



Race Track Industry Program

## 34th ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON RACING & GAMING

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2007

### Media Training Seminar — Part I

**Moderator/Speaker:**

**Richard Valeriani**, Media Consultant, Former NBC News White House Correspondent

**MR. RICHARD VALERIANI:** Welcome to “Media Training 101,” which as Wendy said is what I flippantly describe as teaching people how to defend themselves against people like me. The purpose is to demystify the media, demystify the interview process, demystify live television, and try to persuade you that live television is no big deal. Most people prefer to do print; you’re really better off doing live television. Another purpose is to; if possible, make you feel comfortable in doing live television and interviews, print interviews as well. To feel confident that you can do it and, again, to try and convince you that live television is no big deal and you may hear that more than once this morning.

There are two keys to a successful interview, the first is preparation, and there is no substitute for preparation. If an interview is worth doing, it is worth preparing for. Ideally you prepare this way, whether you do or you have your people for you, you find out why you’re being interviewed, what is your role here, what’s expected of you, what is the angle on the story, if it is television, the nature of the program and the style of the interviewer. Then you anticipate likely questions, then you anticipate your likely answers, or as we’ll call them later, your responses. But more important, you think about how you are going to use the question-answer dynamic to say what it is that you want to say, because there has to be something in it for you to do an interview, to get across a point of view, deliver a message, describe it any way you want, that’s why you do the interview. And when you are on the air live, what scares some people to death, there is no way to prevent you from saying exactly what you want to say, you are on the air live, direct to consumer as the drug companies say. So the only inhibitions, the only constraints are those that you put on yourselves. Well, there are seven words

that you're not supposed to use, but apart from that, you can say exactly what you want to say.

The second key is knowing in advance what you're going to say and if appropriate, what you're not going to say. There is no ad-libbing of substance. Now, I use the phrase ad-libbing advisedly because I want to emphasize that this is a spoken medium, you don't sit and when I ask a question you don't write an answer in your head and edit it like you do at a computer and then push the print button and something comes out, you just talk it, you answer it and that's what you do here. Don't, in this case I advise you to eschew obfuscation, and eschew lucubration, which means don't use words like that. There is a temptation when we're on television to feel we have to somehow upgrade our language. We buy things and then we go on television and we purchase things. We help people, we go on television and we assist people. It's like you've seen the precinct commander announcing that the crime has been solved, the three perpetrators were observed entering the premises and were apprehended, so throw all that out and just talk it, don't worry about how it comes out, you stumble over a word, not a problem, you go down a blind switch, just start over again, not a problem. It is a spoken medium.

We're going to do this in the context of live TV for a number of reasons; one is that training for television translates to print; training for print does not translate to television. Also, I want you to feel the pressure when you're in front of that camera of being on the air live with 10 million people watching. So when you sit in that chair, this is a little cozier than a TV studio but just make believe you're in a studio, on the air, say the Today Show tomorrow morning with all those people watching. So make believe it's real. If you have any trouble with that concept of making believe that something is real, I offer you the example of George Burns, who started making movies when he was 80 years old. He said, "Oh, this acting business is easy, once you learn to fake sincerity you got it made."

Now, another reason is that you're not going to have a lot of time. When you do live TV generally you get three and a half, four minutes. So it's a very good discipline, again, for knowing in advance what you're going to say and saying it. Now, in this regard, you have to prioritize, you always want to find out in advance of an interview how much time you're going to have, three or four minutes for TV, maybe 10 minutes on a longer show, morning show, how much time you're going to have with a print reporter, because you're going to have to prioritize. You can't put the proverbial 10 pounds of you know what in a five-pound bag. So you have to leave some out, you have to decide what is the most important thing that you want to get across in this interview. We used to joke when David Brinkley was doing the news with Chet Huntley on the Huntley-Brinkley Report, how Brinkley might do a story about Moses coming down from the mountain with the 10 commandments and he would do something like, "Moses came down from the mountain today with 10 commandments, here are reports on two of them."

Now, there are two parts to this, one is style, how you look, the other is substance, what you say. For television especially, it's not only how you look, it's

what they see. It's not only what you say, it's what they hear, because television is a medium of images, perceptions, pictures, and we have a saying in television that ultimately you cannot fight the picture, the picture will prevail. Point is that you should be nervous. I compare nervousness to cholesterol, there is good and there's bad. The good is there you are, you're on live television, you don't know what I'm going to ask, you want to do well, you feel the pressure, it's challenging, it's different, it's demanding, for some people it's downright intimidating. So when we as human beings are put in that kind of situation, the mind says to the body, hey Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore, you could be in danger here, you better watch out, you better protect yourself, defend yourself. The body responds by pumping extra adrenaline and that's the good, which we call nervous energy, butterflies sometimes. Helen Hayes used to say she always had butterflies in the pit of her stomach before she walked out on a stage, which she did until she was almost 90. Now, her line was, the trick is to get the butterflies to fly in formation. That is, take that nervous energy and channel it into what you're doing. Now, if there is anything else that makes you nervous, only you can deal with it, so you have to identify it in order to be able to cope with it. Now, the standard things that make people nervous are the camera itself. The camera is merely taking a picture of you and me talking, that's all it's doing. In this format you look only at me, you never look at the camera. Looking at the camera in this format is known as DTD, that's Donald Trump Disease. Now, if you were on with 10 million people watching, would that make you nervous?

**A VOICE:** Yes.

**MR. VALERIANI:** Okay. Well, think of it this way, the audience is always one. In television there is no assembled multitude, there is no group dynamic. People watch television essentially one at a time and they watch in fairly comfortable surroundings. And since you're a director of communications, I'm assuming that you wouldn't book yourself on the Jerry Springer Show and so you will have a respectful audience and a respectable audience and because you are there, you are somebody. I mean, you have a nice title in a glamorous industry and so you come in with a certain amount of expertise, a certain amount of authoritativeness. So the size of the audience doesn't matter.

A quick digression, a few years ago Paul Newman, the actor, was named to represent the United States at the United Nations on nuclear matters, commission on nuclear nonproliferation, because he was very much involved and Jimmy Carter wanted to give the issue very high visibility. And I interviewed Newman live on a Friday morning on the Today Show, most uptight guy you ever saw. When the interview was over he went leaping out of the chair to take his jacket off and there was a sweat stain from his armpit to his belt. I said, wait a minute, Paul, you can't leave yet.

He said, why not?

I said because we're going to go through the co-op.

He said, what's the co-op?

I said, every hour the Today Show gives five minutes back to the local stations to do whatever they want, you see news, weather and sports. But in the boondocks, like in Tucson, no, just kidding, but in some boondocks stations, Lubbock, Texas, they don't put anything on, so we have to keep programming going from New York, otherwise they would have a blank screen for five minutes. Normally we would sit around and BS, but when we have a guest, it takes the pressure off and so we keep the interview going for another five minutes. Boom, we come back on the air, there's Paul Newman, marvelous. Just what you would have expected, so good, the Today Show took those five minutes of tape seen live in only a couple of boondocks stations, put it on the air taped the following week as a continuation of our interview with Paul Newman. What happened in those two minutes between the changeover from the national audience to the boondocks audience? Nothing physically, all here, and that's what this is all about when I say it's no big deal, it's all a matter of your perception of the situation and that's why you can control it.

Are you worried that you are going to make a mistake? Yes? Alright, why would you make a mistake? Why?

**A VOICE:** You're not prepared.....**Other terms, concepts and keywords contained in the balance of this transcript are:** physical side of the interview, persuade somebody, eye contact, notes, owner of the interview, accentuating the positive.. .....If you desire a full transcript contact [bprewitt@ag.arizona.edu](mailto:bprewitt@ag.arizona.edu)

