

*Sound Bites: Planning for Encounters with the Press &  
Confronting the Realities of Social Media*

**Take Aways**

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- 1) Manny Rivera, Bio
  - 2) Interview Tips
  - 3) On-Camera Presence
  - 4) Interview Presentation Message Worksheet
  - 5) Media Relations: Telling Your Story and Responding Effectively (PPT)\*
- (\*Mr. Rivera's Rally powerpoint is proprietary and, as such, we could not distribute it in hard copy. We have, however, included here a powerpoint provided by Lin Public Relations, Inc., that has similar content and which can be widely shared with our membership).



**Manny Rivera**  
**Director, RALLY**

Manny Rivera is a Director at RALLY, specializing in strategic communications, including issue management and media relations. He brings to RALLY a strong background in crisis and litigation communications, and has been an instrumental member of the firm's impact litigation practice. In his role as Director, Manny leads account teams and offers strategic communications guidance across a number of sectors with the ultimate goal of identifying new avenues to amplify the client's messages.

Most recently at RALLY, Manny has worked with the national education nonprofit **Students Matter**, leading the communications efforts around the organization's groundbreaking impact litigation and advocacy efforts, including managing stakeholder communications and media relations around the education equality lawsuit *Vergara v. California*, and the federal education equality case, *Martinez v. Malloy*. In this role, Manny executes at the macro and micro level—from the launching of communications campaigns around significant legal and organizational milestones, to the day-to-day efforts of media rapid response. Manny uses media opportunities as a vehicle to move the needle of public opinion on issues that are important to public school students.

During his time at RALLY, Manny has served as the media lead for a number of clients with high-profile, national media campaigns. He led the media relations effort for the **American Foundation for Equal Rights**—the sole sponsor of the federal constitutional challenge to California's Proposition 8, *Hollingsworth v. Perry*—an effort that helped fuel a momentous shift in public opinion and paved the way for full federal marriage equality. He served as the media relations lead for **Sandy Hook Promise**, working with national and local media to help the organization and the families of Sandy Hook victims share their stories and promote solutions to address the issue of gun violence. He also oversaw the communications effort around various health-related education and awareness campaigns for **The California Endowment**, California's largest health foundation, including steering earned media initiatives and branding opportunities, planning and executing events, and creating opportunities to raise the visibility of The Endowment's flagship Health Happens Here campaign.

Prior to joining the RALLY team, Manny was a Vice President at Mercury Public Affairs, where he was responsible for crafting and implementing public affairs and communications strategies supporting complex projects and business imperatives for two Fortune 20 companies. Manny also provided his expertise to a fast-growing foreign automaker to promote the company's economic impact and social responsibility efforts in the U.S. market. Immediately prior to that, he led the rapid-response and strategic communications function for Apollo Group, and served as national spokesperson for the company's largest subsidiary. Manny trained within the corporate and consumer public relations practices at Fleishman Hillard International Communications and Waggener Edstrom Worldwide.

Manny is a graduate of Cornell University, with a double major in Sociology and Government and a concentration in Law and Society. An Angeleno for most of his adult life, Manny enjoys exploring his own town, making sure to experience Los Angeles's diverse neighborhoods, outstanding cuisine, and notable tourist traps.

# RALLY

## Interview Tips

**During the interview.** You may be nervous, but the most important thing is to be calm and confident. Feel free to keep notes in front of you during a phone or radio interview. The following tips will help you deliver your messages effectively:

- **Have a game plan** as you approach the interview. It's not a conversation between you and the reporter. It's an opportunity to deliver your message to key audiences. Decide on one to three points the audience will take away no matter what questions are asked during the interview.
- **Be brief.** Long answers bury your point, make mistakes more likely, and bore listeners. Using short responses and messages will help keep you focused and allow more time for repetition. It will also make for a better interview.
- **Keep it simple!** Use clear language and avoid jargon. Nobody expects you to be a policy expert unless you are. So be yourself and speak as you would to your friends.
- **Give your answer.** You don't have to answer the interviewer's exact question. You rarely see the question in TV or print interviews, only the response. So feel free to pick out one word or phrase in the question and respond to that. Or say, "I hear your question, but what I am interested in focusing on is..."
- **Use numbers, but sparingly.** Memorize one or two precise statistics that will give weight, but don't overdo the statistics. It is more important to add the human – why this matters to me – element than to cite numbers.
- **Be honest!** Don't stretch the truth. If you don't know the answer, say so and suggest an alternative source. There is nothing wrong with saying, "I don't know the answer to that, but what I do know is..."
- **Focus/collect your thoughts/stay calm.** Give your undivided attention and eye contact to the interviewer. Look directly at the person asking the question. Listen carefully to the questions asked, and don't be afraid to pause slightly before answering or to ask them to repeat the question. If the interview is being taped, it is ok to start an answer again. And remember – stay calm.
- **Stay on message.** Don't stray from your main points. Always bring your answers back to your key messages. Here are some common ways to "bridge" to your message:
  - "That is a good question; however, what people should know is..."
  - "I don't know the answer to that question, but I do know is..."
  - "(short answer to question) which means..."
  - "(short answer to question), and in addition..."

- **Flag key points.** Help the reporter and the audience know what you're saying is of import.
  - "The most important thing for people to know is..."
  - "The main point is..."
  - "What I really want to make clear is..."
  
- **Set up the follow up question.** Stay in control by giving a concise answer that encourages follow-up. You can do this by saving some information for a later answer, by making a statement that leads to another question, or by asking the reporter a question.
  
- **Correct mistakes.** If a reporter makes a misstatement or has a fact wrong, correct it.
  
- **Don't repeat negative or inflammatory language.** For example, if a reporter asks, "Isn't it true that condoms often fail?" don't repeat the negative by saying, "No, it isn't true that condoms fail often." Instead, turn it around to something positive: "When used correctly, condoms are..." and so forth.
  
- **Be in control.** Nobody can force you to answer a question you don't want to. You can politely decline to comment. You also can't be forced to speak. If the reporter leaves a silence with the intention of having you talk yourself into a corner, stay quiet. You can also bridge from the question and talk to what you want to talk about.
  
- **Your body does some talking, too.** Sometimes how you say something can be as important as what you have to say.
  - Keep your eye contact steady. Don't shift your eyes or "look" for answers when asked a question.
  - Keep your tone firm but not defensive, even if you are discussing a controversial topic.
  - If you are standing for a television interview, stand in a "T" formation to avoid swaying. When sitting for a television interview, cross your ankles (causing you to naturally lean forward), and keep your hands in your lap.
  - When you are being interviewed, look at the person interviewing you not the camera. If you are being interviewed at a remote location and the interviewer is in the studio or somewhere else, DO look straight into the camera.
  
- **Know how to point reporters in the right direction.** Before you finish your interview, it may benefit you to tip a reporter about a piece of information that you don't want attributed to you.
  - Ask to go "off the record." Going "off the record" with the media means providing them information that they cannot use. Presumably, they can use the information to help formulate their story or to ask further questions. It should never come out that the information came from you.
  - Give background information. Giving information "on background" means providing reporters with information that they can use in their stories but cannot attribute to you because it has come from another source. Though journalists will probably extract text solely from a statement, background information can change the tenor or angle of a story. This is particularly true when you provide factual background documents not intended for public consumption.
  
- **Have fun!** Really. For reporters, this is a job. They need you to participate and that they want to listen to you is a wonderful and powerful thing. Enjoy it.

# RALLY

## On-Camera Presence

### Tips and Tricks to Maximize Your Broadcast Interview's Impact

#### Posture

- **Standing interviews**
  - Try placing one foot slightly in front of the other. Doing so prevents side-to-side sway, and also helps keep your energy aimed forward.
- **Seated interviews**
  - No swivel chairs.
  - Move forward so you're only sitting on the front half of the chair.
  - Lean **forward slightly** to help increase your energy and ensure that the camera's main focus is on your face, not your body.
  - If there is an armrest on the chair, don't lean on the armrest.
  - Ankle over ankle (for ladies).

#### Energy

- **TV tends to flatten people.** That means that in order to be a successful television guest, you have to over-compensate by speaking with additional energy and additional volume.
- **Be lively but not jerky**
  - Keep hand motions between abdomen and shoulders.
  - In stand-up interviews, keep your hands in front of you near the abdomen, ready to gesture.

#### Eye Contact

- **Maintain eye contact with the reporter.**
  - On television, the lack of eye contact comes across as nervousness (at best) or evasiveness and defensiveness (at worst).
  - Don't look up in between questions — it looks like you're trying to make something up.
  - When talking directly to a reporter, **never** look at the camera while "on."
  - Only look at the camera when being interviewed by a **remote anchor**. Practice by delivering your answers to a specific place on the wall. Some find it helpful to draw a face on a sheet of paper and tape it just below the lens.

#### Gestures

- **90% of your effectiveness is determined by how you deliver your message.**
  - Use your body mannerisms to your advantage. Show some emotion, but don't get emotional.
- When a spokesperson incorporates **gestures** into their delivery, their *words* actually get better. The physical act of gesturing helps form clearer thoughts and speak in **tight, staccato** sentences.
- **For seated interviews:**
  - Keep your arms open and ready to gesture at any moment.
  - When not gesturing, keep your arms on your lap with your hands near your knees.

- Avoid clasping your hands, which is regarded as a “closed” form of communication.
- **For standing interviews:**
  - Keep your arms in front of your torso.
  - Avoid hugging your body in any way and resist the temptation to place your hands in your pockets.
- **Smile, if appropriate.**
  - Television makes people look like they are scowling.
  - A voice sounds more appealing when smiling.

## Attire

- **Women’s interview attire**
  - Solid colors, but avoid:
    - White— it glows and becomes the most noticeable thing on the screen.
    - Black—it’s too harsh and can suck-up all the light.
    - Bright Reds—they bleed on camera and are distracting.
  - Accessories should be **subdued**, both in color and style.
    - No dangly or noisy earrings, shiny pins, or anything that could reflect studio light.
  - Conservative clothing **appropriate** to your position and role.
  - **Avoid** shiny and starchy clothing, large, loud prints or patterns.
  - **Daytime make-up** (without overdoing). Powder is recommended to reduce shine.
    - Never decline makeup.
    - Don’t wear lip-gloss or makeup that is shiny.
- **Men’s interview attire**
  - Medium-tone blues and grays are recommended for shirts and suit colors.
  - If wearing a tie, aim for maroon or red ties.
  - For TV, **don’t refuse** make-up.
  - Do not get a haircut right before a TV appearance.
  - **No loose change** in pockets.

## Additional Broadcast and Interview Tips

- **Look in the mirror.** Do a final check before your interview begins. And don’t refuse make-up, especially if it is offered or recommended.
- **Turn off your cell phone.** Little is more distracting than a cell phone ringing in middle of an interview. Also, the phone’s signal can interfere with the audio. Vibrate mode isn’t good enough; power your phone off completely.
- **Turn the monitor off.** Television monitors in the studio often show a feed that is delayed by a fraction of a second. That can be distracting. Ask that it be turned off, if possible.
- **Beware of the split screen.** In some formats, you will appear on camera even when you’re not speaking. Those “split screen” shots show you and at least one other person at the same time, and “reaction” shots show your reaction to another guest’s comments. Act as if you’re always on, being careful not to wipe your face, adjust your hair, or fix your outfit during your segment.
- **Restrict your nodding.** It’s normal to nod when listening to someone else, but nodding can send the wrong message if you disagree with the premise of someone’s question or comment. Listen attentively, but only nod along if you agree.
- **Stay in your seat.** Avoid the temptation to flee your chair the moment your segment ends. Maintain your pose for a few seconds, remaining seated until a member of the crew tells you you’re clear.



**Interview Preparation  
Message Worksheet**

Prior to each interview, it's important to outline the three key messages that you want to get across during the interview. These messages can be overall organizational messages, for an individual campaign, or for a specific topic. This message worksheet can help you organize your thoughts before the interview. Please note, the supporting stories, statistics and sound bites beneath each message should reinforce that message.

**EXAMPLE** (From a campaign about reforming PA's malpractice laws):

**Message:** *"By loosening Pennsylvania's unreasonable malpractice laws, thousands of pregnant women will be able to find a local obstetrician who can help in case of a medical emergency."*

**Story:** *"Sandy Johnson, a 26-year-old from Altoona, was in her seventh month of pregnancy last year when she went into labor. She was by herself and called 9-1-1. The paramedics got there in time, but didn't have the skills to help when her baby was unable to breathe. Her baby son died. If her skilled obstetrician lived closer, he likely would have been able to save the baby."*

**Statistics:** *"More than 18,000 women of childbearing age in Pennsylvania live at least 100 miles from the closest obstetrician."*

**Sound Bites:** *"Having your doctor 100 miles away is kind of like keeping your Band-Aid at a friend's house—they're useless when you need them most."*

**MESSAGE 1:**

**STORIES:**

1.

2.

**STATISTICS:**

1.

2.

**SOUND BITES:**

1.

2.

**MESSAGE 2:**

**STORIES:**

1.

2.

**STATISTICS:**

1.

2.

**SOUND BITES:**

1.

2.

**MESSAGE 3:**

**STORIES:**

1.

2.

**STATISTICS:**

1.

2.

**SOUND BITES:**

1.

2.

# Media Relations: Telling Your Story and Responding Effectively



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## Lynn I. Nelson

Lynn has over 20 years of experience in public relations, public affairs and communications. She has extensive experience in virtually all facets of organizational communications, with a strong suit in media relations and media training.

Prior to launching her own consulting practice in 1993, Lynn directed employee and client communications, as well as community and media relations for American Express Financial Advisors (now Ameriprise) in Minneapolis. She has served as a public relations advisor to Fredrikson & Byron, P.A., H.B. Fuller, St. Paul Travelers and many other Minnesota companies.

Lynn has been an adjunct professor of public relations at the University of Minnesota, School of Journalism and Mass Communication and was the author of a monthly public policy column in *Women's Business Minnesota*.

She has a B.A. degree from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota and an M.A. in Public Policy from the Humphrey Institute. She has held leadership positions at Southwest High School and Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis.

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## What Makes News

- Timeliness
- Prominence
- Proximity
- Significance
- Unusualness
- Human Interest
- Conflict
- Newness



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## Need to Know About Reporters

- They are outsiders and need extensive context to translate your messages accurately.
- Reporters are bombarded with news releases and media pitches from organizations.
- They are under constant deadline pressure to churn out stories.
- They tend to be cynical by nature as they need to strive to be objective.
- Although reporters may be aggressive or uninformed, they rarely have sinister motives.
- Reporters get frustrated with media pitches that are not newsworthy or targeted to their beat or media outlet.
- Story ideas are considered "exclusive" unless specified otherwise.

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## Effective Key Messages

- True
- Concise
- Sound like you're talking to your Mom
- Not salesy
- Sensitive to outsiders' lack of context



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## Effective Key Messages

- Consider what messages mean to people receiving the information
- Use examples
- Analogies
- Use high impact words
- Repeat as necessary



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## Tips for Unexpected Media Calls

If a reporter calls to request an interview, you should interview the reporter first. Common questions to ask:

- Who are you?
- What is the story about?
- Why did you call me?
- What are you looking for from me?
- Who else are you speaking with?
- Are you going to use my comments in your story?



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## Media Interview Checklist

Before the Interview...

- Find out the general subject, type of story and story angle
- Coordinate the interview with your Communications Director
- Develop possible questions and answers
- Research the latest news stories and related issues
- Determine key messages
- Collect props, pictures and visuals



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## Media Interview Checklist

### During the Interview...

- Listen to the questions
- Don't over answer
- Be friendly, energetic and courteous
- Be clear, concise and accurate
- Use specific examples, anecdotes, points that differentiate your product or issue
- Include key messages



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## Media Interview Checklist

### During the Interview...

- Avoid repeating negatives
- Communicate benefits
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" or "I'm not an expert in that area".  
Then find someone else who can assist the reporter before deadline.
- Don't go "off the record"
- "Stay in the loop" – remind the reporter to call with follow-up questions
- Remember to summarize or bring up additional information on the last question.



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## Media Interview Checklist

### After the Interview...

- Discuss the interview with a member of your Communications Dept. if they did not attend
- Follow through on communications to provide additional information
- Follow up on areas where you were not the expert or did not know the answer
- Read, view, listen for related stories and newscasts



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### Interview Guideline Do's

- Anticipate questions and plan answers
- Know your audience and frame your answers from its points of view
- Develop a message you want to get across
- Be quotable
- Speak conversationally



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### Interview Guideline Don'ts

- Don't let reporters put words in your mouth
- Don't lie ever
- Don't ever say "no comment"
- Don't answer hypothetical questions – say you don't like to speculate



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### Interview Tips for TV

In-studio interviews take place at the TV station versus on-site interviews, which take place where news is actually happening

**What to wear:**

- Avoid wild plaids or violent colors
- Patterns should be subdued
- Avoid white shirts, instead try pale blue, gray, or tan



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## Interview Tips for Radio

- Convey your message with the fewest possible words and facts
- Use simple words and avoid legal-speak
- Be especially conversational
- Listeners have short attention spans; have something to say and say it right away



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## Crisis Communication

- Get your story straight – decide on key messages
- Saying something is better than saying nothing – prepare a statement
- You may just say “we are assessing the situation” and promise updates
- Set up a predictable system for responding to the media
- Be accessible
- As usual, be honest
- Respect and respond to news deadlines
- State clearly and concisely what you plan to do to address the situation



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