or elsewhere in your house could be clearly visible.
- **Prepare for conversational delays.** Connections are not always rock solid, so realize that you may have to wait a beat or two before hearing the next question or jumping into the conversation.
- **Avoid the temptation to switch task** (often erroneously called multi-tasking). Remember, you are likely to be on camera. Plus, it's just good manners.

That covers the territory of what to do when participating in a video call. There are extra layers involved when you are the organizer. That's next.

How to Organize a Video Conference

Participating is one thing. Arranging and managing a video conference is quite another. It encompasses added preparation and responsibility. Here are some best practices to keep in mind when coordinating a remote session:

- **Log on at least 30 minutes before your scheduled start time.** This gives you a few moments to deal with any snafus that may rear their ugly head. Also insist that your technical crew and any guest speakers or panelists join early, too.
- **As with any meeting, have the courtesy to begin promptly.** None of this nonsense of giving people a few extra minutes to join. They were informed of the start time. It's their obligation to show up on time.
- **Inform participants at the beginning** of such logistics as how to mute their audio, ask questions, and use the chat box. While most of us are acclimated to such matters by now, not everyone gets it.
- **Again, as with any meeting, get to the speakers and their content quickly.** Stay away from windy introductions and idle chit chat.
- **Restate your main messages frequently.** Despite your best efforts, you can count on listeners distracting themselves with email, text messages, paperwork, side conversations, Facebook, and other diversions.
- **Ask your viewers meaningful questions** that help keep them engaged. It's not easy to keep everyone's rapt attention on a video call. Having them enter replies in the chat box or speak up vocally helps.
- **Use a moderator** to keep the flow moving, maintain track of time, and organize participant questions. Note that the

moderator should not be responsible for technical matters. That could represent a major distraction, leaving the session in disarray.

- **If you notice people leaving**, raise your energy level, switch gears, or go interactive.
- **Keep a backup plan in mind.** What happens if you or one of the speakers loses power? Do you have a backup power source or battery powered device to use in a pinch? Is there an alternate way of connecting to the internet, perhaps using your mobile phone's hotspot?
- **If you use slides (by no means mandatory):** a) develop teaser slides to display while people are joining; b) post your subject matter expert's bio and photo to help humanize things; and c) include photos, screen shots, video, quotable quotes, and easy-to-read charts instead of dull slides with humdrum bullet points.
- **Advise whether a recording of your program will be available** for later viewing. For legal and courtesy reasons, notify participants in advance if you plan to record.
- **ALWAYS leave your audience with a call to action** such as a website, landing page to subscribe to your newsletter, petition to sign, phone number, or some other meaningful step.

An earlier section dealt with the specifics of moderating a meeting. Are there special considerations when doing so for a remote session? You bet.

How to Moderate a Video Conference

Not everyone has been charged with moderating duties for a remote meeting. Here's what you need to heed when orchestrating such a discussion:

- **If you have invited a guest speaker**, add them to the call 15 to 20 minutes ahead of time for a technical check and to address any last minute questions or concerns.
- **Hold all attendees in the waiting room or lobby**, assuming your service offers one. Make sure everyone there belongs before you allow them in to your meeting. Optional: Monitor the waiting room for a few minutes for any latecomers. You are under no obligation to watch for anyone trying to join if they arrive late.
- **Orient viewers as to where they can find controls** for mute, stop video, chat, etc.
- **Let participants know that your eye contact may stray on occasion** as you check the chat box and monitor for any new participants. That way, they'll know you're paying attention and not obsessively checking email or text messages.
- **Instruct everyone to turn off phone ringers and email chimes**, and to refrain from dealing with email, texts, digital media alerts, web searches, and the like.
- **Be prepared to mute those who do not know how to do so themselves**. This alleviates noisy background distractions such as coughs, sneezes, chirping birds, and the like.
- **Explain how participants can comment or ask questions** by raising their hand or using the chat box.
- **If you or another speaker have made a conscious decision to use slides**, acquaint yourself with that function. And don't feel the need to keep slides on the screen throughout the talk.

- **Pay attention to the chat and Q&A boxes** as the meeting progresses. Deal with any individual issues as best you can, remembering that your prime duty rests with the larger audience.
- **If you're doing a round of introductions** for the entire group, go down your participant list to ensure everyone speaks. When you think you've gotten around to everyone, confirm by asking who hasn't yet spoken.
- **If you opt to record**, tell the group at the start and ask if anyone dissents. Some may choose not to be recorded, so give them the option of departing.

Now let's turn to some special video conference cases — dealing with the media.

Media Interviews on Zoom: Best Practices

Even the highest profile media outlets now hold interviews using online video services like Skype and Zoom. The quality isn't the best, yet when we are isolated from one another it offers a reasonable option. It's a different ballgame for news sources asked to participate in this type of remote exchange.

Granted, some of this advice is similar to remote presentations. It bears reinforcing here so that you keep these points in mind when you're on the receiving end of a remote interview with the press:

- **Practice — a lot.** Unless you have been a regular on the news/talk shows since the pandemic slammed our shores, this format mandates a few more simulated interviews before you engage in the real thing. Rehearse with a colleague on the platform you will be using during the real thing.
- **Look into the camera of your PC or mobile device.** Some interviewees tend to look at their monitor instead of the camera. Wrong. Eye contact with the viewers is what matters, so know where your camera lens is and keep your eye contact locked there. This is one of the few times you should look directly into the camera.
- **Place your camera at eye level.** Use an adjustable stand, a stack of books, or a box to elevate your device if necessary. No one cares what your ceiling looks like.
- **Assume you are always on camera.** You will likely have no way of knowing what is being broadcast at the moment, so avoid any embarrassing acts (yawning, scratching, rolling your eyes, cleaning your teeth, etc.).
- **Stage your backdrop.** Decide on a proper background. Something with your company logo or product or your book is fine, for example.

- **Dress professionally** as if you were going to an interview in the studio. Although you may be at home, image still matters.
- **Heed your lighting.** Be sure you are adequately lit from a source in front of you. This allows you to be seen on TV and avoids plaguing your viewers with background glare.
- **Check your audio quality.** Viewers are more likely to tune you out if your sound quality is poor. Invest in a decent microphone.
- **Keep the background noise down.** Mute all devices and landline phones, and do your best to keep children and animals out of the picture.
- **Prepare for delays in the feed.** You may experience a second or two of lag time, so be ready to wait for a brief blip before you hear the next question.

Video interviews are nothing new. Satellite links have been used for years for both TV and radio spots. While the above advice is helpful for such a format, there are some special wrinkles. We look at those now.

14 Favorite Satellite Media Tour Techniques

The time may come when you sit in a studio and talk to a series of TV or radio news anchors in far-flung cities via satellite. This is known as satellite media tours (SMT) or radio media tours (RMT). You may be talking to dozens of stations for quick-hitting interviews in rapid succession during a single half-day sitting. Make use of the following strategies when participating in this special type of format:

1. **Expect to be in a studio or room with a TV camera.** It may be anything from a grand studio, hotel function room, or broom closet-size space. Arrive early and get acclimated to your surroundings.
2. **Keep your replies short and succinct.** These interviews are quick hitters, so you are unlikely to have time to reinforce more than two or three high-level points in brief fashion.
3. **Focus on your message.** Allow the technicians to deal with the technical aspects.
4. **Share anecdotes and examples** that are appropriate to the cities in which you will appear.
5. **Remind your floor director to write on a cue card** a) the city you are talking to at the moment and b) the name of the reporter interviewing you. This prevents you from citing an example from Phoenix when you're addressing Chicago, or from calling the reporter by the wrong name.
6. **Look at the camera.** The lens is your viewership for all intents and purposes. This is one of the very few times you should look straight into the lens. Do not deviate your eye contact. Do not shift your eyes. Period.
7. **Smile and nod** as you are being introduced provided you are not discussing a solemn topic such as a disaster or the death of a notable individual.

8. **Realize that you will be using an earpiece** (known as an IFB) to hear the reporters on the other end. It's not the most comfortable device. To get used to it, wear one during your practice rounds. You don't necessarily need the audio running through it then; you just want a sense of what it feels like.
9. **If your earpiece falls out mid-interview**, replace it as best you can. Although the technical crew will do its best, it's not always a perfect fit. If they see that you are off the shot for a moment, they may try to help you re-insert it, but don't count on that being possible.
10. **Remember that the mic is always hot.** No fussin', no cussin' allowed.
11. **Practice your technique during your media training session** since this is not a format most spokespeople use on an everyday basis.
12. **Review ahead of time the list of media outlets** you are scheduled to contact. Things will be moving fast during your SMT, so the more advance preparation you undertake, the better your odds for success.
13. **Drink lots of water the day before your SMT or RMT.** These interviews are both mentally and physically demanding. And you don't want to be squirming uncomfortably mid-interview yearning for a trot to the restroom if you try to hydrate during the session.
14. **Be sure to schedule a good night's sleep** the night before. Also, consider an afternoon nap the previous day. Why? SMTs typically take place early in the morning to hit morning drive newscasts at stations across the country. They tend to be marathon sessions with many interviews in rapid succession packed into three or four hours. You don't want to find yourself nodding off in the midst of the festivities.

CHAPTER 5

Bonus Communications Strategies

It hit me as I was plotting out this book. Some scenarios just don't fit no matter how much you try to shoehorn them in.

Presentation skills, media relations, and advocacy all have relatively well-defined lanes. Then there's the other stuff that applies across all of those disciplines. At the other end of the spectrum, some tactics prove not specific to any one aspect of that triad.

My clients might ask how to shape sound bites or slow their rate of speech or steel themselves for a crisis. Some may be first-timers when hiring a communications strategy or training consultant, seeking guidance on how to locate and negotiate with such an individual.

That's what this section contains — a catch-all (though I thought “bonus” sounded much more sophisticated) compendium of issues important to your communications abilities.

Your foundation should consist of a strong, coherent communications strategy, so that's where we begin.

Your Communications Strategy: 10 Warning Signs

An effective communications strategy takes into account your company's bottom line, whether it relates to financial, reputational, or public policy objectives. Smart businesses avoid the pitfalls that come with a lack of attention to their communications and government relations endeavors. They know their public image, business goals, and executives' careers are at stake.

Does your communications strategy need a tune up? Maybe so if your company faces these hurdles:

1. **A CEO dissatisfied** with the company's message development and delivery capabilities. If you sense doubt from the C-suite, it's past time to reinforce your efforts, either using internal talent or securing a capable communications strategy consultant (more on this in a few moments).
2. **Communications staff who trembles** when trying to counsel the C-suite. Your in house experts should not fear to speak truth to power. It's time to clean house in the communications shop if they prove incapable or unwilling.
3. **The need for an unbiased point of view** to ascertain where your communications risks and rewards lurk. Dig deep into your capabilities. Be honest. It may be a good idea to seek external viewpoints, perhaps from a trusted communications colleague or a C-suite leader your top executives admire.
4. **The corporate leader frustrated** with getting their legal, finance, and marketing staffs to deliver concise, consistent messages. It takes practice to internalize, then verbalize, the news you want to emphasize. Ongoing practice can unlock this dilemma.
5. **The firm seeking to strengthen its professional development**

choices. Remember, the key to communicating with impact is sustained improvement over time.

6. **A technical expert who shies away from media interviews.** You have two choices here. First, sharpen the skills of reluctant authorities. Second, if they prove ineffective or hesitant, find someone else to deal with technical aspects when they arise.
7. **The C-suite leader trying to get their communications and government relations teams to play nice together.** There are bound to be tensions and differences of opinion among departments in any business. That's fine as you hash out matters internally. Once the direction is set, it is imperative that everyone pull in the same direction.
8. **The executive with an imminent high stakes speaking or advocacy opportunity.** Treat these showcases with care. You will not like the outcome if you fail to prepare and practice with a formal training program.
9. **The corporate leader struggling with onboarding communications and government relations staff.** You need a plan that inculcates new arrivals with such factors as your messaging, communications philosophy, and professional development options. Don't be shy about asking your communications strategy consultant to play a role here.
10. **The public affairs executive who needs to ramp up the performance of advocates** who deal with policymakers. This includes anyone from the CEO who testifies before Congress to the grassroots advocates who trek to Capitol Hill for a fly-in. Organize programs to enhance their capabilities.

As you can see above, messaging is crucial to the success of your business and public affairs initiatives. Once your message is squared away, you'll want to dress it up with quotable quotes. That's next.

Creating Quotable Quotes

Media interviews, presentations, and legislative testimony demand memorable quotes. By adding some spice to your phrasing, you can make your message rise above the competition. Here are a few favorite methods for crafting quotable quotes to add some punch:

- **Stories** — Spinning an unforgettable tale makes your message more impressive. Despite the current fascination with storytelling, understand that not everyone has the talent to spin an entrancing yarn. Your strengths may reside in one of the following areas. That's fine.
- **Numbers** — Help your listeners size up your message with mental pictures of millions, dozens, fractions, and percentages. Just don't overdo it or you risk lulling your audience to sleep.
- **Comparisons** — Are your offerings better than? Bigger than? More reliable than those of your rivals? As with any claim, be sure you can back it up with solid proof points.
- **Extremes** — Tell your listeners that you are the first, the best, or the only (and of experiences you've had with the last or the worst). Here, too, be prepared to offer ironclad evidence.
- **Third party endorsements** — Offer praise from external influencers. Noted experts in the field, luminaries who are universally respected, and celebrities (though vet them carefully as they are notorious for going off script) can add luster to your stance. This can be especially effective whenever you can cite agreement from someone who traditionally opposes you.
- **Topics du Jour** — Sprinkle your conversation with references to current events and the latest in movies, TV, music, and sports. Keep these mentions current. Few in your audience are likely to be familiar with a random line or character from a 1980s book or film, for example.

- **Famous Quotes** — Leverage words of wisdom from those you admire. Do your due diligence and confirm that you can correctly attribute those words to that individual and that the quote is 100 percent accurate. The internet is rife with erroneous citations.
- **Surveys** — Demonstrate why public opinion is on your side. Impartial third party surveys are the gold standard. If you commissioned the research, be prepared to address questions about its veracity and impartiality.
- **Best case/worst case scenarios** — Provide a glimpse into the future. How will the weeks, months, or years ahead gleam if you prevail? How will your industry collapse if you fail?

Quotable quotes become all the more important when calamity strikes. Now we'll examine what to do when a communications crisis impacts your business.

Crucial Crisis Communications Clues

Every business faces crises. Not every dilemma is as all-consuming as a global pandemic or an economic collapse. Your crisis may come in the form of the death or departure of a key executive, an employee's ill-advised quote in the press, failure of your product to perform as promised, or the effect of a government regulation. No matter the size and scope of your crisis, keep these top tips in mind as you work through the communications aspects:

- **Realize that you will not have perfect knowledge.** You may have little information initially, and random details may emerge in a flood or a drip. Continually feed the latest information to your prime spokesperson and your executives so they don't get blindsided by a reporter's question.
- **Always tell the truth.** Be prepared for the fact that you may need to disseminate developments that don't place you in the best light. While you can tell about the positive steps you are taking to ameliorate the problem, never sugarcoat what happened.
- **Don't hide.** This has all the earmarks of a company that is afraid to be up front because it has something to conceal. Yes, you may need to take a proverbial beating. Swallow your medicine like a grownup.
- **Never speculate.** Do tell reporters and the public that you will get back to them as events unfold and as you obtain solid facts. You may need to hold briefings every day or every hour depending on the severity and the pace at which your crisis evolves.
- **Demonstrate empathy.** This does not necessarily imply an apology as that can have legal consequences. A caring attitude

and evidence that you are taking action to ease the burden on those affected can go a long way toward restoring your reputation.

- **Work closely with your lawyers.** They are the experts in knowing how much legal exposure you might face. Just remember that your chief communications officer is the expert when it comes to shaping and delivering your message. Never delegate that responsibility.
- **Prepare a crisis communications plan in advance.** Identify your spokespeople and steel them for dealings with a skeptical media and a potentially hostile public. Bear in mind that the CEO is not always the best or only option. You may need others to weigh in with technical comments or, in rare cases, take the lead (then again, if your CEO is inept, what are they doing there in the first place?). Make sure to set out your plan before any storm hits.
- **Refuse to let others fill the news vacuum.** Some companies go into ostrich mode. If you don't furnish the news as you know it at the moment, the media will turn to other — perhaps antagonistic — sources. This means they, not you, are shaping the headlines.
- **Explain what next steps you are taking.** You need to do more than clarify what happened. You need to provide a vision for how you intend to solve the problem and avoid its recurrence. This aspect of your message cannot be emphasized enough.

Whether you are communicating during a crisis or a run-of-the-mill occurrence, your nonverbal performance makes a difference. Read on for body language betterments.

Taking Inventory of Your Nonverbal Skills

We all hold inherent strengths and challenges when it comes to communicating in public. That's why mastering the use of your Video Tools — the way you look — and your Audio Tools — the way you sound — holds the key to improving your speaking abilities. Focus first on emphasizing your strengths, then on either sharpening your challenges over time or deemphasizing them. This handy checklist serves as a guide to assessing your nonverbal performance:

Video Tools

- **Action:** Everything from your movement on stage or on the screen to your gestures to how you stand or sit says something about you. Be deliberate about your actions.
- **Facial expression:** Smiles, frowns, nostril flares, widening of the eyes, and more reveal how you feel, whether intentional or not.
- **Eye contact:** Solid eye contact with your audience is a must if you want to come across as trustworthy.
- **Wardrobe:** Take some pride in how you dress. Wearing crisp business attire fosters an image of expertise. I aim to dress slightly more “formal” than the audience as a show of respect for them.
- **Props:** This category covers anything you deal with physically, such as a new product, a remote control device, or a book. Know when to bring these items into play and when and how you will set them aside.

Audio Tools

- **Pitch:** Vary your vocal range to avoid a monotone delivery.
- **Articulation:** Talk clearly in order to be understood, particularly

if you speak internationally or need to communicate while wearing a mask.

- **Volume:** Alternate between loud and soft tones throughout your presentation or interview.
- **Emotion:** Show audience members that you care about your topic. If you don't, why should they?
- **Rate:** Alter your rate of speech every now and then to add a dash of spice. And avoid talking too fast or slow.

Assess your performance on each of the above traits. Set your results aside for a few weeks as you practice and gain some real world experience. Then reassess to see where you've improved and where you still have work to do.

The importance of nonverbal skills was drummed into me by several program directors during my days in radio broadcasting. Phrases like "Ed, sound excited" or "Pump it up" still ring in my ears. It's something I still monitor to this day.

Simulated exercises represent one tried and true method of assessing your nonverbal qualities as well as your other communications capabilities. Following are some tips for creating stimulating simulations.

Simulations Generate Communications Success

Do you want to improve your company's media interview and public speaking potential? Try conducting simulations that allow spokespeople to practice what and how they communicate, using the following suggestions:

- **Set firm learning objectives.** For example, is this session for new learners who need more guidance or for experienced pros who need a refresher? Perhaps your executives need to prepare for hostile fire from reporters?
- **Tell any observers what you expect from them.** Do you want them to come up with a headline after a practice media interview? Ask questions as audience members? Offer feedback based on performance? Sit quietly and take notes?
- **Keep these observers to a minimum** to avoid distractions. Bar the door to anyone without a compelling reason for attending.
- **Anticipate real world questions** that might arise when dealing with reporters, members of Congress, or other audiences. Pepper your spokespeople with routine, friendly, and hostile questions.
- **Familiarize yourself with the reporters or policymakers** your organization will face, and assign members of your staff to assume their personalities as you role play.
- **Give adequate instructions for each exercise.** Make sure learners get enough to understand and execute the drill. At the same time, don't overwhelm and confuse them.
- **Rehearse one skill at a time** to avoid overload. For example, use separate exercises whenever possible to practice such issues as message delivery, Q&A techniques, and nonverbal tools.
- **Always assess feedback immediately** after each practice

round. It is mandatory to conduct this “after action review” while the experience is still fresh.

- **Solicit feedback from participants first.** Have them focus on their strengths initially, then their challenges. Only after they have weighed in should you turn to others in the room.

While I don't consider digital media to be part of the traditional media landscape, it does bear some mention. That's up next.

An 8-step Program for Your Digital Media Communications Plan

How can you make the most of digital media tools to help you deal with reporters, speak in public, and persuade policymakers? This 8-step program points you down the right path:

Step 1: Realize that digital media are simply new communications tools — nothing more, nothing less. They still require both talking and listening in addition to a well-crafted and concise message.

Step 2: Familiarize yourself with the basics — blogs, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, and any private networks you use, for starters.

Step 3: Learn the differences among digital media sites. For instance, Facebook offers a wide demographic range while LinkedIn leans toward business professionals.

Step 4: Think strategically by folding your digital media efforts into your communications plan. Never fashion these tactics in isolation.

Step 5: Decide which tools have the potential for reaching your target audience before you randomly tweet about your CEO's Congressional testimony or blog about your top initiatives.

Step 6: Connect your digital media outreach to the real world. Don't get so caught up with your device that you neglect face time with reporters, policymakers, and other important audiences.

Step 7: Budget your digital media time carefully. Posting obsessively leads others to wonder what you actually do for a living.

Step 8: Don't automatically assign responsibility for your digital media efforts to your youngest staffer. Good strategy requires more than simple knowledge of the tools. It demands solid communications experience.

We've now covered everything from public speaking to media relations to advocacy. And don't forget about the extra content

dealing with remote communications strategy, crisis communications, nonverbal performance, and much more.

Let's wrap up with a look at what you should expect when working with an expert consultant.

How to Work with Your Communications Strategy Consultant

Smart companies understand that sporadic one-off media, public speaking, or legislative testimony training programs are not the answer for long-term growth. Successful firms commit to a sustained professional development regimen designed in concert with their consultant. This aids in the attainment of long-term business and public policy goals as well as their executives' career advancement.

To learn how you can find the consultant who most closely meets your needs, download [“A Buyer’s Guide to Communications Training Consultants.”](#) It even contains an extensive list of questions to help you choose the professional who represents the best match for your business.

Here’s a look at the steps your consultant should take to raise the odds for your program’s success:

- **At the very beginning of your relationship**, be sure that they emphasize the importance of a continuing professional development program, and present you with options for implementing it.
- **They ask questions that center on your long-term business and public policy goals.** You should find yourself doing most of the talking in your initial conversations to give them a clear sense of your needs and objectives.
- **They make it clear that they are not a “here today, gone tomorrow”** freelancer or job hunter unconcerned with your long-range well-being.
- **The options they outline include such aspects as:**
 - Multiple and varied learning opportunities spread out over an extended time frame.
 - Several options that make it convenient for you to select the one that best suits your current situation.

- A comprehensive professional development plan that covers as many of your spokespeople as necessary.
- Strategic consultations with your C-suite officers, senior staff, and board of directors.
- Regularly scheduled telephone or video check-ins with program participants.
- Ongoing email support.
- An assessment of your current communications plan and efforts.
- Learning resources that fortify your staff's growth (consultants who have authored books on communications topics score bonus points).
- **An inculcation program** to onboard new staff members.

About the Author

Ed Barks is an author and communications strategy consultant. He has authored [three previous books for communications and government relations experts](#), and for executives who represent the public face of their companies:

- *Reporters Don't Hate You: 100+ Amazing Media Relations Strategies*
- *A+ Strategies for C-Suite Communications: Turning Today's Leaders into Tomorrow's Influencers*
- *The Truth About Public Speaking: The Three Keys to Great Presentations*

His corporate and association clients hire him to provide them with the messages and everyday communications skills their executives need. He shows them how to gain an enhanced reputation, greater confidence, added opportunities for career advancement, and realization of long-term business and public policy goals.

Clients who turn to him for strategic advice say he “knows how to elicit peak performance.” They call him “a master at connecting with his audience” and “an effective educator,” and give his counsel “two thumbs up!”

As President of Barks Communications since its founding in 1997, Ed has guided more than 5500 business leaders, association executives, thought leaders, and communications and government relations professionals toward a sharper message and enhanced communications skills.

He is also the founder and community leader of the [C-suite Blueprint blog](#).

Keep up with the latest news from Ed when you [join his *Communications Community*](#). Subscribe today and get a special bonus: His position paper “Remote Media Interviews Are Here to Stay: How Your Spokespeople Can Thrive.”

Visit him online at www.barkscomm.com. He enjoys hearing from readers, so contact him at (703) 533-0403 or ebarks@barkscomm.com.

Join Ed's Communications Community

How can you get the same strategic advice from Ed Barks you've read about here in *Insider Strategies for the Confident Communicator* on a regular basis?

Easy. [Join his *Communications Community*](#) and get a special bonus: His position paper "Remote Media Interviews Are Here to Stay: How Your Spokespeople Can Thrive." Plus, you'll receive quick-hitting guidance you can use every day, right away.

Receive twice monthly updates on how to shape and implement your communications strategy, deal with the media, deliver winning presentations, and advocate before policymakers.

You can even send in your ideas and questions for Ed to examine in future editions of his twice monthly publication.

Communications Community members also get updates on Ed's forthcoming books.

All it takes is one click. Join the [Communications Community](#) today.