

IT'S ALL IN YOUR ATTITUDE

By Karen Friedman

Let's face it. You can't live with them and sometimes you'd rather live without them. However, the media are a necessary evil. You need them to tell you what's happening in your world. They are your mouthpiece to the public. What you say, how you say it, the way you look, and the tone of your voice will instantly form the public's perception of you and your agency. But there is something even more important than that laundry list of first impressions. It's called attitude and it's sabotaged many an interview opportunity.

As a former television reporter for three different network affiliates, I have stood at my share of plant gates moments after workers have received pink slips. They are anxious to discuss the hardships this will cause their family the fear of losing the only job they've had and the uncertainty of the future. My camera rolls and so do their tears. My audience will feel their anguish. My story will hit home.

Yet, more often than not, plant spokespeople, who could put the story in perspective and portray their company as caring and compassionate, are unavailable. They don't return phone calls. They have security shoo us away from the gate. When the story is reported in the paper or on the evening news, they are the first to claim how unfair we are not to tell their side of the story.

Inaccessibility builds barriers. Barriers create attitudes. Attitudes leave lasting impressions. Here are some media guidelines:

Don't be afraid to talk to the media. If you are not in a position to discuss the current situation, explain why you can't. You will appear cooperative and not evasive.

Don't let your emotions get in the way. Your words won't be heard if your eye contact, gestures, body language, expression and tone of voice are distracting.

Worry about what you can control. You can't control the record button on the photographer's camera. You can control how you act and what you say when that camera is rolling.

Tell the truth. If you don't know the answer, say so. Your lie will be repeated over and over again every time the story is printed or aired.

Help them help you tell your story. Reporters are looking for stories. They want accurate information to include in those stories. Avoidance leads to speculation and inaccurate reporting.

Do not fight with the media. Reporters write, edit and produce their stories. They have the last word, not you.

Keep it simple. Most reporters have no ill intent. They want basic information that means something to their readers, listeners and viewers.

Your ability to communicate with the media is directly related to your success. If you are available, your side of the story will most likely be heard. If you don't cooperate, then go ahead and blame the media, however the reality is, you have no one to blame but yourself.

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