

Your Rights as an Interviewee

As a spokesperson, you have certain rights. Agreeing to an interview does not mean waiving your right to courtesy and respect. Indeed, the vast majority of producers and reporters are professionals who appreciate your willingness to participate and will gladly agree to reasonable requests.

You have a right to:

- **Determine the scope of the interview.** What topics will be covered? Is the interviewer interested in your personal views, or will he/she stick to the subject at hand?
- **Know the show's format.** Is it taped or live? Will there be a studio audience? Will there be call-in questions from the public, and will they be screened? How long should answers be?
- **Know the length of the interview.** If the show is live, you probably will be given an approximate length; if it is taped, you have the right to know how much of your interview will be used. Knowing the length of the interview in advance helps you prepare appropriate answers to questions you anticipate.
- **Ask the producer or interviewer what specific subject areas will be covered,** understanding that you may not be given all the questions. Hosts usually discuss the issues they will touch upon ahead of time. If not, be prepared for difficult questions.
- **Pursue your objective.** When you agree to be interviewed, let the producer or reporter know of your interest in being interviewed. If you are promoting a program or particular point of view, and time is getting short, you have the right to steer the conversation so that your concerns are met.
- **Try not to take notes with you** on the set or at an interview. Reading from prepared material can ruin an otherwise good presentation--it's distracting and adds "crumple, shuffle" noise to an interview.
- **Ask to use visual materials** to enhance your presentation, but producers are not obligated to use them. Producers often welcome slides, film clips, photos, charts and videotapes because they spice up programs. Some stations in small markets are not equipped to handle such materials; others may reject them for format reasons. Most talk shows, however, like visuals, which give you an excellent vehicle to illustrate your message.
- **Monitor the reporter's "cut-away" questions** in a taped news interview. Most of these interviews are shot with one camera, so reporters tape their questions after the interview is completed. Later, the tape is edited into the interview to give the impression that two cameras were used. Sometimes, a reporter alters questions. You have the right to be present while the questions are taped, and to object should they differ from the actual interview.
- **Speak.** Don't wait for the interviewer to ask the questions that will lead to the message you wish to deliver. Take advantage of a pause in the interview to make your points. If you are interrupted before you've had a fair chance to answer the question, you have a right to complete the answer. Be polite, but firm. Use transitions to return to your message points.
- **Take control of the interview.** Don't be intimidated by a big-name journalist or a network producer. It might be their show, but it's your issue. You are the expert, and you can make the interview exciting by being assertive and enthusiastic. Use transitions.
- **Know who the other guests will be** on a talk show and their order of appearance.