

Radio Public Affairs Seminar

Presented by Rich Culbertson

What Does A Public Affairs **Producer** Do?

- **Decides on the subject mater.**

What's interesting about the subject? Will it pull people in? Is the guest interesting, easy to understand?

- **Acquires**

The producer gathers guests, information and sound bites.

- **Puts it all Together.**

The producer works with editor helping to decide on content vs. time. *(The more material you have to work with, the more chances you have to hit the point of the show. But remember short and to the point keeps the listener listening.)* The quality of the overall program is the producer's responsibility.

- **Listens & Evaluates.**

The producer should try to listen like the audience will. Does it flow? Is the edit clean? Is the music appropriate? Do the sound bites work? Are there ways the show could be better?

What Does The **Host** Do?

- **Guides the program.**

Is the subject being presented in an efficient, thoughtful and interesting way? Is the subject accessible to the listener?

- **Uses probing questions to get the best out of a guest.**

Is the guest clear? Are they talking to the subject of the program? Raise questions that they average listener would if they were there.

- **Keeps the program subject on track.**

Is the subject of the show easy to understand and follow? Are the important questions being answered? Does the focus of the guest or show remain on the subject?

- **Is a voice for the listener.**

Are the obvious questions asked? Are the important details covered? Is the contact information mentioned?

What Does The **Editor** Do?

- **Sets up all the technical aspects of the program.**

How does it sound? Is the quality maintained? Do the theme, sound bites, and music etc. work?

- **Guides the recording.**

Is the show interesting? Is the host covering the points intended? Is the correct information going out? Keeps host informed of time.

- **Edits!**

Is everything saved & safe?!!! Does it sound good? Is the content interesting? Are the main points covered? Is the information accurate? Does it time out correctly? Are clear notes as to the technical quality and show quality maintained?

Preparing for a show

- Take time to conference with everyone involved in the show.
- Think about your resources and how they may add to the subject. (Resources such as: archive material, Sound f/x, sound bites, music etc.)
- Make sure the host & engineer are in sync with the direction of the show.
- Review your sources and background information and research.
- Plot out an outline and include structure and constraints.
- Write up some questions & anticipate where the interview might go.
- Check & Test all the recording equipment.
- Dress in comfortable clothes.
- Don't eat chocolate or stuff with sugar. It thickens your saliva.
- Don't drink milk or soda drinks. They cause film in your mouth, which adds to mouth noise.
- Double check your material and read it aloud a few times.

Relax and focus.

Breakdown of an interview.

What to say: Finding the Angle

Ask “So what?” To answer to “So what?” You need to know who the listeners are.
What interests them?
What information is relevant to their daily lives?
What do they worry about?
What do they feel strongly about?

Tool:

While researching the story, ask:

- What is happening or what has been happening?
- Why is the story important?
- Why will listeners care?
- What will the listeners want to know?

Think about Listeners:

- Who are they?
- What will make them identify with the story and find it relevant & interesting?
- What do they already know about the subject?
- What other questions would they want answered?
- Are all perspectives of the subject covered?
- Why did the event happen?
- What do people think about the event?
- Who was involved?
- What are the repercussions of the event?

Tool:

- Break the rules of grammar if necessary. Clarity is more important.
- Say aloud what you've written.
- Imagine someone listening to you as you write.
- Keep it simple by using just one idea per sentence.

Interview:

Be sure to watch for:

Tension & Stress.
Body positioning & gesturing.
Voice & speech.

A good interviewer is:

A great listener.
Knows when & how to ask follow up questions.
Has good communications skills.
Has the ability to be flexible in the interview.
Understands the order in which the questions should be asked.
Knows how and when to ask why?

A Tool is to ask:

What are their credentials?
Why are they the right person to interview?
What is their background?
What do they bring to the interview?
Will they be interesting?
Do they offer a unique perspective?

Magic question:

"Why?"

Opening up questions might start with:

"Tell me more"

"Take me back to the first time you..."

"What was going through your mind when"

Pinning down questions might start

"What do you mean when you say...?"

"Let's be more specific. Are you saying...?"

"To recap...do you mean that?"

Closing questions Wrap up the interview.

"What's your message to..." (This works especially well for a profile or "soft" interview.)

Introduction:

Make sure you lead your piece with a clear description of the program, the guest and why the listener should care enough to listen. Welcome your audience in. Bring them in with a clear opening that will make the listener an advocate for the program being done even if they disagree with the content.

Don't try to be cute. (*"The president has resigned."... from the school board of Texas that is.*) It's not good to try to fool the audience into listening.

A Tool that may help take you to the heart of the subject is to ask yourself, if the program died 2 to 5 minutes into it would the listener know any more than they did before and would they want to hear more?

Lets look at why the networks do what they do. With time equaling money in the network world there's a reason they don't spend more than a few minutes on a story. They must keep you interested even if you hate a story, they are soon going to be on the next story or sports or whatever. We in no way want to emulate their style, however it's a good measure of how quickly the chance to grab the listener's attention goes by. You need to make the subject, known, interesting and informative with in the first 2 to 5 minutes. (*For a 30-minute program*)

Introduce your guest often. With a thirty minute piece at the very least you should introduce your guest no less than three times. Explain why the guest is there and how they are connected to the subject. Doing this early helps to begin to establish some credibility. It also sometimes helps the guest to hear why they are there as well. Try to make your guest feel at ease. Give a personal anecdote that relates to the shows subject if you think it will help inspire the guest. You don't want to be overly personal though because the show's not about you. Let the listener know you & the guest are familiar with the subject. Talk about how this program touches the listeners' sensibilities. This establishes some credibility. Give a brief background of your guest or the sources for your material. Hit the high points that have the greatest clout. This too helps establishes credibility. You can and should reveal more details of the subject or guests credentials as the program continues to enforce or question the credibility of the subject or guest.

A Tool you can use is to think employment cover letter & resume. What if you were writing a resume to get a job dealing with the subject, or if you were writing one for your guest? A Cover letter hits the highlights while the resume hit the details.

Body Of The Show

Generate flow or at least promote excitement for the subject. ***If you can't do this there's no reason for the interview!*** Be Direct & dynamic, but not sensational.

Make it in-depth and not just the surface information that many listeners may already know.

A Tool often used is to act as if you were explaining the subject to your mom or in some cases to a child.

Ask probing questions. It's YOUR show & YOUR turf. Don't be afraid to ask the tough question. Bring it local. Try to paint a picture. Make it universal so that the audience can relate. Avoid making listeners feel like just part of the crowd. Only react if truly surprised but don't fake interest, it shows! Don't compliment your guest for their answers. Watch confirming statements. While it's fine occasionally if done too much it sounds like you are an advocate for the subject or the guest. After all that's why they are the guests. *(If you wish to be the advocate for an issue then you need to be the guest not the host/producer etc.)*

A Tool here is head bobbing. If you notice a lot of head bobbing while doing your interview you might be asking too many confirming questions.

Watch for tangents. *(“ When I went to Spain for the protest ... I had to get there by train because the flights were all taken... I found that the protest was bigger then reported.”)* Be familiar with the subject. *(“ Spelunking, that's a funny name were does it come from?”)* Watch for repeats! Many guests will answer in a way that says basically the same stuff each time. *(“It was great to win the race. I was entered in the race at the last minute so winning the race was a surprise. I had gotten new shoes so they may have helped me win the race. I found the crowd to be very loud and I wasn't sure if it had any effect on winning the race.”)* Tie the show together. Connect the discussion with the guest and the qualifications they may have with any sound bites you might use. You should also tie together the reason for the show and the history of the subject or the guest. Make sure the technical aspects of the interview are maintained. The editor should feel free to stop the interview for any technical improvement or if they hear something that doesn't make any sense or is incorrect information *{Wrong phone number etc.}*

A Tool you can use is a prerecord. (You should do this anyway to get mic levels etc.) You can start the interview for a minute or two and stop it there and restart (you can claim technical issues if you need to.)

Summary:

Ease out of the interview with summary questions and leave some details for the listener to discover if they have interest. Remember it's best to leave them wanting more. Be sure to recap the best parts of the show to promote the show it's self. Recap subject and guests credentials, Repeat dates, times, locations etc. Generally it sounds best if the host is the last thing the audience hears. It's better if you say your good-byes and cut the guest off rather than have them reply.

Editing:

If you are not the one editing, you should to sit with editor for at least a few raw plays of the recorded material. The most important question for you to ask is does the content carry the subject in an efficient way? Here's an example of an answer that can be made more to the point. *Rich Culbertson said, "We knew there was a problem and I don't know what they did about it. CEO Dan Wargo sent out a press release saying, "What we did about the problem, is we had an investigation. "We saw no evidence nor have been contacted by the EPA to tell us we had a problem. Changed to.... Rich Culbertson "We knew there was a problem and I don't know what they did about. "We had an investigation and saw no evidence nor have we been contacted by the EPA." CEO Dan Wargo stated in a press release. (Sample of choppy edits.)* You can never edit enough for quality. (Assuming you recorded plenty) And very rarely can you edit too much for content. This is the time to paste in FX, sound bites, music etc. If you can it's good to break things up about every 10 min with a sound bite, ambient sound, music etc. Just a short transition goes along way in helping give the listener a second to digest what they've heard. Sound is a great tool to pull in your audience and paint a picture in their minds.

A Tool to use is a simple one. Do you feel that you edited too much? If you do then it was most likely correct.