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## **MEDIA SAVVY: ON CAMERA PRESENCE**

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Media interviews are intimidating – for everyone – even Fortune 500 CEOs.

Whether you're running a worldwide firm, or a start-up business from your kitchen table, you'd like to know how to get positive press.

If you're confident about handling the media, you say yes when reporters call.

If you're afraid, you worry about saying the wrong thing; you hold back. You pass on interviews. You don't get quoted, because you're too careful.

It's not wrong to worry – even the friendliest reporter can catch us off guard with an unexpected question. The thought of tougher reporters, who try to coax, coerce, wheedle and bully information out of us can send us running for the bottle of Maalox.

What's the answer? You have to become media savvy.

When I was just starting out as a reporter, handling consumer issues for Boston's WCVB-TV, Channel 5, I interviewed one guy who really impressed me.

He was the spokesperson for Star Markets.

Most of the stories I did about Star were positive – they had introduced new technology or a new product line – but occasionally, consumers were complaining about something their spokesman also had to deal with.

This guy never said no or "no comment", never even ducked a question. He was always prepared. He spoke clearly, concisely and with energy and conviction. Whether the story was positive or negative, he was consistent!

I was not surprised that he ended up leading his own successful company years later.

His name is Tom Stemberg. He founded Staples, the mega-office supply store chain.

Knowing your subject well and speaking confidently to the media are key to leadership.

You need to know this stuff, whether you're speaking to print, radio or television reporters.

But television has some special rules of its own. Look to the following tips next time you are preparing to be interviewed either "Live" or "on tape." You'll want to be "camera-ready."

### **Television Tips: Live Interviews, in Studio**

- Arrive early. Your interview slot may change. Give yourself time to get settled, review notes, have your microphone and earpiece tested. Collect your thoughts, talk to the producers on the remote, and/or the anchor or reporter who will be interviewing you ahead of time.
- Find out exactly how much time you have for the interview, and plan how to get any important messages into your answers within the allotted period.
- Once your microphone is on, assume people are listening, and never assume you are not on the air. Dozens of people can be watching in the control room or by satellite, and any remarks you make could go out over the air.
- Be sure your earpiece fits comfortably and allows you to hear everything that is being said. If you do interviews often, consider having a personalized earpiece made that you carry with you.
- If you cannot see the person interviewing you, look directly into the camera as if it is a person. One of the greatest secrets to success in these interviews is to come across as if you are just talking to a friend across the table – your whole face should be engaged – facial expression should mimic what it would be if you were speaking in person.
- If the reporter or anchor is in the room, look directly at them, and do not look at the camera.
- While you may hear distractions in the room, most viewers will not hear, because the microphone doesn't pick it up – so generally it's best to ignore those distractions (such as ringing phones, people yelling across a room) – just keep talking.

## Television Tips: Taped on Location

- Arrive early! Give yourself time to get settled, review notes on what you want to say
- Good posture is a must. Sit up straight, supporting yourself with the stomach muscles and the back of the chair in a comfortable, relaxed position. Make sure that once you are sitting up straight, you relax the muscles in your neck, shoulders, arms and hands so you don't look too stiff.
- Stay STILL. Don't swivel, rock or sway, even if your chair moves. Television picks up the smallest movements and magnifies them. The viewer needs to focus on your face.
- Look at the interviewer, not at the camera.
- Use colorful, active language.
- Speak clearly, enunciate, but remain conversational.
- Be succinct, answers may be edited down to 3 – 10 seconds.
- Prepare talking points and bridge to your key messages.
- If you are asked to carry out any action for B-roll purposes, do so as if the camera isn't there. Do not look at the camera. (B-roll means just pictures or video, which will be used between sound-bites, under the reporter's voice.)

In today's business world, it is harder and harder for companies to stay "under the radar". There are just too many news outlets, many more reporters looking for stories. And policies forbidding all contact with the press just create suspicion and often backfire.

People who take the time, through training or coaching, to master the skills needed to handle media interviews effectively, reap the benefits in positive press and minimize negative coverage when problems arise, as they inevitably do.