



UPDATE

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THE UNEXPECTED EXCITING PHONE CALL AND, THINGS YOU NEED TO ASK

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In these post 9-11 days when we are being warned by the Gold side about what to say and how to say it, it is nice to have some advise from a pro.

Let's say a reporter calls you on the telephone wanting an interview. I don't know about you, but when that happens, and it does, I get nervous. I want to do well, to be of value. I want to tell the CGAUX story, and do it right. But, then I wonder. What should I say? What shouldn't I say? Should I volunteer lots of info? Or should I play it close to the vest. I don't want to look bad, or worse, I don't want "TEAM" Coast Guard to look bad.

This uncertainty and eagerness to please can sound defensive, which will reflect in the interview and make us look inadequate in the eventual article.

To avoid this, some simple steps can be taken to help manage the phone call and the interview. Remember: The reporters want to get the story and get it right. We want them to get the Aux story and get it right also. So, we need to work together toward that goal.

Ask Questions. After the reporter's introduction and brief description of the reason for the phone call, start asking a few questions.

Our first question should be: "What is your deadline?" This shows the reporter that we want to be helpful.

Next, ask more about the subject of the story. Inquire about the information the reporter has now, and with whom, the reporter, has already spoken. This will give us a sense of the direction of the story. It will also allow us to offer our own information by providing the latest and most accurate information we have.

Do not ask questions like, "Have you ever covered a story like this before?" and/or "How much do you really know about what's going on here?" This puts the reporter in an awkward position.

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It is advisable to compliment the reporter. Saying, "Your newspaper has always been fair." This will make the reporter feel good and, at the same time, challenge them to get it straight. After the interview if we are still uneasy, ask the reporter to review what we have said. We can also fax or e-mail our main points. Some folks are afraid that this is a slap in the face to the reporter, but we must trust our instincts. And it is better to correct something before rather than after it has been published or aired.

It is always preferable to do interviews in person. Meeting the reporter face-to-face allows us to add a personal touch to the interview and to our professional relationship with them. Telephone interviews should only be done if the reporter has a tight deadline, or if it is logistically impossible.

SUMMARY:

1. Take control by asking questions.
2. Compliment the reporter.
3. If you are uncomfortable, ask the reporter to review what you have said.
4. Fax or e-mail your main points to the reporter after the interview, if necessary.
5. Do telephone interviews only when deadlines are tight or meeting is logistically impossible.

If you have some good advice for us. Drop me a line at: dsopad7@ucnsb.net. Remember that this is your newsletter. It is only as good as the suggestions, ideas, and materials you provide.

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