

**MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION: DAMAGE CONTROL IN THE MEDIA**

*Containing a crisis: it can be done.*

**IF YOU'RE UNDER ATTACK**

- If you feel an interviewer has a negative slant, keep in mind:
- Try not to be defensive, angry or excited.
  - Keep your answers brief.
  - Remember to breathe, appear calm and, if appropriate, smile to break the tension.
  - Look him or her in the eye.

**GET FROM NEGATIVE TO POSITIVE**

Similar to framing the debate, repositioning is another way to put your best argument forth. A reporter may ask you a provocative or loaded question. You reposition it by flipping it to an opportunity for a more positive comment.

Fundamental to the idea of repositioning is never to repeat any negative words used by a reporter. For example:

*"Congressman Reed says you cheat on your taxes."*

You reposition the question by responding:

*"Once again my opponent has distorted my record and lied to the taxpayers."*

**TRANSITIONAL PHRASES**

Transitional phrases help you to get from the negative to the positive; they enable you to bring the focus back to your message and away

from issues you do not want to talk about.

Make sure you have at least three transitional sentences memorized. Here are some suggestions:

- That's not really an issue I can speak to, but what I would like to say is...
- That's a good question, however, what I think is even more important to talk about...
- But just as important/even more important to me...
- Let me put that into perspective...
- That's not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is...
- That's an interesting question; let me remind you though...
- What's important to remember, however...
- Before we get off that topic, let me add...
- That's a good point, but I think your audience would be interested in knowing...
- Let me give you some background information...



**Women's Action for New Directions  
Education Fund**

*WAND Education Fund educates the public and opinion leaders about the need to reduce violence and militarism in society, and redirect excessive military spending to unmet human and environmental needs.*

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*The PUSH formula*

*Tips for dealing with public problems as soon as they arise.*

**P – Plan | Map out a strategy first.** Do not respond to a question or situation in the heat of a crisis. Your goal is to quell the present problem, not make it worse by appearing unprepared or shooting from the hip.

**U – Urgency | Allow yourself time** to plan a calm, rational response and then waste no time in implementing your strategy. While you should respond quickly to a crisis do not allow a sense of panic to enter into your planning. Reporters will often push hard for your comments before you are fully prepared. Don't fall into this trap.

Tell reporters when you will issue a statement, hold a press conference or return their call. Beyond that you are under no obligation. However, it is important to respond quickly – within the hour if possible, absolutely before the end of the workday. Once a problem is reported, it will continue to be reshaped in front of the viewer until something more interesting comes along – or you put the issue to rest.

**S – Same script | If your crisis involves anyone else,** make sure you are all saying the same thing. Nothing piques a reporter's interest like conflicting stories.

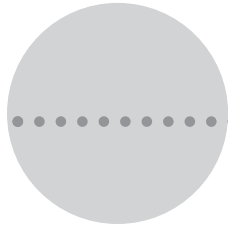
**H – Honesty |** Do not make a bad situation worse by embellishing your story or failing to take responsibility.

**Being honest is the single most important step you can take.** People are generally sympathetic to someone in times of trouble. Admitting a problem, acknowledging pain or lapses will usually never be as damning as getting caught in a lie.



# take action!

## GUIDE TO THE MEDIA



### IT DOESN'T HAPPEN UNTIL IT'S IN THE NEWS

**T**HE UNFORTUNATE TRUTH IS THAT THE TREE FALLING IN THE FOREST DOES *NOT* MAKE A SOUND — unless there's someone there to hear it. Same with your news. It isn't news unless it appears in the media.

Fortunately, you *can* do something about it. You can devise a media strategy, and take advantage of media opportunities. This will enable you to reach more people, and to motivate them to action.

This Guide should help you put together a plan of action, and then follow through on it. Good luck!

### *A snapshot of what you need to do*

- **Develop your message. Then stick to it.**
- **Get your message out there.** Target your audience. Find the media. Pitch your story.
- **Don't overlook any media outlets.** Remember letters to the editor and op-eds.
- **Hold a press conference.** But do it right.
- **Learn some tricks of the trade.** Look good. Speak up. Contain a crisis.

### GET CONNECTED!

Check out these great online resources.

WAND Education Fund web site:  
[www.WANDEducationFund.org](http://www.WANDEducationFund.org)

Will web site:  
[www.willwand.org](http://www.willwand.org)

STAND web site:  
[www.standwand.org](http://www.standwand.org)



"An analysis of the evening news programs on CBS, ABC and NBC determined that the percentage of female protagonists in news stories in 2002 was on average 14%, compared to 86% males... Out of 1845 individual appearances in the context of political issues, women appeared only 115 times."

— *Media Report to Women*



Women's Action for New Directions  
Education Fund • FALL 2005

**MESSAGE. MESSAGE. MESSAGE.***Develop your message. Then stick to it. Again and again.*

**“Spin control”** is often used to mean slick language that obscures an unpleasant reality. However, “spin” is simply a practical method for casting your arguments in the most positive light. The following techniques take practice, but are well worth the time to master. In this age of media-driven campaigns, you need to take the time to become skilled in the ways of delivering a convincing argument.

**MESSAGE! MESSAGE! MESSAGE!**

You know that commercial with the awful jingle? The one they play over and over? Well, there’s a reason they do that (and it’s not just to annoy you). Advertisers understand that the key to success is to *develop a MESSAGE, and repeat it.*

Finding your MESSAGE, and repeating it often, is the best way to make sure people are hearing it. This counts double if you’re trying to get your message in the media. You need to make sure *your* message gets heard, not a distorted argument from someone else, or a mistake by the media.

**STAY ON MESSAGE**

How to “stay on message”? Let’s say your message is that there is not enough federal funding for state programs, and that defense contractors get more than their fair share. You get asked these questions:

- 
- Q** What do you think of campaign finance reform?  
**A** Campaign finance reform is sorely needed, since defense contractors spend millions on political contributions so they can get funding for weapons systems the Pentagon doesn’t need.  
**Q** What do you think of state programs for women?  
**A** We would have more money for domestic violence programs if the federal budget didn’t waste billions on things like the F-22.
- 

This is what it means to stay on the message!

**TEST YOUR MESSAGE**

Your message should be clear, easy to understand (especially for television and radio), and catchy. Before you go public with your message, make sure to test it.

- Who are your potential supporters, and what do they care about?
- Who are your potential opponents, and what do they care about?

You should frame your message accordingly. Use the positive aspects of your case to ward off any expected criticism.

**FRAME YOUR MESSAGE**

When speaking with any reporter, you can use one simple maneuver that will highlight the most important portion of your statement.

- Right before you deliver your sound bite or key point, **STOP! Pause before continuing.**
- Consider removing your glasses, taking a breath, or having a drink of water.
- Create silence before and after your sound bite. This provides a cue for editors that this is a sound bite, and shows that you are about to issue a statement of primary importance.

**WRITE THE HEADLINE**

When dealing with the media (especially radio or television), you don’t have time for a long-winded explanation. Don’t get distracted or drawn away from your message. Before you speak, envision the best possible headline or summary of the interview, and deliver your message accordingly.

Which headline would you rather see?

- Jones and Smith Fling More Mud; Voters Weary of Name Calling  
*or:*
- A.G. Jones Denounces Opponent’s Bounced Checks  
Here are rules for “writing” your verbal headline:
- **Make a brief and powerful argument.** Then stop talking until the next question.
- **Don’t feel the need to fill silence by talking.** Reporters will often wait before asking another question, in the hopes that you will trip up or provide them with information you wish you hadn’t. Remaining silent also emphasizes your interest in the issue under discussion.
- **Don’t be led astray.** Especially if you are initiating the interview or press call, keep on topic by transitioning back to the sound bite and repeating the message. If a reporter presses you onto another subject, consider asking if you can take another call and call him right back. The interruption in your conversation will “close” your message and allow it to remain undiluted.
- **Don’t be afraid to repeat your message over and over.** This will help you make your point.
- **They cannot print what you don’t say.**

**USE ANECDOTES**

Nothing moves people like a story. One of the most compelling ways to address an issue is through anecdotes. Talking about the need for universal health care is adequate; talking about your own experience without health care can electrify your audience and convey a sense of urgency and passion.

If it’s inappropriate or impossible to discuss your own experience, consider providing the names of constituents who are living through the experience and wouldn’t mind talking about it publicly.

## LOOKIN' GOOD IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

# It's not just print anymore: tips on using other media

### PUT YOUR BEST IMAGE FORWARD

Nobody needs to tell you how important your appearance is. Any woman who has run for office or worked in business is aware of the importance of being well groomed. However unfair or discriminatory it may be, unless you appear professional, every effort you make to be well-informed and articulate will be for naught.

The truth is — on television especially — what you look like creates an indelible impression. Now that you are instituting a media strategy you should consider engaging an image consultant who has experience in theater or television.

### TELEVISION

- Take the time to find and maintain a simple, professional hairstyle. Use hair spray and bring touch up gear with you.
- If you wear glasses, do not take them off. Wear non-reflective lenses.
- Wear makeup. At a minimum, use under-eye concealer and powder to eliminate shine. Use neutral lipstick that isn't too shiny. Restrict nail polish to neutral colors.
- Do a last minute check for lipstick on your teeth.
- Limit the accessories around your face, neck and hands. A watch and earrings are necessary. A short necklace or a pin is fine. Floppy jewelry is a distraction.
- Dress in solid colors or small prints in medium, vibrant shades. Avoid fabrics that are shiny or clothing that bunches when you sit. Do not wear white.
- Sit on the hem of your blazer to ensure that the collar and shoulder pads don't bunch up around your neck.
- Wear a skirt that covers your knees.
- Wear only dark or nude nylons, no white.
- Make sure your shoes are polished, the soles in good shape.
- Look at your interviewer or at your colleagues, not the camera.
- Know what your best profile is and — depending on the generosity of the host — try to be seated and filmed accordingly.
- Remember reaction shots. A television camera can pan to you at any time, whether you are talking or not. Fix your bra, blow your nose, etc., before entering the set.



### PUBLIC SPEAKING

- When speaking at a podium, do not flip from page to page. When you finish a page, move it to the side.
- Take charge of the podium. Place your hands lightly on either side of the podium surface until you need to move your hands for emphasis, to turn the page, or take a drink.
- When seated at a table on a stage or riser, make sure there is a skirt over the table to shield your legs.

- A woman debating two men should not sit or stand between them. Rotating your head and raising it to look up at them will appear childish and indecisive.
- Check the podium height. The audience should be able to see more than the top of your head.

### RADIO

- Keep your mouth about one fist away from the microphone.
- Radio “soaks up” your enthusiasm. Add extra pronunciation and emphasis to the important points you are making.
- Always wear headphones in a radio studio. Ask for them if necessary. The headphones will make a big difference in your delivery.
- Take a deep breath before speaking; it's easy to run out of breath and get squeaky.
- Imagine your audience is in the studio: it makes your voice friendlier.

### PREPARING FOR ELECTRONIC APPEARANCES

Speak with the producer for the following information:

- What color is the background of the set? Wear a complementary color to ensure maximum contrast (e.g. don't wear a blue jacket against a royal blue background).
- What shot will generally be used? Will you be photographed from the neck up, waist up or full-length while seated? Pay attention to where you place your legs.
- Ask in advance for a list of questions. If you can't get the questions in full, discuss the topics with the producer.
- If you are appearing on a high school, college or volunteer produced cable show, ensure that a supervisor will be present during the filming and editing process.
- Remember the rule of one third: For every one hour of radio or television time, you will need three hours of reading and preparation to discuss an issue cogently.
- Unless you are on a book tour discussing your latest bestseller, you can always learn more about an issue.
- Make sure you know who else will appear on the program.
- Make every effort to have viewed the program, and the host, at least once before appearing on the show. If you know you will be appearing with an opponent, have a sound bite ready.
- Ensure that the show's producers have a copy of your polished and professional biography.
- The audience's impression of you will be largely determined by your introduction.
- As with all appearances, know your message. *What one point are you trying to make?*

**NOW THAT YOU HAVE A MESSAGE: GET IT OUT THERE!**

*Target your audience. Pitch your story.*

**TARGET YOUR AUDIENCE AND THE MEDIA**

*Targeting* is a method to help you determine where your message will work best. You can determine the proper target for your message by answering these questions.

- What is my message?
- Who do I want to hear my message?
- Why should this audience listen to me?
- Who cares about my message?
- What do I want those in this audience to do after they have heard my message?

Then, request advertising/media kits from all the local news outlets: newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations. These kits are designed to help advertisers know where to spend their dollars. They usually include extensive (if optimistic) demographic information on their readers, viewers or listeners. Another good source of this information is your local cable company.

By referring to the circulation and demographic information, you can determine:

- The most widely read newspaper. You will probably want to provide important information to this outlet first.
- The media sources that are important in a district.
- Where your most likely voters live and get their news.
- The type of information a certain media outlet will find especially newsworthy (e.g., local chatter for your neighborhood weekly, your sponsorship of a local football team in the city sports magazine).



**KNOW HOW TO PITCH A STORY**

“Pitching” a story is a way to convey your ideas in a way that is interesting to the media in order to get coverage.

Despite the best efforts of editors and reporters, it often happens that only major events receive coverage. To get your message out, you need to pitch the story to a receptive reporter or editor.

When making a pitch, you need to develop an interesting angle or “hook” to spark the interest and imagination of the media.

This is not the time to be shy or modest. You should always look for opportunities. Try the following strategies to beef up your presence in the media:

- First, determine where and to whom your issue will be most relevant (targeting).
- Second, send a press advisory and background information to the reporter about a week before you call to make your pitch.

**WHEN YOU PITCH A STORY**

- **Be brief.** Summarize your ideas into a simple, interesting message. You have a few seconds to pique interest, so lead with your most interesting, startling or tantalizing information.
- **Use colorful phrases.**
- **Don’t get bogged down in detail** or too much information, you want to interest, not exhaust
- **Use new studies, information or actions to lead your pitch.**

Which one captures your interest more?

“I thought you might want to cover a story about the state budget and the complicated way federal monies come to us, and how they are being cut. We are not trying to make them up here. Many women, children and the elderly are being affected.”

or

“Tomorrow at the State House I will give a press briefing on pork. Instead of ‘bringing home the bacon,’ our Members of Congress are porking up defense contractors’ paychecks and denying citizens of this state medical care, emergency services, and necessities.”



*Make your own news!*

You might consider the following activities:

- Run a poll or focus group on a topical issue and release the results.
- Research and commission a report (great project for your college intern), and release the results.
- Do a stunt, issue a dare or challenge.
- Create and disseminate a “top ten” list like David Letterman does.
- Do something! Visit a classroom, a mall...go where your constituents are and tell the press about it.

## DON'T FORGET THESE MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

# There's more to the media than the press corps

### WRITE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Most newspapers devote a lot of space to letters to the editor and/or readers' phone calls.

Use these sections in the following ways:

- To announce a new initiative or program when you can't get a full story written.
- To refute remarks made about you or falsely attributed to you.
- To argue points made generally in an article or editorial.
- To highlight a positive event in the community.
- To credit someone for excellent work.

Don't be shy about encouraging friends and associates to send a letter to the editor about you and your good work. In business, good service is often rewarded with a letter of commendation from the boss. In politics, a praiseworthy letter to the editor is about as close as you can get.

Make sure your letter is short (about 75 words) and to the point. Include your name, address and daytime phone number.

### WRITE AND SUBMIT OP-EDS

An op-ed is a newspaper opinion column that is published opposite from the editorial page. It provides a wonderful chance to express your message. Learn the policy of your local papers for publishing op-eds, and take maximum advantage of this free media opportunity.

If you are not confident about your writing, seek assistance. Write an outline or rough draft and ask a friend or colleague for help. Sometimes an assistant or professional contact can prepare the first draft, but always remember to include words that reflect your style and message. You can also use excerpts from a speech you have delivered.

Some radio and television stations provide opportunities to produce and air op-ed comments. (This is becoming increasingly rare.) Check your stations and learn about their policies.

Note: On a regular basis, the Women Legislators' Lobby (WILL) provides members with sample op eds on timely federal issues. Simply edit the sample as needed and submit it to your local or state wide paper. Take advantage of this free service!

### MAKE THE MOST OF EDITORIAL BOARD MEETINGS

Newspaper editors and publishers usually make policy decisions at Editorial Board meetings. You should mail information about your issue to key editorial and reporting staff to brief them on your position. If you are spearheading an issue, it's helpful to

meet with the editorial board to inform the newspaper leadership.

Call the newspaper editor and ask if an editorial meeting can be arranged. If you're a legislator, you will usually have no trouble obtaining such a meeting. Find out who will be attending and send them briefing materials. Someone should be with you to take notes. Take your press kit (and current photo) to hand out.

### TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CABLE

Local access cable stations are frequently looking for free, informative programming with a local accent. Cable public affairs shows are excellent places to gain experience on television, while reaching a broad audience. Be in regular contact with your cable station's manager. If you are reasonably articulate and interesting, you could be a frequent guest or host.

In addition, many cable stations would be delighted to have a state legislator host her own show. You could address local legislative happenings or interview people making news. And it's great practice.

### HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE

**Do not hold a press conference unless you are absolutely certain you have something to say that requires such a forum. The question you should ask is, "Is it news?"**

*These situations do call for a press conference:*

- You are being hounded by reporters for information on a specific issue.
- You are announcing your candidacy or your withdrawal, or announcing a major policy initiative that will affect thousands of people.
- You can hold the press conference at a time when reporters will not be on deadline — and at a convenient place..
- You have a "picture" that illustrates your point.

*Use these alternatives to a press conference:*

- Release a written statement with an offer that you will be available to the media for one-on-one interviews about the subject at their earliest convenience.
- Give a reporter an "exclusive" on your story, which almost assures you of receiving coverage.
- Send a press release and follow it up the same day with a phone call.
- Hold a briefing session seated at a table or in your office so you can provide them with information with fewer time constraints. Consider holding more than one so that rival journalists and stations will not be in the same session. Also, you can accommodate different schedules.

