



# Idaho Elections Conference

**MEDIA TRAINING**

*Presented by:*  
Atlas Strategic Communications



# ABOUT ME

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- Founder + President | Atlas Strategic Communications
- University of Idaho Grad (Go Vandals!)
- 11+ years experience in Public Relations
- Winner of more than a dozen industry excellence awards
- Lover of yoga and tacos





# CONTENTS

- The Art of the Interview
- The Mediums
- Managing the Interview
- Developing your Message
- Interview Techniques



BE PREPARED.





# BEFORE AN INTERVIEW

- Contact your communications person if you have one
- Do your homework – research the reporter and media outlet
- Develop your message
- Anticipate tough questions
- Determine the appropriate setting for the interview



# DURING AN INTERVIEW

- Deliver your messages – early and often
- Take control of the interview
- Correct any errors in the reporter's questions
- Know how you want to end the interview
- Be a human



# AFTER AN INTERVIEW

- Find out when the story will run
- Provide any follow up information
- Update your team
- Determine how you are going to maximize coverage/control the story through your own channels (*ie; social media*)
- Review coverage
- Thank the reporter for their time



# NEVER DO AN INTERVIEW YOU'RE NOT PREPARED FOR



- Find out a reporter's deadline, determine what information they want to cover and tell them you'll get back to them or set up a later time to do the interview.
- Take time to gather your thoughts and develop your message.
- Research the reporter and their news outlet to try to find out if they may have any predisposed biases.
- Anticipate the questions and practice, practice, practice.





# THE MEDIUMS





# BROADCAST JOURNALISM

- Taped vs. live
- Visual storytelling
- Speak in short 10-15 second sound bites
- Look at the reporter not the camera
- Short turnaround time, stories usually air the same day



# PRINT JOURNALISM

- More in-depth storytelling
- Turnaround time can be longer than other mediums
- Opportunities to provide background information



# RADIO

- Stand to maintain energy and tone
- Don't shout
- Think about talking to a person and not a microphone
- Stories typically air the same day
- Control meandering thoughts





# ZOOM INTERVIEWS

- Be mindful of your background
- Have a quality microphone
- Do not be backlit
- Keep external noise and distractions to a minimum
- Make sure your internet connection is strong

# MULTIMEDIA REPORTERS

- Non-stop news cycle
- Social media means news travels at the speed of thumbs
- NO set rules for bloggers/tweeters
- Anyone can be a reporter





Know the **tips** and **tricks** reporters use  
so you're ready next time the media  
calls.



# A REPORTER IS ALWAYS WORKING



When with a reporter, always stay alert and on message.

- When you're doing an interview, even if a reporter turns off their camera or puts away their notebook, it is not over until they leave
- Even at social gatherings, understand a reporter may take something you say and turn it into a story



# NO SUCH THING AS OFF THE RECORD

If you don't want to see it, don't say it.



- Even if you have a strong relationship with a reporter, there are no guarantees they won't publish the information you share



# MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT

It helps to communicate credibility.



- Eye contact communicates assurance and trust
- If you are glancing around during an interview it signals you are nervous or grasping for answers



# DEMEANOR IS CRITICAL

Make sure your attitude matches the situation.



- Delivering a successful message requires a positive demeanor. [The opposite is also true.](#)
- An appropriately timed smile conveys confidence and control
- Don't let the reporter get under your skin and make you lose your cool

# USE THE REPORTER'S FIRST NAME

This helps you make a connection with them.



- Building rapport with the interviewer can turn a potential confrontation into a conversation

# LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THE QUESTION

Immediately correct any errors or characterizations.



- If you don't set the record straight, the interviewer will assume their facts are correct
- “That’s not true. As a matter of fact..”
- “I want to make sure you have the correct information...”

# STOP TALKING

After you've made your point, stop talking. Don't fill the silence.



- Conversational instincts tell you to fill the silence -- don't
- This trick can be used to get you to say more than you want
- “Do you have another question?”



# DO NOT REPEAT THE NEGATIVE

Focus on the positive – say what you are doing, and not what you aren't.



- **Q:** Didn't you deliver the wrong ballots to precinct A making it so those voters were unable to vote?
- **Wrong A:** It's not that voters weren't able to vote because the wrong ballots were delivered, what happened was...
- **Right A:** No. Voters in precinct A were able to vote and those ballots were collected and counted.



# THE FALSE PREMISE

When the question is based on incorrect assumptions, don't answer.



- When there is lots of misinformation, it can be too complicated to correct all the facts
- “I don’t agree with the premise of your question. As a matter of fact..”



# DON'T SPECULATE

Reporters ask “what if” questions to get information you wouldn’t typically provide.



- Hypothetical questions are typically negative in nature and can be damaging
- Alarms bells should sound when you hear, “what if,” or “is it possible,” or “let’s say that..”
- Like everything, there are exceptions!

# TELL THE TRUTH

Never lie – it will come back to haunt you.



- If you don't know the answer to a question, tell the reporter you will get back to them or put them in touch with someone who can help
- If you misspeak, correct your mistake as soon as possible and move on
- Half-truths and outright lies only make bad news worse

# STOP INTERRUPTIONS

Interruptions prevent you from sharing your message.



- If a reporter talks over you, pause, then go back to delivering your message before moving on to the next question.
- Remember that reporters can lose control too
- Be the one who stays in control!

# AVOID LINGO

Jargon and acronyms can create a barrier between you and your audience.



- Do not use any acronyms
- Use terms your audience knows and understands



# PAUSE AND THINK

Immediately answering can get you into interview hot water



- Stop. Think. Answer smartly.
- A reporter isn't likely to use a video of you calming sitting and thinking.



# FOCUS ON YOUR AUDIENCE

Always remember what is important to your audience.



- To connect with voters/constituents, you must understand what is important to them
- Make sure your messages are relatable and relevant

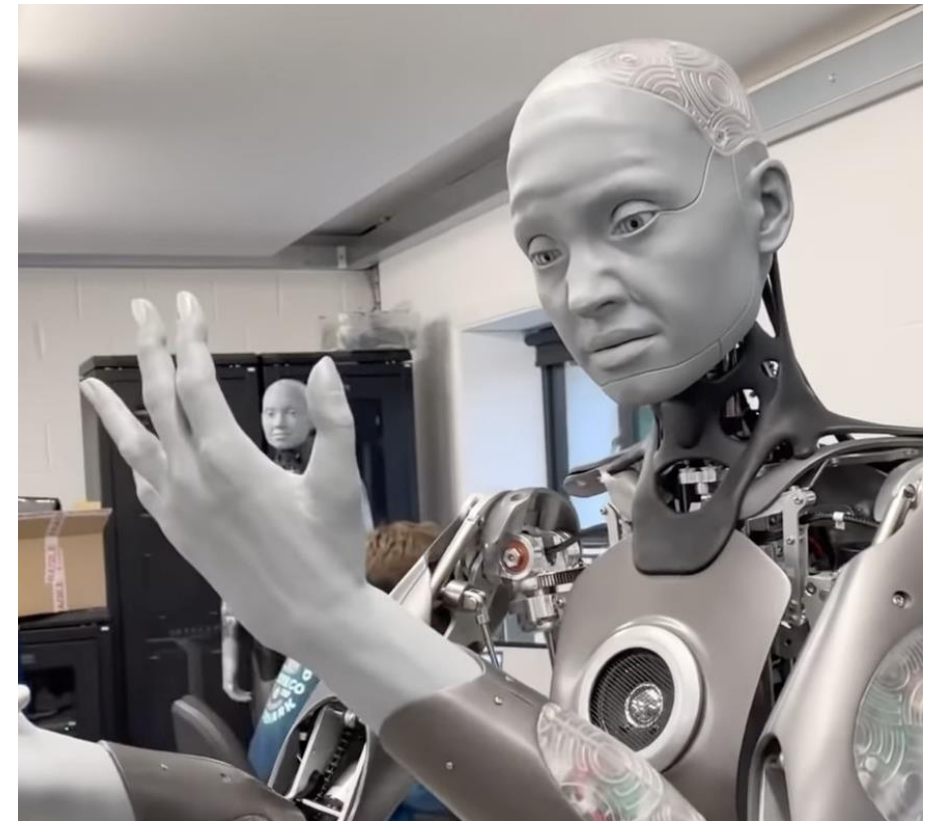


# BE A HUMAN

You're talking to a person, so be personable



- Rules are guidelines. Don't be chained by them and have them sabotage your interview.
- BE REAL



# SELF-PROMOTION: INTERVIEW NO-NO

Either provide something substantive or do not do the interview



- The fastest way to derail an interview is to try and make it about something other than the topic. Even worse if you use it as a medium for self-promotion.
- The best way to “promote” your office, county or give credence to a successful election is to provide a substantive interview





## WHEN SHOULD YOU DECLINE AN INTERVIEW?

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- If after careful research and understanding of the reporter's background, biases and story direction you believe the story will be a hatchet job, or your company is a no-win position, consider declining the interview.
- If you decline an interview, provide the reporter with a brief, concise written statement.
- Avoid the speculation associated with “no comment” or “the Clerk’s office was unreachable.”



# DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGE



# MESSAGING

Know what you want to say. Say it. Say it again.



YOUR MESSAGE IS THE SINGLE THE MOST IMPORTANT THOUGHT OR IDEA YOU WANT TO LEAVE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE.



MESSAGES ARE COMMUNICATED BY YOUR WORDS, DEMEANOR, APPEARANCE, SURROUNDINGS AND MOST IMPORTANTLY YOUR ACTIONS.



YOU SHOULD HAVE 2-3 MESSAGES PREPARED FOR EACH INTERVIEW – BUT NO MORE.



TO PROVIDE CREDITABILITY TO WHAT YOU ARE SAYING YOU MUST BACK UP EACH MESSAGE WITH STORIES, THIRD-PARTY VALIDATION OR FACTS.



# FOCUS ON YOUR AUDIENCE

Always remember what is important to your audience.



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# INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

Learn how to  
**take control** – no  
matter what  
questions you're  
asked.





# BRIDGING

This technique allows you to take control of the interview and share your message no matter what questions are asked.

- Part 1: Answer the question directly
- Part 2: Use a transition phrase
- Part 3: Deliver your message
  
- Transition phrases:
  - What we need to focus on...
  - As a matter of fact...
  - And in addition...
  - The bottom line is...
  - As I said before....
  - The real question is....
  - Let me explain...



# BRIDGING EXAMPLE



Question: Can you explain the discrepancies in the original vote count and the recount? Why were they so different?

## Part 1:

This was a close race and a recount was warranted to correct the margin of error inherent in all elections.

## Part 2:

What matters is...

## Part 3:

The recount confirms the result and residents of Joe County can feel confident their vote mattered and was counted.





# HOOKING

This technique helps you guide the reporter's questions.

- Finish answering questions by leaving the reporter wanting to know more.
- Hooking examples:
  - “We’ve got some really exciting events planned for this year.”
  - “People would be surprised if they saw the research we’ve conducted on the impacts this decision could have on the community.”
  - “There are several issues we are watching closely.”





# FLAGGING

This technique allows you to call out your most important answer to the interviewer.

- Finish answering questions by leaving the reporter wanting to know more.
- Flagging examples:
  - “That is the most important question you asked me.”
  - “If people remember one thing...”
  - “What I want people to understand is...”



# REVIEW



Reporting  
3.1) Wrap report  
3.2) KPI grid  
3.3) Recommendations  
3.4) Next steps

Door knocking  
Launch event  
- Run of show  
- Media onsite  
- Speaking notes  
- Gift bags

2.5) Media  
- Release  
- Earned pitching  
- Desk sides  
- Interviews



# REVIEW

- **A reporter is always working** – even when it's not obvious. When with a reporter, stay alert and on message.
- **There is no such thing as off the record.**
- **Maintain eye contact.** It helps to communicate credibility.
- **Demeanor is critical.** Make sure your attitude matches the situation.
  - Often when people are being interviewed they come across as too grim.
  - Don't let reporters get under your skin, always keep your cool.





# REVIEW

- **Use reporter's first name** occasionally to turn interview into a conversation.
- **Listen carefully to the question.** Immediately correct any errors in the question.
- **Don't repeat the negative.** Reporters may try to get you to say certain prejudicial words or phrases by using them in their questions. Don't fall for it, simply say, "That's not true."
- **The false premise.** If a reporter's question is based on a false premise, tell them, "I don't agree with the premise of your question, as a matter of fact..."

# REVIEW

- **Try not to answer hypothetical questions\*.** ‘What if’ questions should be a red flag.
- **Don’t lie.** If you don’t know the answer, tell the reporter you’ll get back to them or put them in touch with a contact who can help.
- **Don’t let the reporter interrupt you.** This prevents you from sharing your message.
  - “I’ll answer that question in a moment but first let me finish my answer to your earlier question.”



# REVIEW



- **What to do when you mess up?** Go back and fix your answer. Remember, this is your interview.
  - “I can give you a clearer answer to that question about...”
- **When you’re through making your point, stop talking.** Don’t fill the silence.
  - “Did you have any other questions for me?”
- **Avoid lingo.** Don’t use acronyms or industry jargon. It makes it harder for your audience to understand what you are saying.



# REVIEW



- **Focus on your audience.** Talk about the issues important to your stakeholders so they know you care.
- **Be a human.** Talk to reporters professionally and conversationally.
- **Do not self-promote.** Provide quality, thought-leading materials or decline the interview.



# QUESTIONS?





# FIND US

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