

February 1989

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman

RE: How Reporters Behave

Analyzing how reporters ask interview questions reveals a predictable set of behaviors. You can be more confident and have positive, successful interviews if you anticipate reporters' behaviors and if you become familiar with the three kinds of questions reporters generally ask. According to Chester Burger of New York City, during interviews news reporters can be expected to:

1. Interrupt.
2. Put words in interviewee's mouth.
3. State a non-truth or distortion as fact or inside information to get a reaction.
4. Go on to another subject before interviewee makes complete or positive reply to the first.
5. Solicit candid comments "off-the-record."
6. Shoot rapid-fire, hostile-sounding questions -- pressing interviewee's pace of answering.
7. Demand an answer to questions interviewee can't answer.
8. Accuse interviewee of "anti-consumer" action (bias, exorbitant profits, neglect of handicapped and aged, hiding truth, destruction of competition, bribery, etc.).
9. Ask about some specific company failure.
10. On one subject, use several increasingly probing follow-up questions.
11. Claim not to understand a technical or "company" answer.
12. Pose a tough, complex question for quick response.
13. Confirm an answer, then misinterpret or misquote.
14. Ask interviewee to respond to controversial or critical statements by others in or out of interviewee's organization.
15. Ask interviewee for a personal opinion on a controversial company policy.
16. Ask interviewee for an opinion of competitor products or services.

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