PREPARING FOR A RADIO INTERVIEW

- It’s okay to have talking points. In fact, it’s probably a good idea to sit down and make a few notes about things you want to talk about during the interview. However, it’s important that you don’t try to write something out and read it word for word. Be familiar enough with your subject matter that you can write down a few key words and talk intelligently about your topic from there.

- It’s also fine to give the reporter an idea of some of the things you want to talk about, but realize they will have their own questions. Don’t expect them to accept a list of questions from you and read down the list during an interview. They will appreciate some background information, but each reporter will have his/her own ideas about the direction of the interview.

- Be conversational. Even if you’re nervous, remember you are telling your story. Tell that story to the reporter, and let him/her worry about the rest. Try not to think about how many people might be listening and focus on that one-on-one conversation.

- Focus on the question that is asked, and answer it. Remember that on the radio, especially, reporters may only have time to use a portion of an interview or even a portion of one response. Try to be concise and not ramble as you answer questions.

- Don’t be afraid to admit that you don’t know the answer to a question. It is much better to say that you’ll have to get more information and report back than to guess and get it wrong.

- If you do set up a phone interview, or especially an interview in person, BE ON TIME. Reporters are often trying to make a deadline or they may have constraints based on when they can reserve a recording studio. It is imperative that you arrive early if possible, and respect that professional’s time.

- Look professional. If you are meeting a reporter in person, wear FFA official dress, or at least dress in a way that will reflect positively on you and on your organization. Obviously if you are interviewed on show day at the county fair or in the middle of running the petting zoo during National FFA Week, your attire will reflect that situation. Remember a reporter could stop by at any time, so be thinking about that as you prepare for that event or activity.

- Leave your contact information with each reporter you meet. Print some simple business cards, or ask for one of theirs and e-mail them your contact information as a follow-up to the interview. That way they will know who to contact if they have any questions or need to clarify anything from the interview.
INTERACTING WITH MEDIA – RADIO

• Identify which radio stations cover your area. Familiarize yourself with their formats (music/news/talk) and find out which ones might have a reporter or show host interested in either agriculture or youth organizations.

• Identify the appropriate reporter or contact person for each station.
  • Most radio stations now have websites with contact information and sometimes even specifics about reporters and show hosts. These are a great resource as you work to develop a contact list.
  • Use e-mail or phone calls to contact potential people and introduce yourself. Explain who you are and what organization you represent. Give an example of a story or topic you can talk about that might interest them.

• Once you have identified the appropriate contact person at each station, find out how they prefer to receive information. Most will probably prefer e-mail, but make sure you follow the format they prefer to distribute information.

• **Ask about deadlines.** Some reporters have a daily deadline; others might be weekly or even monthly. Know when during the day, week or month they need to have your information in order to make use of it.

• Throughout the year, put together **news releases** highlighting your group’s activities. Use spell check and ask for help with formatting if you need it.
  • Community service, education and outreach are great things to point out to your local media. Think about things that affect your community or help others.
  • Things like career development events and chapter activities are fine, too, but may not always make the cut.
  • If in doubt, send the information. Understand that reporters will not follow up on every news release. It may depend on their news load that day. But it never hurts to try.

• **Chapter reporters:** Be aware of most everything going on within your chapter.

• **Section reporters:** Know all of your section activities at any given time. Try to maintain communication with chapter reporters in your section so that you’ll be aware of any notable activities going on at the chapter level.

• **All reporters:** Be aware of state and national events like upcoming conventions and National FFA Week. These are times you will likely get a call from a local media representative.

• **Know about agriculture.** Even though the FFA has expanded way beyond production agriculture; that is still the root of the organization. If you didn’t grow up on a farm, find a local farmer to shadow one day. If you don’t know the answer to a question about modern farming practices, don’t guess. Find someone who can answer it. Be sure you are not spreading misconceptions or myths about modern agriculture. The reporter would rather hear you say, “I can’t answer that,” than print or broadcast wrong information.

Written by: Carrie Muehling
Profession: **Agribusiness Director for WJBC Radio – Bloomington, IL, August 2010.**