

# Making peace with NEWS Media

## A handy dandy guide for working with local news reporters

### Understanding different news media:

Lincoln is fortunate to have professional, solid radio and television stations, and newspapers. But it is important to understand the different nature of print, radio and TV – their challenges and strengths.

- **Newspapers:** Newspaper stories are more in-depth. Once upon a time they had a late afternoon/evening deadline. But in the era of the web and social media, everyone is trying to get their news online first. Newspaper reporters are constantly looking to find out more information, because that is their advantage over electronic media – longer more in-depth stories.
- **Radio** people work on very short deadlines – and these days seldom come to a school to cover a story. Their advantage is they can get news on NOW. Once upon a time they didn't want photos, but with the era of the web and social media, they'll often use photos you have taken. Radio is generally looking for sound bites – often very short sound bites.
- **TV folks** work around three newscasts: noon, late afternoon and evening. Their stories are often very short, 30 or 60 seconds. And in Lincoln these reporters are generally younger and less experienced. Take time to explain more. If they want an interview, ask if it's live or taped. But do remember: by the latest count a great majority of Americans get their news from TV.

### An interview with the MEDIA – general guidelines

#### AHEAD OF TIME

- When a reporter calls, clarify exactly what they want and for what purpose.
- It might be helpful to contact the superintendent or the communications director to see if the reporter is talking with anyone else for the story. In addition, there may be consistent message we want to communicate.
- When you are tempted to decline an interview, remember that the reporter will go elsewhere – perhaps even turn to someone less qualified. This is your **opportunity** to have your on the issue.
  - Reporters are always haunted by deadlines. The shelf life of a story is very short – especially in this era of online news and social media. Try to respect that. However, you do have rights. It is perfectly reasonable to ask for a little time to collect your thoughts. Ask if you can call back in 10-15-30 minutes.
  - Do your homework. Take a moment to develop the main two or three message(s) you want to convey. Keep them simple and consistent.

## THE INTERVIEW

- Keep your answers short and to the point. Your words and comments are scrutinized closely, particularly as a member of the Board of Education.
- Remain calm, relax and try to have some fun – this is an opportunity.
- Always be honest.
- Don't forget: Facial expressions and body language convey as much as words.
- Make sure you always find a way to share your two or three major messages. Use the technique of the "bridge:" "But you should also know this.." "It would be helpful to know this.." "But the most important thing to know is..." "The most important thing to remember here..." "I would add this.." Reporters will often ask: What should I know? What more do you want to say? Don't waste this moment. Use this opportunity to share – or repeat – your major messages.
- Silence is golden: Do not feel obligated to fill in the moments of silence.
- Always, always show concern for the situation, for students, for staff members.
- Listen: Listen closely to each question, pause, gather your thoughts and give a simple answer. Don't ever rush. If you encounter an especially difficult question, take your time. Never hesitate to ask a reporter to repeat or clarify the question.
- Be relentlessly and aggressively positive. "We have an excellent record." "We're going to look into further safeguards in this area." Never become defensive. Never.
- Treat reporters with respect. Stay cooperative and calm.
- It's OK to not always have an answer. "I'll get back to you on that.." Another possible answer: "That's a question I have also been thinking about..."
- Learn how to illustrate your point with a story: It helps the listener to visualize, and is often more memorable than numbers or facts.
- At the close of an interview, always say thanks.

## NEVER, NEVER EVER

- Never, ever lie – or even fudge.
- Don't say "no comment." Listeners do not hear "no comment." They hear: "Ohmigosh they've found out." They hear, "Yep, it's true, but I'm trying to hide something." They hear: "This is an organization that is not transparent." The rule of thumb is to explain why you can't respond: "I can't respond because it will violate the privacy of our children/staff members. However, I can tell you..."
- Never go off the record. In most cases off-the-record only adds confusion. Best rule of thumb: If you don't want to read it or hear it – don't say it.
- Don't use jargon/education-ese/abbreviations or alphabet soup.
- If you don't know an answer, never guess or speculate. It's OK to say that you don't know. Offer to get back to them with the answer.
- Do not ramble. When you're finished with the answer, stop talking.

## TV Interviews: Great sound bites

There's something intimidating about a camera lens – and that makes television interviews particularly difficult for some people.

Here is some simple advice.

### AHEAD OF TIME:

- Do not be afraid to ask questions before the camera is turned on, such as: "Give me a sense of what you're going to ask? I would appreciate a few moments to collect my thoughts."
- If they are going to ask difficult questions, respect their deadlines but ask for a reasonable amount of preparation time.
- If it helps: practice in front of the mirror.
- If you know about a TV interview in advance, wear simple, classic clothes: No to small stripes, dots, squares and fine designs.
- Do not be afraid to ask for a moment to take a glance in the mirror, comb your hair, make sure your tie is straight, your blouse is buttoned.
- Take a deep breath and remain composed.

### THE INTERVIEW

- Remember your basics for all interviews: Formulate your three major messages and make sure you share them somewhere in the interview. Always focus on students.
- Use stories – they are the best way to convey information.
- It's always good – but most especially important for TV interviews – to keep your answers very simple. Details do not translate well in this medium.
- Keep your voice calm and clear – that speaks volumes about your credibility.
- Make sure you have a pleasant expression on your face (though it doesn't have to be a smile) – even BEFORE the interview begins.
- Speak naturally and conversationally, and talk in simple language.
- Don't be afraid to pause and consider your answers.
- Make eye contact – no sunglasses.
- Stay friendly, confident and relaxed.
- Watch your hand movements, because they can distract from your words.
- Always remember: The camera and microphones can be turned on – at any time...!