

## **Survival of the Fittest:** *Arming your spokespeople to survive in the media jungle*

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## **Overview**

- Assessing survival skills
- Laws of the media jungle
- Strengths & weaknesses
- Avoiding danger in giving feedback
- Giving evolution a helping hand

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## **Spokesperson Assessment**

- 96% of PR people surveyed say they've worked with incompetent spokespeople
- Average corporate media spokesperson:
  - has received only 4 hours of training
  - more than 10 years ago
- 91% get coaching & debriefings "sometimes" or "never"

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## **Spokesperson Competency Levels (SCL)**

7	Highly skilled and disciplined media spokesperson with outstanding interpersonal skills and charisma. Provide ongoing feedback to maintain.
6	Minimum requirement for crisis, financial and other high-risk spokesperson roles. Very strong skills. Use as spokesperson with key national/international media. Provide ongoing feedback to maintain.
5	Strong spokesperson, able to handle most non-crisis media situations. Continue development and coaching, providing feedback after every interview, in order to strengthen. Consider advanced spokesperson training before placing in high-risk or broadcast media situations.
4	Competent as primary spokesperson for trade, local and 2 <sup>nd</sup> -tier media. Provide strong guidance for messaging, and require rehearsals in advance of interviews. Provide additional development and coaching, including feedback after every interview. Consider additional formal spokesperson training.
3	Should not be used as primary spokesperson, but may be teamed with stronger spokesperson while developing. Provide strong guidance for messaging, and require rehearsals in advance of interviews. Additional formal training is needed, may also need work on interpersonal skills.
2	Recommend no spokesperson duties. Require basic media training and re-assess.
1	Candidate is not suitable as a media spokesperson.

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## **Assessing Survival Skills**

- Establishes rapport
- Seems at ease
- Seems well prepared
- Knowledgeable on the subject
- Interesting (ability to tell a compelling story)
- Provides good examples
- Seems open and honest
- Meets journalist needs for the interview
- Delivers key messages
- Handles difficult questions well
- Picks up on non-verbal cues
- Adjusts style to interviewer

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## **Laws of the jungle**

### **What journalists need:**

- To please their editors
- To grab their readers/viewers/listeners
- An interesting angle
- Something new or newsworthy
- Understandable, simple concepts
- Examples, case studies, real people
- Great quotes (a.k.a. sound bites)
- Credibility

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### **How to play to your spokesperson's strengths (and minimize their weaknesses)**

- Know what they are
- Select the right opportunities – and turn down the wrong ones
- Individualize spokesperson prep (lose the standard briefing doc)
- Get face to face
- Coach to further enhance strengths
- Change the venue, format and props to fit the objective

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### **Avoiding Danger in Giving Feedback (how to give feedback without bruising egos)**

- Big picture
- Engage them in the process
- Objective, credible, specific
- The bad-news sandwich
- How-to
- Set expectations

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## **Giving Evolution a Helping Hand:**

### **Spokesperson Coaching Tips**

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### **Spokesperson Coaching Tip #1: Establishing Rapport**

- Start by establishing your own rapport with your spokesperson.
- Discuss need to establish rapport with the journalist.
- Suggest setting aside 3-5 minutes in the interview just for getting to know each other.
- Provide one or two bits of info on journalist.
- Encourage spokesperson to open up, be human.
- Serve as the facilitator.
- Change the venue and/or format to loosen things up.

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### **Spokesperson Coaching Tip #2: For Example...**

- Examples build bridges, paint pictures, give substance to fuzzy corporate concepts
- Can be:
  - Real people (employee stories, customer references)
  - Hypothetical
  - Personal
  - Literal or figurative
- Schedule coaching session that focuses on “for example...”

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### **Spokesperson Coaching Tip #3: Taking Charge of the Interview**

- “Interview” doesn’t mean passively answering questions.
- The spokesperson must take responsibility for the success – for both self and journalist.
- Coach to:
  - Get the ball rolling.
  - Level-check journalist’s knowledge.
  - Keep on track.
  - Meet the journalist’s needs.

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### **Spokesperson Coaching Tip #4: Briefing docs**

- The briefer, the better (3-5 minute max, 1-pager is usually best)
- Know your spokesperson – only 1 out of 10 are best prepped with briefing docs
- Include interview objectives
- Include background on the journalist (including style and trouble-spots)
- Limit “key messages” to 3

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### **Spokesperson Coaching Tip #5: Let's be honest**

- “Seems open & honest” = relationship
- Videotape an interview to analyze body language
- Eliminate verbal crutches
- Lose the Q&A doc
- Get comfortable with “I don't know”
- Loosen up, reflect the journalist's style

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### **Further development resources**

- More free tips on <http://spokesblog.wordpress.com>
- Coach-the-coach sessions, spokesperson assessment and other spokesperson training and development available from SpokesComm (<http://www.spokescomm.com>)
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