

# ROGUE ACTION CENTER

## Tools for Organizing: Preparing People to Talk to the Media

### IF YOU JUST HAVE A FEW MINUTES

**Explain what is going to happen.** If it's a news conference, briefly go through what that is, how it is conducted, where and when they will speak, and what to wear. If it's a phone interview, tell them how it will work, who will contact whom, and how long it may last.

**Explain how their interview fits into our overall campaign and our effort to connect to the public interest.** How is talking to the public via the media different than talking to their friends or co-workers? How will connecting to the public interest help us win? Why are they a good messenger to get the public interest connection across? How are our opponents trying to paint us into a special interest corner? How will the media frame the issues if left to their own devices? What do we have to avoid so we don't play into our opponents' hands?

**Show them or tell them what our main message theme is and ask what it means to them.** Ask a lot of follow-up questions: "How do you feel about that?" or "What's an example of that?" Listen and then repeat back to them good phrases or specific examples they gave you that they should use with the media. If there are details or arguments they should *omit* to avoid excessive length, unnecessary controversy, or other distractions, explain why.

**Suggest ways of framing and wording.** Give them phrases they might use to start sentences: "The whole community wins if we win because..." or "The governor has to choose between corporate special interests or the public interest."

**Make sure they know they can and should stick to our public interest message.** Give them phrases from bridging from a question that is off-topic to get back to our message, like, "Here's what really matters to people like me and the people we serve..." Ask them some likely questions so they can practice.

**Help them relax** by reminding them that they will be talking about things they know well.

## **IF YOU HAVE SOME LEAD TIME, YOU MAY ALSO WANT TO:**

**Show them print or video clips** so they can see how effective it is when other people like them do the talking to the media and so they can see how other worker or community spokespeople framed their message in the public interest.

**Show or tell them what our opposition is saying and ask them to respond.** This may generate good phrases and examples as well as heartfelt emotions.

**Ask them what they think are the principal concerns on this issue from the point of view of their neighbors or other members of the public.** Then remind them that it is those concerns we are trying to appeal to.

**Go over in more detail the likely questions from reporters** and how to answer them from a public interest point of view.

**Remind them that they are speaking for the whole group, not just themselves.** Encourage them to talk about what "we" want or "our community wants," not just "I."

**Urge them to be positive** and focus on solutions, not just individual complaints.

**Make sure they get their facts right.** Ask them, "Is that an exact figure or an estimate?" "If a reporter asked you to prove that, would you be able to?"

## **A WRITTEN STATEMENT OR NO WRITTEN STATEMENT?**

Different people have different approaches to whether worker or community spokespeople should work from a written statement at a news conference. Some say it helps keep them on message. But others say that it takes the life, soul, and credibility out of the presentation, and that it generates TV footage that may not be used because it is too stilted and canned-looking.

Many people prefer having a written statement, supposedly so they will sound more professional and won't make a mistake, but if you believe that reading a statement will undermine their effectiveness, you should strongly urge them not to do so. One method that works for some people is to...

1. Write up a statement that incorporates good phrases and examples the person gave you, put in a public interest frame.
2. Review it with them and discuss any changes they propose.
3. Have them practice their statement but with an agreement that they won't read from it and are just going to say what it says in their own words.

**NOTE: Don't be afraid to say so if you realize a particular person can't be an effective spokesperson.** It's better to find someone else than to hurt the campaign.