It’s Not You, It’s Me…
or
How I Learned to Stop Worrying and
Love the Press

Sunshine Menezes, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Metcalf Institute

Expanding Accurate Environmental News Coverage

Training for journalists, scientists, and other science
communicators to build a deeper public understanding
of science and the environment.
JOURNALISM 101

Being a reporter is as much a diagnosis as a job description.

-Anna Quindlen

STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA - 2013

Digital Grows Again as a Source for News
Percentage of Respondents Who Got News “Yesterday” From Each Platform

http://stateofthemedia.org/2013
STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA - 2013

For Many, Mobile Means More News
News users who said that since getting their tablet they...

- Spend more time with news 31%
- Turn to new sources for news 31
- Are adding to the news they consume 43%

Based on weekly tablet news (N=1111) users. Icons from the Noun Project.
New Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism in collaboration
with The Economist Group

http://stateofthemedia.org/2013
“For news organizations, distinguishing between high-quality information of public value and agenda-driven news has become an increasingly complicated task, made no easier in an era of economic churn.”

http://stateofthemedia.org/2013/overview-5
JOURNALISM 101

*Put it to them briefly, so they will read it; clearly, so they will appreciate it; picturesquely, so they will remember it; and, above all, accurately, so they will be guided by its light.*

-Joseph Pulitzer

JOE Q. JOURNALIST

- BS in Journalism, Communications, English
- General assignment
- Cover more than 1 story/day
A DAY IN THE LIFE *

8 am: Editorial Meeting, Get assignment
9 am: Story research, interview set-up
11 am: Interviews (video/sound)
1 pm: Stop to cover nearby apartment fire
2 pm: Review interviews (video),
     write story (edit script for TV or radio)
3 pm: Script review by editor/producer
4 pm: Rewrite and submit story (or begin editing
     session if on TV or radio)
5 pm: Live shot to introduce piece
6 pm: Rewrite for 11 pm news

*With thanks to Helen Chickering, NBC

WHAT MAKES A GOOD NEWS STORY?
WHAT MAKES A GOOD NEWS STORY?

“It's all storytelling, you know. That's what journalism is all about.”
-Tom Brokaw

WHERE DO JOURNALISTS GET THEIR INFORMATION?

✓ Interviews
✓ Observation
✓ Background Research
  • Press Releases
  • Other News Outlets
  • Google
  • Documents
WHY IS A REPORTER CALLING YOU?

• Response to an event
• Response to a complainer about a site, permit, process
• Looking for an independent response
• Response to public’s response to your work

KEEP IN MIND

They are looking for:
- Quote or sound bite
- Concise comment
- Comment making it clear which side you’re on

The Sound Bite Workbook

How to Generate Snappy Tag Lines, Scintillating Interview Quotes, Captivating Book or Article Titles, and Irresistible Marketing or Publicity Headlines

Marcia Yudkin
BECOMING A TRUSTED SOURCE

- Clear language, free of jargon
- Prioritized, easy to understand messages (repeated to be sure they’re understood)
- Responsiveness, Professionalism

WHEN A REPORTER CALLS...

Remember!
- The reporter isn’t an expert
- You are on the record
- This is not an informal conversation
- Write it down
- You can ask questions
**TIPS FROM A (REALLY GOOD) ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALIST**

- A disaster is no time to make friends
- Know your B’s (Bias vs. Balance)
- Be available
- Embrace the reporter’s deadline
- Be patient
- Complain
- Persevere

**COMMUNICATING RISK**

- Develop clear messages
- Use analogies, but don’t trivialize
- Use ranges (safe to risky)
- Put measurements/data in perspective (compare with regulatory std)
- Explain differences in magnitude

**Why should people care?**

Modified from “Risk Communication” by Regina Lundgren & Andrea McMakin
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WHAT MAKES A GOOD NEWS STORY?

JOURNALISM 101

• Driven by events (news values)
• Focus on outliers (catastrophe)
  • Total control over content
• Condensed, personalized representation
  • Balance of views

It is a newspaper’s duty to print the news and raise hell.

-Chicago Times
COMMUNICATING UNCERTAINTY

- Know thy audience
- Simplify language, not content
- Discuss sources of uncertainty
- Frame uncertainty within context (esp. wrt risk assessment)
- Stress areas of consensus

From “Risk Communication” by Regina Lundgren & Andrea McMakin