**Get Your Words' Worth**

By Brian Jud

Two concepts determine your relative success in answering questions during a television or radio performance: preparation and flexibility. In most cases you will not know the questions you will be asked during the interview. But if you understand your topic and know beforehand what you want to get across to the audience, you will be able to perform more successfully.

What makes a good guest for the show does not always make a good show for the guest. If all you do is answer the interviewer's questions informatively (whether or not they lead to meeting your goals), the host will think you are a great interviewee and perhaps ask you to return. But there is no future in being a professional guest if it doesn’t serve your purpose.

Your objective is to sell books, and this may seem at odds with the goals of the host and audience. But you can meet everyone's needs if you provide information in an entertaining way, stimulating viewers and listeners to purchase your book. As a general rule, you will sell more books if you entertain people, piquing their curiosity, showing them how they can reach their goals by reading your book.

You must charm the audience while communicating important information. And you may have to do it in three minutes, perhaps while the host is asking you questions that have nothing to do with your book. Reaching your goals under these conditions requires you to blend your understanding of the audience, knowledge of your topic, diplomacy and training to create a polished, effective performance. You can do this if you know the answers to these questions:

* Given a limited time on the air, what are the major points you want to impress upon the audience? Since you will participate in shows of varying lengths, decide in advance how many points you can communicate reasonably in different time periods.
* What information is important to each audience? Your presentation will change, depending upon the composition of the audience.
* How can you make the transition from an irrelevant question (How is the weather where you are?) to your message without offending the host?

**Succeed through planned spontaneity**

Reaching your objective does not mean you ignore the interviewer's questions. If you do not answer, it will appear as if you are evading the question. Instead, allow the host time to fulfill his or her agenda (being a good interviewer) to the extent that your purpose is not compromised. If you sense the conversation going off in a different direction and you have not addressed your critical points, you must begin to respond differently.

Impart a brief, yet smooth, transition from an irrelevant question (from your perspective) to one of your agenda items, making it relevant to the audience. Then once you make the transition, give an example to demonstrate your point. Concise anecdotes, particularly those germane to the audience, can make your presentation more personable and convincing. People like to hear examples to which they can relate.

But this must be done cautiously. In a three-minute interview on a national show you do not have time to relate a complete story. Practice making your transition statement and giving an example in about thirty seconds. Here are three illustrations:

Interviewer's question.

"That's an excellent point, and with a different twist it can help your audience by … (Your point #1). For example...

Interviewer's question.

"I agree. But if you look at it from a different perspective, then … (Your point #2). Here is what I mean...

Interviewer's question.

"Most people think that is true. However, if we put it in the context of … (Your point #3). For instance...

You have acknowledged the question, complemented the interviewer and led the conversation back to where you want to be. During a longer show you will have more flexibility in your answers. You will be able to expand upon the interviewer's questions more leisurely while still covering your agenda items.

In any case, know how much time you have on the air, what points you must communicate in that time and how you can get those across graciously. You will sell more books and be asked to return on more shows.

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