WHEN A REPORTER CALLS
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- Take control; don’t answer questions until you’re ready.
- Note the reporter’s name, affiliation, and phone number.
- Ask what the story is about.
- Find out the reporter’s deadline.
- Define the role you’ll play in the story.
- Suggest other sources.
- Set ground rules for the interview: subject area, time, place, duration.
- Pick an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.
- Regard the interview as an opportunity to tell your story or to make your points.
- Remember your audience is the public, not the reporter.
- Decide what you want the public to understand about the subject.
- Pick one or two points you want to make.
- Keep your language simple, as though you were explaining to a neighbor.
- Avoid jargon.
- Prepare relevant examples and analogies.
- Make notes for easy reference.
- Prepare a list of probable questions and short, concise answers.
- Collect material that will help the reporter understand the story.
- Rehearse with someone you trust.
- If possible, tape the interview so you can catch your own errors before they’re part of the permanent print or broadcast record.
- If a reporter asks you to comment off the record, decline. Assume everything you say in an interview will appear in the story.
- Don’t wait for the reporter to ask the “right question.” Make your main point early and often.
- Be concise; you will be less likely to be quoted out of context if you are clear and concise.
- Make sure you understand each question.
- If a question contains erroneous information, don’t let it slide. Correct it.
- Don’t evade questions. If you don’t know the answer, say so.
- Never lie.
- Beware of hypothetical questions; don’t be pressured into speculating.
- Don’t ask or expect to approve the story before it is printed or broadcast.
- Be available for follow up; encourage the reporter to call back with other questions or for clarifications.
- Ask others what they thought of the story. If the story has major errors, don’t let anger or embarrassment rule your response.
- Call the reporter to correct errors in the story; uncorrected errors get repeated as fact in follow-up stories.
- If other reporters call you, use the new contact as an opportunity to correct any errors or misperception.