

Media Interview Tips For Post and Department Leadership

It is wise to review these points before an interview.

If a reporter calls, determine why he/she is calling and the subject to be discussed.
Ask if the reporter is on deadline; assure the reporter you will call back before the deadline.

Quickly Prepare:

- If the subject involves a national topic, review any emails recently received from VFW National or Washington, D.C., offices, as well as the VFW website for a national stance or related information.
- Jot down likely questions, appropriate answers.
- Know what you want to communicate. Plan to make your points accordingly.
- You should research, prepare information and provide background.
- Call the reporter back, as promised.

The Interview:

- Never lie to or mislead a reporter.
- Offer your conclusion first, briefly and directly. Back it with facts.
- Avoid company jargon, acronyms.
- Be realistic, positive.
- Short answers are better than long; use full sentences.
- Be responsive and factual. Don't talk too much.
- Don't accept a report's facts and figures as true; don't respond to a hypothetical situation; respond to negative leading questions with positive statements.
- Keep cool. Don't allow yourself to be provoked.
- There is no formal beginning or end to an interview. Everything within earshot to a reporter is fair game.
- Remember when talking to a reporter there's no such thing as "off the record."
- If there are any "skeletons" in the company's closet, be prepared for them to come up in the interview.
- Similarly, be prepared to state all your positive points completely in response to the first questions asked.
- If you don't know the answers, say so, and offer to find out.
- Don't overlap the interviewer's question; begin your answer when the reporter is finished.
- The interview will be brief. A reporter has only a few minutes to get your full story.
- Don't ask to approve the story before it is published or broadcast.

Suggestions for a television interview:

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- A broadcast interviewer may want a “voice level.” This sets his recorder sound.
- Dark clothes, a blue shirt looks best on television.
- Be sure the background is an appropriate setting for the interview.
- Take 45 seconds to straighten your hair, tie, shirt. If possible, have another person review your appearance.
- If you wear dark lenses, take them off for the interview.
- Stand up straight; look directly at the reporter, not at the camera or the microphone.
- Smile only at appropriate times.
- Resist the urge to shout into the microphone.

Cautions:

- If a reporter asks for an interview to discuss one subject and begins asking questions about another subject, wait until the question is asked and say, “I thought this interview was to be about _____.” You may tell him you are not in a position to discuss the other subject because you want to take time to make sure the information you have is accurate and current.
- Following an interview, the cameraman will want to shoot additional videotape. The reporter will then ask you to chat about the weather, Sunday’s football game, etc. Be sure your movements and comments are in accordance with your posture during the interview. And again, always remember nothing is “off the record.”

If you have questions regarding VFW’s stance on a particular matter, or need help preparing for the interview, please contact:

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