Effective Media Skills for Law Enforcement

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**References**
The Florida Regional Community Policing Institute (RCPI) at St. Petersburg College (SPC) operates under a cooperative agreement from the Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). RCPI provides FREE community policing training to law enforcement officers, community residents, city employees, social services agencies, and private sector representatives throughout Florida.

Basic Courses
- Introduction to Community Policing
- Police-Community Partnerships
- Problem Solving for the Community Police Officer and Citizen
- Survival Skills for Community Policing Officers
- Ethical Issues and Decisions in Law Enforcement
- Reaching your Goals Through Code Compliance
- Planning a Win for the Good Guys: Crime Prevention/Crime Displacement and Environmental Design
- Managing Encounters with the Mentally Ill
- Building Bridges: Community Policing Overview for Citizens
- Changing roles: Supervising Today’s Community Policing Officer
- Grantsmanship 101
- Sexual Predator and Offender Awareness in Your Neighborhood and on the Internet
- Effective Media Skills for Law Enforcement
- Citizens’ Community Policing Academies

Specialty Courses
- Protecting, Serving and Supervising through Community Partnerships
- Three-Part Management Series

Online Courses
- Ethical Issues & Decisions in Law Enforcement
- Introduction to Community Oriented Policing
- Dynamics of Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence Courses
- Dynamics of Domestic Violence
- Legal Aspects of Domestic Violence
- Resources for Domestic Violence Teams
Course Material

Course material is provided at no charge to all participants. We can adapt our training to fit your agency/community/business needs. Evening and weekend classes are available. Most training modules are eight or 16 hours but may be modified to allow for limited time allotments.

Training Locations

Generally, classes are conducted at our SPC training site. However, we will arrange training at your facility or a training center in your area. Students who travel more than 50 miles may be eligible for lodging reimbursement.

Who Can Attend?

- Any law enforcement officer (community policing patrol, crime prevention, campus police), civilian employees, probation officers, and social service agencies
- Community leaders and citizens
- Chiefs and Sheriffs who are interested in starting and maintaining community policing in their communities
- Business managers, executives and employees
- Mayors, City Managers, Council members, trustees and government leaders

Registration

To register for classes, schedule on-site training or become part of our mailing list, please call:

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Acknowledgements

The course, Effective Media Skills for Law Enforcement, was constructed and written by Retired Division Chief William G. Doniel of the St. Petersburg Police Department. Bill retired from the Department in March 2000 after 25 years of service. He is currently an adjunct instructor for the Criminal Justice Institute and the Florida Regional Community Policing Institute at St. Petersburg College.

Bill, with a broadcast and criminal justice background, is a recognized expert in the field of Police/Media Relations and has instructed at numerous institutes throughout his career. While with St. Petersburg, Bill supervised the Public Information Office, Crime Prevention and Volunteer Services Units.

As the chief spokesman, he has been the voice for the Department in times of crisis and also hosted the City’s television program, “Police Report,” featuring community policing problem solving activities. St. Petersburg’s Community Policing problem solving efforts have also been featured on national TV.

In 1983, Bill also began the City’s initial efforts into organizing Neighborhood Crime Watch programs. With only four police officers and a small group of volunteers, the program grew into one of the State's largest, 300 neighborhoods and 600 block captains.

In June 2000, the Florida Public Information Officers Association recognized Bill for his media skills, as a founding member of the organization and the distinction of having been the longest serving police spokesman in Florida.

Media Skills for Law Enforcement shares the knowledge of a hosts of media experts and is designed to assist police officers, detectives, community police officers, communications supervisors and even Crime Watch Block Captains with a working knowledge of the media and how to use that knowledge to gain maximum exposure for the officers’ work in the community. In today’s world, the news media and its assignment editors work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. At any time, a crisis could occur in an officers patrol zone or community policing area (C.P.A.) and you can be sure one of the first people the reporter will want to talk to is the law enforcement officer. This course is designed to make the law enforcement officer feel comfortable talking to members of the media, recognizing what the reporter will be looking for in a story, what questions to expect from the reporter and how best to prepare and present a pro-active approach.

Florida Regional Community Policing Institute

This textbook summarizes Media Skills for Law Enforcement for the Florida Regional Community Policing Institute (COPS). It is supported by cooperative agreement #2002CKWXK025, awarded by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice, to St. Petersburg College. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.
Purpose of Course

This course is designed for police officers, detectives, community police officers, communications supervisors, public information officers and other law enforcement personnel with none or even limited experience in media relations, who seek additional skills which will allow them to communicate more effectively with members of the media under a multitude of circumstances. Course topics cover an array of media issues that commonly cause law enforcement to not seek media assistance in their problem solving efforts.

The one-day course is designed for law enforcement and taught by a law enforcement media professional. It focuses on development of communication skills and techniques, avoiding pitfalls, and better understanding of media procedures, as they apply to law enforcement.

Participants will understand the media can be an invaluable tool in which to provide information to the community, as well as a source of gathering information for on-going investigations. Participants will learn how to be pro-active in describing their problem solving efforts to the media, allowing for a greater chance of positive coverage and eventually case closure.

Effective Media Skills training will use real-life media conflicts and crime scene procedures as they apply to releasing information and dealing with crisis situations. Students will then apply learned skills in classroom discussion. Participants will also interact with members of the media in a free flowing discussion on how they can gain maximum positive coverage of a negative incident occurring in the officers patrol zone, community policing area or at the crime scene.

This course is presented by an award winning retired Police Division Chief, with over 25 years of experience as a Police/Media instructor.

“A cantankerous press, an obstinate press, a ubiquitous press must be suffered by those in authority in order to preserve the even greater values of freedom and expression and the right of the people to know.”

- Judge Murray Gurfein
Goals

- Participants will become more aware of how the media can be a powerful ally in providing information to the community or helping to persuade witnesses to come forward during an investigation.

- Participants will become more sensitive to the benefits gained from establishing positive working relationships with the media.

- Participants will understand the importance of working with the media to assist in their community problem solving efforts.

- Participants will gather an insight into the workings of the media and learn how to avoid certain pitfalls during an interview.

- Participants will have discussions with members of the media to learn first hand their philosophy and procedures when covering negative or “breaking news” within a patrol zone, community policing area or crime scene.

- Participants will be given the opportunity to present real-life problem solving cases and discuss ways to work with the media in times of crisis.

AP Photo: Eric Gay
Course Schedule

0800-0815    Registration and Pre-Test on Media Knowledge
0815-0830    Course Purpose
0830-0915    Who Are You? - Class (Each student will give background on themselves and briefly explain their individual concerns of the news media or areas they would like to improve upon, i.e., “How not to say the wrong thing. Wanting to feel more comfortable talking to a reporter.”)
0915-0930    Break
0930-1030    Media Skill’s Workshop – Recommendations, observations and discussions that will provide the class with a knowledge of news media procedures and how to communicate more effectively with reporters in various news situations
1030-1045    Break
1045-1145    Media Skills Workshop continues
1145-1300    Lunch
1300-1500    Learning from the News Media - (Media Panel)
1500-1515    Break
1515-1615    Facing the Camera – Class (Practical Exercise)
1615-1645    Review, Post-Test on Media Knowledge, Certificates and Evaluations
Topics Included

Who Are Those Guys?
Demonstrates how the news media and law enforcement have similar goals and similar descriptions.

Media’s Place In Our Lives:
Who watches or reads the media? Survey of the media.

Media Coverage: What Are We (Law Enforcement) Up Against?
A background into why the media may not cover your event. Recognizing what “sells” your story idea to the executive producer or editor?

TV News... The Story Behind The Story
Presents a history of TV news and how TV is looking for visuals and emotion.

Think... Media Skills (Do’s And Don’t)
Covers a series of points for effective media skills.

Lessons Learned in a Disaster
Good and bad during the disturbances in St. Petersburg. Covers the role of the media, what the media learned, and recommendations to law enforcement. Also Columbine High shooting and media coverage is discussed. This compliments video “In the Line of Duty... Media Relations.”

What Is Reporting?
Takes a look at reporting from the editor’s viewpoint. The media’s Code of Ethics is covered.
Press Release Tips

Covers the procedure to prepare a press release.

Press Policy Tips

Covers the procedure to write a new press policy.

Press Conference Tips

Goes over the proper procedure, do’s and don’t for arranging a press conference and what to do when the media arrives. How you can use the press conference to get the information out on major stories.

US Department of Justice Media Guidelines

This is a brief review of Media Guidelines for agencies having a joint investigation with the Department of Justice.

Media Mafia Skills:

Takes a humorous look at reporters and photographers and how they really don’t care who you are. Their job is to get the story or pictures.
Chapter One

Media Knowledge

Who Are You?

Class Instructions:

Name, agency, expectations of course and examples of media discussion topics:

Keep a list of the topics you identify up on the board and then as you go through the day, try to address something about each one. Nothing is too way out to discuss. Discuss blunders with the media.

Some Examples:

• Teach me how NOT to get “jammed.”
• What will this class do for me? WII-FM
• I’m never going to talk to the press, so why do I need this?
• Show me how NOT to screw up an investigation when talking to the press.
• Show me how NOT to embarrass myself on TV.
• Show me how to use the media in my investigation.
• Teach me what to expect from the media when they show up at my scene.
• I don’t want to look bad in front of other officers.

“Who Are Those Guys?”
Movie - Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid

Perceptions of the Media

Have the class describe words or phrases that they feel describe the news media.

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
4. ____________________________
5. ____________________________
6. ____________________________
7. ____________________________
8. ____________________________
9. ____________________________
10. ____________________________
11. ____________________________
12. ____________________________
13. ____________________________
14. ____________________________
15. ____________________________
16. ____________________________
Perception of Law Enforcement

Now have the class describe words or phrases that they believe represent how the media would describe law enforcement. Make a separate list on the board. Discuss the similarities.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 
11. 
12. 
13. 
14. 
15. 
16. 


Historical Relationship

When a crime or serious incident occurs on our streets today, you can bet one of the first phone calls will be not to the police, but to a television station or some member of the media. The desire to “tell,” to be first making the call is overwhelming. America has been conditioned to call the media, “when you see news happening,” and because of the competition by the media to be “first” in reporting a particular story.

Historically the relationship between law enforcement and the media has been something less than perfect. Law enforcement, in their effort to investigate crimes and arrest the person responsible, seeks to prevent the media from interfering in their investigation.

Local officials, bureaucrats and even police officers recognize the importance of a free press. And we want them to print good stories about us. So do most people. And sometimes these stories are worth telling. But often, what “we” find to be interesting and important, others may not. For example: a water development story describing a new way to deliver water to homes. The truth is most people only care that water comes out of the faucet when it is turned on. If the water does not come out, why does it not come out? Unless it’s going to cost them more money, or, if the police department has just completed a manpower service delivery study, how do you make it interesting enough that people
will want to read it? How can you make them understand what you’ve said?

No local government department or work unit is exempt from the scrutiny of the media. At the same time, government cannot afford to ignore the opportunities for accurate news coverage. Media coverage can generate interest and provide a vital link between the citizens and their government.

On the media’s side, they perform the valuable function of keeping the public informed of crime in the community and the actions of law enforcement. They do this work under the first amendment banner and by holding newsgathering privilege.

The public’s interest in crime and police work is reflected in citizen surveys and in the prominence those issues are afforded in the media. The Gallup Polls (Apr. 98, Dec. 97, Aug. 97) have indicated that citizens across the nation rate crime as one of their greatest concerns. When we turn on TV tonight for the 6 O’clock News, you can bet the first three or four stories will involve law enforcement. Whether it is crime reporting, citizens’ expectations of the police or other concerns, the media is still the primary means for delivering public safety information and actions of law enforcement.

Every police officer or deputy here today can probably cite instances when a reporter, photographer or TV cameraman came close to disrupting a crime scene search or investigation. Unfortunately we never seem to remember the times a reporter was helpful in an investigation.

What helped the media distrust government? The Vietnam War and Watergate helped the media distrust government.
This news conflict was defined in three Supreme Court decisions that defined the parameters of the first amendment’s newsgathering privilege.

Essentially, the Supreme Court held that constitutional right of the media to access the news is no greater than that of the general public and that law enforcement can prevent the media from obtaining access to information (active ongoing investigation) or areas generally not available to the public. However, once the media acquires the information, the constitutional right to publish is virtually insurmountable and any attempt by law enforcement to prevent its publication will be presumed invalid.

Essentially the Supreme Court created a strong incentive for law enforcement and the news media to work together and resolve conflicts in the spirit of cooperation. We all know the media depends on us for information, which is not available to the general public, and we depend on the media to responsibly report the news in a manner that will not interfere with our investigations.

An example of this new found cooperative relationship is the very popular “docudramas” that you see each night on TV. One of the more popular is COPS. (Can you name others?)

The public soon became used to seeing camera crews going along on chases, drug raids and handling the street people. In this way the public gets to see the officers/deputies as real people. (Is this a good thing?)

One court case that has affected this cooperation to some degree was the United Stated v. Sansui. (Ayeni v. Mottola 1994.) In this case, the Secret Service and Postal Service had obtained a search warrant to search the private home of a suspect in a credit card fraud. A CBS TV crew filming “Street Stories” was allowed to accompany the agents.
When the agents arrived, only the suspect’s wife and son were home.

Over the wife’s objections, the TV crew was allowed to film her being questioned as her house was searched. The wife sued both CBS and the agent in charge claiming that the search violated the Fourth Amendment, including the unauthorized presence in a private home of a CBS television crew. The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the decision of the federal judge, who denied the agent’s motion to dismiss the suit. The court said that the agent did not have the right to bring the crew into the home, as they were not authorized to be there and it was beyond the scope of the warrant.

Conclusion

As a result of the Ayeni decision and the subsequently filed civil action, media participation in law enforcement activities can result in predictable and legally significant consequences.

- First, videotape obtained by the media is subject to discovery and may be used by the defense to cloud issues at the trial.

- Second, if law enforcement activities take place in an area where an individual has a fourth amendment right of privacy, media participation at the invitation of law enforcement is a violation of that constitutional right.

- Finally, the individual law enforcement officers responsible for inviting the media into areas protected by the fourth amendment are subject to civil liability for having violated a clearly established law.

Therefore I recommend that you develop your own relationship with the media; you should proceed with a balanced approach of good media relations and the understanding that media information is available to the defense. Don’t forget the fourth amendment that speaks to law enforcement activities in public places vs. private areas. The citizen MUST agree to the media accompanying law enforcement onto those areas. If you have any doubts, ask your Department’s Legal Advisor.

We all remember the OJ trial circus. What about ABC’s undercover hidden camera reporting on Food Lion employees repacking meat and conditions in the meat department?
Over the last several years there has been much hand wringing in journalistic circles over the media’s declining status in American culture.

Several years ago *George* magazine commissioned the research firm of Global Strategy Group, Inc., to conduct a scientific poll of Americans regarding the media’s place in their lives. It’s important to know how the public views the media.

### So Where Do We Get Our News?

**How we receive our News**

- 64% watch TV
- 27% read newspapers
- 5% listen to the radio
- 1% read magazines

**TV Viewers ... Local or National?**

- 65% get news from local TV
- 14% get news from national TV
- 13% get news from all-news TV

Newspaper Readers

- 67% get their news from the local daily papers
- 14% get their news from the weeklies
- 11% get their news from a national daily (Washington Post)
- 1% get their news from USA Today
Chapter Two-Media’s Place in Our Lives

Most Frequently Watched TV Networks

NBC, ABC, CBS, (locally NBC- 8, FOX- 13, CBS -10, ABC- 28) MSNBC, CNBC, CNN, FOX,

Radio Listeners

- 41% get their news from local radio news (locally WFLA radio)
- 28% get their news from national radio talk shows
- 16% get their news from local talk shows
- 15% get their news from national radio news

Faithful and the Fickle

81% of people age 65 and older watch the news every day, while only 26% of those between the ages of 18 and 34 tune in daily.

Respect and Veracity

Most Respected Media Entity

- 32% CNN
- 11% Wall Street Journal
- 11% USA Today
- 9% PBS
- 6% New York Times
- 5% Washington Post

Least Respected

- 18% None
- 13% USA Today
- 10% New York Times
- 9% Washington Post
Most Believable News Source?

46% TV  
26% Newspapers  
9% Radio  
2% Magazines  
2% National Tabloids  
2% Internet

Bottom of the Barrel Awards

Whom do you respect more, lawyers or journalist?

49% journalist  
27% lawyers  
19% neither

Whom do you respect more, politicians or journalist?

69% journalists  
12% politicians  
15% neither

Which is the most powerful at effecting change; media or the government?

67% Media  
23% Government  
5% Neither

Summary

What we’ve learned is:

• Americans have a strong need for and attachment to news and find it useful in their everyday lives.

• People distrust the news media as a whole, but rely heavily on it in times of crisis, i.e., look at the coverage of the World Trade Center disaster. However, Americans seem to believe that the press is often influenced and has become more strongly identified with special interests than with the general good of society.
• Young people are strongly interested in news. But they obtain news differently from other Americans, often from on-line sources.

• Few Americans are familiar with the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution. In fact, few believe that the right to freedom of the press should be guaranteed at all times.

The Good News for News

• Americans (80%) see the role of the news media as crucial in a free society.

• 88% of those surveyed say they spend at least half an hour on a typical weekday obtaining news.

• They say news is useful in their daily lives.

• 63% said it would matter if they couldn’t get news for a week.

• Americans’ primary and most trusted news sources are local TV and local newspapers.

The Bad News for Journalists

• Most people trust what ministers, priest, rabbis and doctors say, but only 53% place similar trust in their local TV anchors. Even fewer trust what network TV anchors say and just a third trust newspaper reporters.

• What bothers some people about journalists is that they are insensitive to people’s pain when covering disasters and accidents. If it bleeds, it leads.

• A majority of Americans surveyed (64%) also say a major problem with news is that it’s too sensational.

How the Public Sees the News

Media Gets Good Reviews from the Police

A small police department in Ironton, Ohio, population 14,000, was faced with the prospect of a nationwide search for two suspects in a murder investigation. The department had only one detective, so he went to the FBI for assistance. Details were entered into the national crime computer so other agencies across the country could be on the
lookout. But in the end it was a five-minute segment on a television show “America’s Most Wanted” that led to their capture.

More and more law enforcement agencies are turning to the media for assistance.

It was the intense publicity that sent Andrew Cunanan into seclusion. Eventually police discovered his whereabouts from the publicity.

Unfortunately, all those leads and far-flung sightings have to be followed up. In St. Petersburg several years ago, we were faced with a triple homicide. The victims were a mother and two daughters visiting from Ohio. The case was eventually solved thanks to a multitude of publicity.

Why then do law enforcement and the media regard each other as opponents? Officers often characterize certain reporters as repressive or stupid. And police resent being compared to Keystone Cops. We all know that today’s police standards have transformed the “dumb cop” image into sheer fantasy.

On the other hand, law enforcement is quick to apply a similar obsolete stereotype to the news media. A portrait of a reporter as an unprincipled, omnipresent meddler, eager to play cop and hungry for a “scoop” that will sell papers is – like the Keystone Cop belief hopelessly out of date.

**Why Do You Need Media Skills?**

For better or worse law enforcement will always have a relationship with the media. Its just a matter of whether it a Good or Bad one. Let’s get some insight into how you can develop a good sense of the media and how it can work for you.

**TV News...The Story Behind the Story**

**In the Beginning**

Before cable TV, the three network affiliates in each city had a virtual monopoly on viewers. At 6 and 10 (or 11), there was nothing else to watch except the news and all three affiliates generally had about a third of the audience. The “number one” newscast was only slightly above the others.
Then Came the Ratings Consultants

By around 1980, stations began hiring consultants to analyze ratings, conduct focus group surveys and help stations keep their viewers. They were not paid to recommend serious journalism. They were paid to get viewers. Now virtually all local stations subscribe to consultants.

Consultants Changed TV’s Look and the News

Through their research, consultants advised the obvious—and not so obvious. They told news directors that viewers were loyal to anchors, which are familiar, friendly and attractive. The consultants would show videotapes of anchors, studio news desks and even news stories to small, controlled groups of viewers to get feedback. By studying these focus groups carefully, the consultants could accurately assess which anchors and studio designs were most appealing. Ultimately the consultants told nervous news directors what kind of stories people would not tune out. News directors bought it because their competitors were hiring consultants too.

Consultants also taught the news directors to “tease” viewers with headlines at the eight and nine pm station breaks to keep them tuned in for the newscasts later. Stations bought expensive news sets, which highlighted their anchors. The set was lit differently, chairs were raised and moved closer together to promote togetherness and make anchors appear larger than life. Stations were soon doing “consumer” and “medical” news because the research said viewers liked it. But the real ratings builder is sensational news, such as crime, accidents and violence.

If It Bleeds, It Leads

While a student of Edward R. Murrow might want to lead a newscast with the most “important” story, the consultants urged local stations to lead their newscasts with the most sensational story to grab viewers before they change channels. Hence came the phrase “if it bleeds, it leads.”

Crime is big -- crime against the innocent is even bigger. Since people are fascinated with fire, photographers and reporters are sent to the scene of the fire and the news pro-
Producers spend a major portion of the newscast on team coverage.

Talking Heads are Out

What is unpopular with viewers, the consultants revealed, are talking heads. As a result, mayors and politicians receive less airtime and the police and firemen receive more. Stations quit covering city councils, school board meetings and political speeches. Unless a controversial topic is on the agenda and someone may be creating a scene, which would make a good visual for the camera. Controversy is always big – but only if there is emotion.

Play to the Viewers Emotion

“Emotion” said the consultants, “that’s what viewers want.” So TV stations now seek to press every viewers’ emotional button – anger, fear, sympathy, admiration, disgust, love and sex.

Cute animals and cute kids are the most popular topics for feature stories. For a long time, it was stories about the homeless and poor until national polls showed the public was less sympathetic. Crime and disaster stories are always lead stories – and made to look bigger even if they really aren’t. But they are emotional and that’s what the public wants. Tearful parts of the interview are always the chosen sound bites.

One strange phenomenon is that many victims will play along with the camera’s appetite for emotional intrusion. Often victims deep in personal grief will give what are most certainly, difficult interviews for the camera – as if they were actors obliged to personally replay what they’ve seen other victims play. But viewers love it and TV stations do too – because people keep watching. Survivors or witnesses of crimes and natural disasters are incessantly asked the tiresome question “How do you feel?” The photographer zooms in and you can see every tear.
If There Isn't Emotion, Go Find Some - and Keep Looking Until You Do

In any large city, it’s not hard to find people who agree with almost any loaded question. For example, after a recent murder, a photographer is sent out to ask young women a leading question “Are you afraid after this brutal murder?” They continue asking women the same question until they get several agreeing responses. The producer will then build a story making viewers think they’ve discovered widespread fear in the community. “Residents are fearful tonight…” will be the lead opening of the newscast for the purpose of drawing in viewer attention.

Are Things Really As Bad As We Are Led To Believe

No, of course not, but remember this. News is not the 1000 planes that landed safely today, it’s the one that did not. It is not the hundreds of police calls for service that were handled successfully; it is the one that ended up in a SWAT call up that made it unusual. Remember, emotion, conflict and controversy sells.

Visuals are everything.

If a story easily lends itself to pictures, it will get more air-time over stories that are hard to illustrate. As a result, stations will forgo covering important issues which aren’t ‘visual.’ They will emphasize ‘visual’ stories even if they aren’t important at all. That is why the viewers see TV newscasts filled with bloody crime, accidents, arrested subjects, teary-eyed victims, cute kids, animals and street protests. The pictures will carry the story. In fact, most TV people will write the stories to the video they have and omit details for which they don’t.

TV reporters go after the Quick and Dirty

Since most stations only have a few reporters, each must turn a story every single night – almost always assigned at mid-morning. They tend only to go after sure things – events, crimes, and other stories where the interviews and visuals can be set up in an hour, gathered by lunchtime,
copy written by early afternoon, and edited with video by 5:00 p.m.

**Most Reporters are not Experts**

Field reporters who cover health, city hall, police and fire are the only those who have more than a cursory understanding of their beats. Education, industry, utilities, environment and business are not well covered – especially in the suburbs – because general assignment reporters don’t set foot in those places except when working on a feature story or covering a crisis. Reporters have little background and few unofficial sources to cover these important segments of our society. There will be very few stories on school lunches, test scores, dropouts, industry price fixing, wage rates, credit card come-ons, or hundreds of other stories requiring some real research. Reporters will cover city hall politics in their market, but will not bore viewers with suburban issues unless the newspaper, which has the staff to keep tabs on them, first discovers controversies.

**There’s Just No Time to get all the Facts**

Since most TV stories are prepared in half a day, reporters just write around missing elements they can’t confirm; they do this by further generalizing their copy so they won’t be wrong. An incomplete story is not as faulty as a story with factual errors. Therefore, they just get rid of the facts they can’t verify.

**Yesterday Doesn’t Exist In TV**

“When” has traditionally been one of the five W’s (who, what, when, where and why). In TV, the “when” is always a big deal and TV people always use “when” as if the event just happened or is happening now. The objective is to let viewers think they are getting the latest news, rather than “old news.”

The rule for the ten pm or eleven p.m. newscasts is to make the stories sound refreshed. If an accident happened at four pm, many stations will simply say, “Police investigators tonight are trying to find out why a young girl was run down.” Almost every story will have tonight in it. The word “yesterday” will not be used. Producers simply can’t afford their stories to sound old. Stations go to these
lengths so the viewers will watch both newscasts. How many times have you heard the tease “New At Eleven!”?

**TV Loves the ‘But’ Word**

For some reason TV people love the word ‘but.’ Sometimes it is used to create controversy when there is none. If there are no conflicting interviews, producers will make up a conflict using the “but” word with some syntax like, “Most people in this small community think their streets are safe, BUT we found a resident who doesn’t believe what the police are saying.”

**You Have Not Seen Desperation**

What can be more disappointing to a reporter than to find out that a story doesn’t turn out as big as it sounded during the morning editorial meeting? Now it is up to the reporter to convince the producer back at the station, who is depending on the story that “the story’s just not there.” You have not seen desperation until you’ve seen a reporter have an interview fall through. Before noon he will be looking for a warm body to give him just one sound bite to build a story around. At that point anyone will do for that ten-second sound bite needed for story credibility.

**Exclusive**

Every once in a while, a TV news reporter gets a tip that turns out to be news that the newspaper hasn’t discovered yet. TV people will lead with anything they actually enterprise because they are very proud of themselves on these occasions. They get all excited and remind you “As we first told you in our exclusive story at six…” If it is really important, it will make the paper and be on other stations. If it is not, it won’t. In either case, other TV stations will do everything they can to ignore the competitor’s “exclusive.” TV stations have no trouble stealing from the newspaper, but they have too much pride to “react” to a broadcast competitor. The best way to tell if a story you see is more hype than important is to see what the newspapers and the other TV stations do. Other media outlets will not ignore a truly important story.
Pack Journalism

One reason reporters stand around at a news story watching each other is that they’re under incredible pressure not to be beaten by their competitors. Reporters gather outside waiting for something newsworthy to happen or for the victim or witness to happen by. Everybody has to get a piece of the action because after all the stories are written, their news directors will watch all the stories on each station and compare them to the final product on his own station. If another station has a better story, he’ll question his own reporter on why that happened. No reporter likes to be embarrassed in that manner. At any major scene nobody wants to leave first lest somebody else might get a scoop. Reporters are certainly aware they sometimes come across a bit like a group of buzzards, but that image isn’t nearly as fearful as getting a good chewing out from the boss.

Public Interest vs. Doing No Harm

The media occasionally shows restraint with obvious incidents like terrorism and hostage taking. Unfortunately they tend to be single-minded about the notion that the public has a right to know everything. Suffering from that notion sometimes is good taste, rights of individuals to due process, and the respect for privacy – especially the privacy of ordinary people. Too often the media seems willing to sacrifice individuals for this greater good of “the public’s right to know.” Sometimes the media disguises its motivation to just get a good story with the excuse that it is acting in the public’s right. That may be defendable, but it’s not always honest.

Seasoned politicians know when they’re being tricked and trapped and they are usually able to escape unfair questions. However, most ordinary citizens, especially youngsters in a situation like Columbine, have no idea what the ramifications to them personally will be when they openly answer reporters questions, which will be edited and widely broadcast. Reporters have been known to take advantage of that naiveté.

Perhaps ordinary citizens drawn into the public limelight should be treated as ‘non-combatants’ – and handled more delicately. Perhaps TV and newspaper reporters should read them a form of the “Miranda Warning,” telling the citizen that they talk at their own personal risk -- that they
may be shunned by friends or even fired by their bosses if they misspeak before a video camera or utter some embarrassing comment for print.

Reporters and video editors have total control when they sit down at their keyboards. Most often supervisors do not preview stories before broadcast. In fact, more often than not, the stories are finished just before broadcast time. Thankfully most TV reporters consider the ethical aspects of ‘doing no harm to the innocent’ as they hastily write or edit their stories. Hiding behind the “public’s right to know” or “we didn’t have time to edit” are not excuses for failing to consider the ethical issue of doing no harm.

**News of the Future**

Computer technology will probably replace local stations, as we know them and certainly TV newscasts. This will happen as computers increase in speed and modems are replaced by the higher bandwidth of wired cable. We have seen the evidence already, first with audio, which requires less bandwidth. Next comes video. The point and click selection process of interactive communications will eliminate the need for newsreaders and the teams of “friendly” news anchors. Newspapers and TV stations are experimenting with Internet delivery. One day in the not too distant future, the web, not the newscast, will be the major delivery system for video news.

**Viewers will decide What Is News**

At the present, viewers have to sit through a half hour of spoon fed information -- divided up by long commercial breaks and the anchor telling viewers why they should keep watching awhile longer. Essentially, people have to sit passively through material they don’t care about in hopes they will see something they do. When the Internet becomes a bit faster and more interactive, viewers will not sit through newscasts, they will create their own.

People will not wait for a newscast and sit through a beginning-to-end news presentation. In the future viewers will be selecting not newscasts, but news stories.

Ratings will be instantaneous… by page-hit count! Essentially, interactive viewer selection will put the control of what people see in the hands of viewers themselves.
Media Mafia

During your stint as a PIO, CPO, Traffic Investigator, Patrol Officer or Detective, you will have dealings with the media. Although you are the one with the badge and the gun, do not be under the misapprehension that you can handle or are better than a reporter or photographer making only $375.00 a week. The press core is a kind of mafia family. The head of the family of the newspaper bunch is the publisher, bureau chiefs, political reporters and columnists. They usually can be snowed if you take them into your confidence once in a while. They are part of the establishment; you can make them an offer they can’t refuse.

What you have to worry about are the foot soldiers in the families who wear turtleneck sweaters, untied ties, socks and clothes that don’t match. Every one of them has a contract out on you. These soldiers, both male and female, are the ones standing out shivering in the cold and rain for hours waiting for one morsel of information while you are inside the building with the body or sitting inside your cruiser or accident van working on a report.

Underpaid and overworked, these soldiers of the media mafia all have fantasies of becoming another Woodward, Bernstein or Barbara Walters. They know the only way they can do it is over your dead body. You would do well not to underestimate them just because they eat their lunch at McDonald’s and take notes with a 49-cent Bic pen.

Unresponsive to flattery, these soldiers are not impressed with titles and that you’ve been on the Department for 20 years that you are a Lieutenant or you’re in charge of the scene. Most of them have never worn a tie in their lives. They live in a jungle and are constantly scrounging for food for their stories or pictures for their cameras. They have the killer instinct and would just soon dine on your carcass as the next public official’s.

The “electronic mafia” is something else again. You have to keep in mind that every TV reporter sent out on a story has only one goal in mind, and that is to get it on the air that night. In order to do that, they have to provoke you into saying something newsworthy and if you don’t say anything of importance, they’ll be satisfied with 30 seconds of

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1 Taken in part from a satire by Art Buchwald
you bumping your head on your car or your cap blowing off and you chasing it down the street.

The main difference between the print media mafia and the electronic soldiers is that when a story appears in the newspaper about something you said, you could always deny it. But if you deny something attributed to you on television, they will show you denying it and then replay the tape of you saying it.

Now that you understand how the media mafia works, it’s up to you to decide how to handle it. But don’t make the mistake of threatening the soldiers after they’ve written something you don’t like by saying you know the president of their company... because in almost all cases, they don’t!
Chapter Three

Media Coverage:
What Are We Up Against?

Tips

Tips on Getting Your Good News Story On TV or In the Newspaper

When you’ve worked hard to plan and coordinate a special community policing event and then you’re left wondering why no TV or newspaper reporter or photographers showed up to take pictures and report on all the great and wonderful things you did, there has to be a reason.

Here are a few of the things you may not have thought of:

Television stations and newspaper offices receive hundreds of faxes each day from various PR firms, companies, hospitals, civic organizations, neighborhood associations, city marketing offices, and law enforcement. And they’re all asking for reporters or photographers to cover their Happy News (as the media describes it) event. It’s important to remember that newspapers and TV stations have only so many reporters/photographers (budget expenses) to cover events. And what gets priority coverage... Late Breaking News!

Faxes coming to newspapers and TV stations are first reviewed by city editors or assignment managers and they will be looking quickly for information that is interesting, different, unusual, first time or ties in to a previous story that has been aired or written about. Typically the general
public will call the newspapers or stations and say, “Did you get my fax?” It’s impossible for the editors to remember all the hundreds of faxes. Your PIO, or whoever is responsible for media liaison, is in the best position to help provide follow-up to faxes regarding law enforcement events. They are talking to the editors and assignment managers several times a day and usually know what type of news day is occurring. On a busy news day, forget about getting any coverage.

At your law enforcement agency, the PIO is the best person to “pitch” your event or story idea to the assignment managers and editors. At a TV station, the assignment manager then has to “sell” what the PIO has pitched (your story idea) to the show producer. It’s the producer that makes the decision for a story to get on the air. TV news directors, editors, assignment managers and producers meet several times a day to review stories, what’s going to lead the news that evening and how to cover other late breaking news with available manpower. Your event could be discussed at that time, but it’s the assignment manager that has to do the majority of the selling.

At the newspapers, the “cop reporter” is probably the best person to help “sell” your event to the city editor. They are always looking for a good “people” stories and like the TV assignment managers, they are calling the PIO several times a day to see what’s going on. Therefore, your PIO is in the best position to “pitch” your event for coverage. Just as in TV, the newspaper editors meet several times a day to discuss what their reporters are working on, what scheduled events are happening or any late breaking news. It’s at that time your event will get consideration.

Each station has a “Planner” and it’s that person who works with the assignment editors and producers on stories that are coming up later in the week. Many happy news stories may be produced and held to a later day when it’s slow news day. This is often referred to a putting something on the “Evergreen Tree” (completed stories ready for airing). Producers can then go to the “tree” and pull something off for the newscast.

Weekends are times when TV stations need stories, but it’s also the time when most stations don’t have a full complement of news crews. Therefore, they usually only cover late breaking events. During the week they may have 8 crews vs. only 4 on the weekends.
Some companies (Busch Gardens) provide their own video (new baby animal born) and a press release to the stations. If it’s professionally done, it’s almost a guarantee to get on the air. The producers will write a script IF they decide to use it. Many times they will use it as a “kicker” (funny story at the end of a newscast) to leave the viewers feeling good.

Many stories will have “legs,” (stories written about for several days) which may generate follow-up coverage the next day or later in the week, i.e., Baby Tiger Getting Stronger; Homeless Woman Adapting to Her New Home; Injured Officer Takes First Steps and Crime Victim Fights Back, Organizes Crime Watch.

“Good News” is and always has been a tough sell, but it can be done. Crime and weather will always lead the news. Sometimes the event by itself is not news; it’s the underlying story that’s really the news. What does the ground-breaking represent? How will the demolition of a “Crack House” improve the neighborhood? You must get the reporter thinking not just what the event is, but why. Don’t assume the reporter knows this. Always point out the little things that affect the big picture.

So the next time you are planning an event and you would like TV to show up, step back and ask yourself, “Why Would I Cover This? Why Would I Want to Watch This? Is There a Hook? Has It Been Done Before? Would My Neighbor Want to Watch This On TV or Read It In the Newspaper?”

Remember, the event must be “pitched” and the best person to help is your PIO. It’s easy to get TV to a homicide, but a crime watch/traffic safety rally takes some planning. There must be an unusual twist or hook. Does it tie into some other newsworthy story, i.e. “Pedestrian fatalities are down because of__________.” Don’t get discouraged when all your ideas or releases are not used. Don’t ever say “They’re not interested.” They really are. They just need to know about it, but not at the last minute. Remember, if you don’t try, then you won’t get even one story!

Never expect the assignment manager or editors to “promise” to cover your event. A day doesn’t past that someone doesn’t call a newsroom, complaining his or her event didn’t get coverage and that the editor, assignment manager or reporter had “promised.” There is an unwritten rule in
every newsroom, You Never Promise Coverage! Why? The chance of late breaking news is too great.

If your agency is in a rural area, then reporters covering your agency will probably work out of a “Bureau.” It’s important that you develop a liaison with them, as they have more flexibility to cover your event than a reporter from the main office.

All newspapers and TV stations do research and the research shows that readers and viewing public like to read about and see stories about the “Average Joe,” not the shirt and tie crowd. They identify and relate to people like themselves. That’s why it’s important to have citizens in your story, i.e., “Neighbor Holds Burglar until Officers Arrive!” “Citizen Helps Police Chase Down Armed Robber!” “Crime Victim Starts Crime Watch!”

Tips for Getting Your Good News on TV or In the Newspaper

1. You must let the media know. Don’t assume they know. Follow up with phone calls.
2. Always coordinate with your PIO. They can help “pitch” your event.
3. Have your PIO fax a one (1) page brief on the event several days in advance.
4. Try to have a unique or funny title, something to attract attention.
5. Be sure to include all the W’s. Who, What, Where, When, Why.
6. Always include a contact name, phone numbers and after hours number.
7. Also think about photo opportunities for newspaper photographers.
8. For TV, don’t schedule your event between 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.
9. The best time to have a “Scheduled Event” for TV is 9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
10. Kids and animals always help get coverage, i.e., K-9 demo.
11. There is no such thing as a bad idea.
12. Assignment Managers and Editors are looking for stories that are:

- Interesting
- Stimulating
- Significant
- Warm and fuzzy
- Broad appeal
- Average citizen can identify

Example

**Attempt Homicide, St. Anthony's Hospital Suspect Arrested**

**Offense #:**

**Occurred:**

**Location:**

**Suspect:**

**Charges:**

A female employee at St. Anthony's Hospital was working in her office when the suspect approached her. He proceeded to rob her, attempted to sexually assault her and then strangled her to the point she passed out.

Investigators were able to identify the suspect from fingerprints left at the crime scene through the Automated Fingerprint Information System (AFIS). Investigators coordinated with the suspect's Probation Officer and learned the suspect was being treated for seizures at Tampa General Hospital. With the assistance of Tampa Police officers, they located the suspect leaving the hospital on Wednesday,
February 7, 2001 at 7:30 pm. He was arrested on the above listed charges, no bond.

The suspect has a prior arrest and criminal history for:

- 1977 Armed Robbery
- 1984 Sexual Battery, Kidnapping
- 1986 Attempt Homicide
- 1997 Prostitution
- 1998 Sexual Battery

The suspect had been sentenced on the Sexual Battery in 1998 to ten (10) years, eight (8) years was suspended. He was released from prison on November 26, 2000 and was on probation. He is a registered sexual offender.

The detective in charge of the case is _________

We have emailed the Press Release and photos of the suspect.

Thanks, _________, PIO

Phone Number
Attempt to Identify Victim

Offense #:
Occurred:
Location:
Victim:

Was wearing 3 Rings and a bracelet (pictures available)

On February 15, 2001 at 0413 hours, we received a call of a possible fire at United Methodist Church. Fire Dept. units responding found the victim on fire in the field behind the church. This is being investigated as a possible Homicide and investigators are asking for assistance in identifying the victim.

Anyone who recognizes the jewelry found on the victim or has any information which could assist in identifying the victim is asked to call Detective __________

Thanks, __________, PIO

Phone
Example

St. Petersburg Police Department

Public Information Office

Press Release

06-20-01

Homicide Suspect Arrested

St. Petersburg Police arrested the suspect in a homicide, which occurred Sunday, June 17, 2001. The victim was found at _________ South. ____________ was charged with 1 count of homicide and three counts of attempt homicide. Suspect was booked into Pinellas County Jail yesterday afternoon.

The case began Saturday, June 16, 2001 in the ____________ Avenue South when the victim exchanged heated words which later evolved into a physical confrontation. At this time the suspect made threats. Later that night the suspect returned in a blue Ford Explorer, after an exchange of more words, the suspect allegedly fired several shots at the victim and two of the victim's friends. The shots missed. Police responded to the area on a "Shots Fired" complaint, neither the suspect nor the victim was found at the scene.

Then Sunday morning, June 17, 2001, the suspect returned and exchanged more words with the victim. At this time one shot was fired from the Blue Ford Explorer hitting the victim in the upper torso. The victim then ran several blocks to ______ Avenue South, collapsing in the front yard. The paramedics pronounced the victim dead at the scene.

Anyone with additional information is asked to contact Det. ___________, Homicide, (727) Phone.

A picture of the arrested suspect will be posted on the Media Alert Web site.

__________, Public Information Office, St Petersburg Police (727) Phone
Offense #: The St. Petersburg Police Marine Unit today recovered the body of a W/M, 35 to 40 years of age floating in the bay. The U.S. Coast Guard notified the St. Petersburg Police after a fisherman found the body. The St Petersburg Police Homicide Unit is handling the case as a suspicious death. There were no obvious signs of injury to the body. The body was turned over to the Pinellas County Medical Examiner's Office who will determine the cause of death.

Our agency received a report that the Tampa Police Department investigated a suspicious circumstance on the Friendship Trail (The Old Gandy Bridge) when some property was found on the trail. It is unknown at this time if the body and yesterday's incident are related. There was no identification found on the body.

__________, Public Information Office, St Petersburg Police (727) Phone
Chapter Four

Media Skills for Law Enforcement
“They’re Here!”

Facts About the Media

• Not going to go away
• By not talking is not going to make the reporter go away
Why Don’t We

• Try to understand them
• How they operate
• How they go about their business
• Then, maybe we can “Use Them”
  – How?

“I Don’t Talk to the Media”

• “They’re a bunch of vultures”
• “All they want to do is embarrass you”
• “Only interested in the negative”
But If Your Want to Get Positive Headlines

- Police Sweep Up Dealers!
- 15 Arrested In Crackdown!
- Neighbors Join Police To Clean Up Street!
- Tip Leads To Arrest Of Southside Rapist!

Child Found

Then We Have To

- Learn to deal with the media
- *But remember*, we are going to do it on our terms
Throw Them A Bone

- Give them something they can use
- Don’t automatically shut them out
- You must occasionally “feed them”
- You control the food (information)

How Much to Tell

- Media – Maximum information vs. minimum delay
- Law Enforcement – Public vs. Investigative Information
  - Protecting our evidence
  - Protecting our witnesses
  - Complying with Public Records Law
Media’s Strange Jargon
Today we’re going to discuss.....

- On/Off the Record
- B-Role
- Sound Bite
- Not for Attribution
- Color
- Legs
- Hook
- Slant

Is Police Media Relations A Game?

- You bet!
- Your game skills
- Level the playing field

video
Better Media Skills

- Better media skills does not mean that you have to give reporters everything they ask for.
- It means working toward a win-win solution:
  - We (law enforcement) get to take a problem off the street.
  - News media get to inform the public.

The Public Wants to Know About Your Successes

- They want to support law enforcement.
- The good news will help offset the bad news that will probably happen sooner or later.
- Unfortunately some officers try to hide their good work.
Today, We See Citizens:

- Afraid of crime/terrorists
- Sympathetic to law enforcement
- Critical of the media for being too arrogant

At the Same Time…

The Media Sees Their Role As:

- Journal of Record
- Public’s eye
- Representatives of the public
- Responsible for telling the public what went on in their community
- “We ask the community’s questions”
- “The community is our readers / viewers”
Law Enforcement Saw Its Relationship With the Media Change in the 60's

- A more liberal press no longer accepted just the police side
- Police/media relations became polarized and embittered
- Liberal court decisions involving the media gave little comfort to law enforcement

Effective Media Skills Slide # 16

Prior to 1974

- “Police Secrets Rule”
  - Confidential
- After 1974, the public records act (government in the sunshine) changed the way we did business with the media.
- Chapter 119 F.S.

Effective Media Skills Slide # 17
After 1974

- State Law Introduced us to new terms
  - Public Information
  - Investigative Information

Five Key sections in Chapter 119 F.S.

- Active Investigations
- Complaints Against Law Enforcement
- 911 Recordings
- New Juvenile Law
- Security
What is... Public Information?  
Chapter 119.07 F.S.

- Time, date, location and nature of a reported crime
- Name, sex, age, and address of a person arrested
- Name, sex, age and address of a victim of a crime, except a sexual offense or child abuse.
- Time, date, location of the incident and of the arrest
- Crime charged
- Documents given to the person arrested (complaint/arrest affidavit)

What is... Investigative Information?  
Chapter 119.07 F.S.

- The information must be active and ongoing
- Must be criminal investigative/intelligence
- Exemptions
  - Lab tests
  - Reports of investigators/informants
  - Surveillance activity
  - Ongoing criminal activity
  - Anticipated criminal activity
Complaints Against Law Enforcement
Chapter 112.533

- Confidential until the investigation is no longer active or until
- Agency head provided written notice to the officer that the agency has concluded the investigation with a finding to either proceed or not proceed with disciplinary action or the filing of charges.
- The complaint and all the information gathered in the investigation becomes public record at the conclusion of the investigation or when the investigation becomes inactive.
- The investigation is presumed inactive if no finding is made within 45 days after the complaint is filed.

Effective Media Skills Slide # 22

Complaints Against Law Enforcement
Chapter 112.533 (Continued)

- If the officer resigns prior to completion, the information becomes a public record unless there is active criminal investigative information.
  - Discovery
- Day of Chain of Command Board
  - Expect media requests for any “All Personnel” memos released after the board concludes
  - Expect the media to immediately request to review the entire case, after the board concludes. You have the right to excise exempt information.

Effective Media Skills Slide # 23
911 Voice Recordings  
Chapter 365.171 F.S.

- A tape recording of a 911 call is a public record after deletion of the exempt information.
- Exemption
  - Name, address, telephone number or personal information of a person requesting emergency service or reporting an emergency.

Juvenile Offender Records  
Chapter 985.04 F.S.

- After October 1, 1994, age restrictions for juveniles 16 and older were eliminated.
- Name, photograph, address and crime or arrests are public record
  - Taken into custody for a violation of law which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony or
  - Found by a court to have committed three (3) or more violations of law which, if committed by adult, would be a misdemeanors.
Security Chapter 119.07 F.S.

- Exemptions
  - Information relating to State Security Systems
    - Records
    - Photographs
    - Audio/Visual presentations
    - Schematic diagrams
    - Surveys
    - Recommendations
  - Surveillance Techniques
    - Emergency response procedures
    - Emergency response personnel

What Makes an Incident News

- Good news is expected
- Bad news is different
- Tie-in to another story
- Public figure
- Threat to public safety
- Late breaking
- Visual
How Do They Find Out?

- Public Calls… “See News Happening… call us”
- Scanners
- Call-A-Rounds
- Stringers
- Dime Droppers

Who Decides What Gets Coverage

- News directors
- Managing editors
- TV executive producers
- City editors
- Assistant editors
- Assignment managers
Chapter Four-Media Skills for Law Enforcement

Underpaid and Overworked

- They all have fantasies of becoming another Woodward and Bernstein or Tom Brokaw.
- NY Times
- Washington Post
- NBC
- ABC
- CBS
- FOX
- CNN

Print Media vs. TV

The main difference between the print media and the TV media is...

Print
- you can deny saying it

TV
- they will show you denying what you said and then, they’ll replay the video tape of you saying what you just denied you said.
Who Plays a Key Role

• Assignment Managers
  – Answer news phone
  – Keep in touch with reporters
  – Help sell your story idea to executive producers/editors
  – Call law enforcement
  – Look for story ideas

Effective Media Skills Slide # 32

Satellites
Make Today’s News Immediate

• Technology
• You must expect the media to arrive in your community soon after a news worthy incident occurs

Effective Media Skills Slide # 33
The “Jargon”... What it Means

- On/Off the Record
- Background
- Not for Attribution
- Sound bite
- TV “package”
- Legs
- “B” Roll

Not Talking Is Not Going to Make the Reporter Go Away

- A reporter's philosophy is
  - If your mother says she loves you, check it out
Use Terms the Public Can Understand

- Not ascertained
- Not perpetrator
- Not legal talk

Reporters Will Be Looking for Color

- Don't forget, their color quite often is your evidence
- Example:
  - There was blood all over the white shaggy carpet
  - The body was moved from the bedroom to the kitchen
  - A fingerprint was found on the broken ax handle
Slant

- Direction of the story
- Reporter will usually have quotes from other sources on how bad the problem is
- Don’t be afraid to ask the reporter what direction his story is going
- Never, never lie about a problem
- Neighborhood association president
  - Bad answer
  - Better answer

Hook

- Reporters will look for ways to “hook” a current incident to a previous story in another city
  - Chase policy
  - Deadly force policy
  - Handcuff policy
  - Domestic abuse policy – “O.J. Simpson”
- Don’t play the “what if” game
Enterprise Story

- An enterprise story is not to be shared with the reporters' competition
  - Example: “Crime Victim Starts Crime Watch”
- On the other hand...
- All of the media helped keep a story alive
  - Example “Southside Rapist”

Controversy

- Reporters will always be on the lookout for controversy
- Don’t be the one to provide it
- Always think before you speak
- Don't get “jammed” thinking the reporter's job is to make you look good
- Your case closures, reduction in neighborhood crime and arrests will do that
Pink Elephant

- If you don’t want to see it in print,
  - Don’t draw attention to it……
  - Don’t bring it up, because once you do, it’s like a pink elephant

Never Forget

- You are not the story
- The incident is the story
- The reporter’s thinking:
  - Why am I here?
  - How much time do I have?
  - How much play is this going to get?
It’s OK to Ask Reporters:

• It is within your rights to ask the reporter to go back over his/her notes if you feel the reporter didn't fully understand your response
• You can usually tell if the reporter doesn’t fully understand the subject being discussed

Watch Out For:

• Some reporters have been known to play officers off one another
• Example:
  – “I spoke to __________ and he said ______”
  – “No, that’s not true, it happened this way”
When a Reporter Has Asked for an Interview on a Particular Subject

- Always have all the subject matter experts sit in on the interview
  - Crime prevention expert on environmental design
  - Traffic investigator
- This will eliminate the potential of the reporter calling others for conflicting statements
  - He said, she said
  - This is a must in major investigations

Don’t Forget

- It’s your interview
- Have 2-3 “Key” messages clearly in your mind before you start talking
- It’s OK to repeat “Key” messages
Be Careful of the Telephone Interview

- It’s always best to look the reporter in the face
  - That way you can tell if you’re clearly explaining your topic and does the reporter understand you
- Does he/she have a quizzical look on their face?
  - You can’t see that over the phone
- A quick fact over the phone is ok

When Being Interviewed

- Be careful not to let the reporter get you into the danger zone
- You always want to keep your interview at a conversation level
- Know your tension level and work to lower your anxiety level
When Doing a TV Interview

• Look at the reporter, not the camera
• It is always more natural to respond to a person and you will come across better to the viewer
• The photographer may be moving around and you will be distracted if you try to watch him
• Stand and talk naturally, not stiff
• Always assume the camera is on, all the time.

Effective Media Skills Slide # 50

Be Aware
That Reporters May Ask a Question

• Then leave the microphone in front of you, hoping you will keep talking and talking and talking
• “Hot Mike” trick
• Don't ramble, especially on camera
• Rambling leads to “they took me out of context”
• Think ten second sound bite
  – Remember, this takes practice

Effective Media Skills Slide # 51
Learn How to “Bridge”

• The fact is…
• The real question is…
• The truth of the matter is…
• What’s more important is…

No Comment

• Saying “No Comment” and walking away from the camera presents a picture that the public often identifies with criminals
• Not responding or being evasive will give the impression that the incident is more important than it really is
• Why not try something to the effect:
  – “I'm sorry, it's too early in the investigation to discuss your question. Hopefully I can have something for you in the next hour.”
Your Department Will Be Perceived by Your Attitude on Camera

- Be careful not to come across as hostile or defensive
- That will only confirm what some of the public has read about law enforcement
- Think perception

Effective Media Skills Slide # 54

Media Loves Victims

- Reporters see their mission to be on the side of the “little guy,” the “Average Joe”
- Neighborhood victimized by burglaries, drugs, auto thefts
- Show officers helping rid neighborhood of a community problem
Show and Tell
What You’re Doing to Fix the Problem

• Provide the opportunity to show the neighborhood and you working on the problem
• Especially with TV, you must think visual. Example:
  – Officers writing traffic tickets after neighborhood complains about speeding
  – Think visual
video

Good Quotes

• Say what makes a good quote
• Reporters are always listening for good quotes
• “Will it work in my story?”
  – Example:
    “The officer obviously saved the life of the woman.”
video
Crime Scene

- It's important to tape off two (2) crime scenes, (inner and outer)
- This will give supervisors, PIO, CPO an area away from the media to discuss the investigation and what is to be released
- You need time to get your thoughts together before making any statements

A Reporter Doing a Stand-up at a Scene Creates the Perception:

- I'm at the scene and know what I’m talking about
- You, as the officer, detective or CPO, will also be seen as the expert
- You give credibility to the story
- They need you
Reporters: at a Scene

- Will be working the neighborhood, including:
  - Talking to the same witnesses or observers as the officers
- Don't assume they won't
- News photographers will be taking many pictures or video to tell “the story”

The National Media

- Will always be more aggressive, more hostile
- They don't worry about getting information from you the next day
  - They have gone back to New York, Atlanta or Miami
- The local reporters have to work with you
  - They need your help
When You Don’t Know

- Don't be afraid to say “I don't know, but I will find out and get back with you”
- Don't make-up something just to make yourself look smart
  - This tactic is guaranteed to blow-up in your face
- Never, never try to “wing it”
- Never, never lie

Don’t be Pressured

- Don't be pressured into making a statement if you are not ready
- Always get your facts together
- There should be an initial statement, followed by several updates
Reporters Will Always Ask Questions That You Don’t Want to Answer

• Don’t get mad at the reporters for asking tough questions. They are only doing their job
• Don’t get mad and play into their hand
  – This will provide color for their story

Tough Questions

“I don’t have an answer for you at the moment. Let me think about it and then I’ll respond. OK, next question”
Stay Cool

- Some interviewers deliberately seek to provoke
- Don’t take it personally
- It’s just a technique to elicit more colorful information or controversial quotes
- Work on staying calm and unemotional
- Don’t you become the story

Don’t Answer for Someone Else

- “I didn't hear (the Chief/Sheriff) say that, therefore I can't respond. It would be improper for me to assume what he meant.”
If the Reporters Get Only One Side
You'll Read Only One Side

• “Ambush Interview”
• It’s always best to get your side out first
• You set the tone of the story, not the other side
• Be careful on a potentially embarrassing situation. Example:
  – When a reporter wants you to look at a news photo and
    then asks for your reaction
• Always think before you respond
• Colorful quote

video  Effective Media Skills Slide # 68

I Never Thought It Would Happen to me!

• It's important to recognize that negative news can occur in any
  patrol zone or CPA at any time, day or night
• Will you be ready when the media arrives?
  – Who speaks?
  – Have a plan
  – Have a backup
• The first step to better media skills is to recognize the above
  statement

video  Effective Media Skills Slide # 69
Sometimes
You Have to Tell It Like It Is

- A key to earning and retaining credibility with the media is to take the bitter with the sweet
- Understand that bad news is good news to editors
- They know that bad news is more avidly read than good news

Unfavorable Situations

- The best way for handling bad news is to get it out of the way and prevent it from becoming a bigger or continuing news story
- The best policy is to respond forthrightly to questions, with emphasis on plans for remedial action
- Avoid “New Evidence Uncovered”
- Be careful of an apology. Legally it is an “admission against interest”
- Work with your legal officer
Always be Pro-active When Dealing With the Media on a Sensitive Issue

- Don’t wait to be asked for a particular report or statement
- It’s always less impact if you release it first
- The reporter can’t say to his editor, look what I discovered, making it an even bigger story
- Remember, you are not the story
- The story is the incident

Speed is Key to Resolving Your PR Nightmare

- Longer the situation drags on unresolved, the greater the damage and harder it will be to fix.
- Investigate, yes, but start talking, not stonewalling.
- Example: “Our DUI squad has an outstanding record. The facts show that DUI arrests are up compared to a year ago.”
- Show public that you are working on the problem.
It’s Ok to Complain

• Best way
  – Call the reporter first
  – Ask for a correction or retraction
  – Do as soon as possible-in person/telephone
  – Explain why you’re concerned
  – “I know you want to be accurate”
  – Give credit where credit is due
  – Don’t threaten! Remember, it’s on the record
  – Listen to the reporter’s response
  – Ask a third party if you’re being too thin-skinned. Your PIO can help.

Not Satisfied

• Next Step:
  – Contact the editor or news director and also let the reporter know
  – Explain the problem and results of your discussion with the reporter
  – Be calm and analytical
  – Ask if others have complained
  – Expect the editor/news director to defend the reporter
  – Don’t expect correct action on the spot
  – Listen to the editors/news directors feedback
  – Continue to make it clear what you expect
Still Not Satisfied

• Other Means:
  – Put your complaint in writing
    • list all your facts
    • who you have talked to
    • what their responses were
  – Send copies to other media and local law enforcement
  – Try to get other reporters to do a story
  – Always leave the door open for further discussions and corrective action

• In the future
  – Tape interviews
  – Have a third party present
  – Provide written responses

A COPS Show of Your Own

• Taking advantage of Cable TV
• Federal Cable Act of 1984
• Cable companies must provide public access
• Franchise agreements vary
• Public vs. Government Access Channel
Understand That the Media and Law Enforcement Aren’t Partners

- They arrive at the crime scene with different purposes
- Reporters must remove themselves from the event
- Law enforcement cannot remove themselves from the event
- Even the appearance of taking sides, however casual or well intentioned, will erode the media’s credibility and public skepticism of law enforcement
Don’t Try to Get Buddy-Buddy with the Press

- A friendly and productive relationship can be developed without going overboard
- In fact, many reporters will resist too chummy a relationship to avoid impairing their own objectivity

Resist the Ego Trip

- It’s always fun to see yourself featured and quoted in the media
- Remember the best publicity is what advances the department as a whole
- Personal gratification should be a pleasant by-product
Remember...

In working with the media...
– “It’s important for everyone to recognize the fact that “you are a member of law enforcement and… cannot, not communicate.”

Perception

• Perception is Everything!
  – Be conscious of how your operation or effort is perceived.
  – *If the public doesn’t perceive it,* then it doesn’t make any difference what you’re doing.
Don’t Forget the Best Policy

It’s on the record *All The Time*

William G. Doniel
St. Petersburg Police Department
Retired Division Chief
Chapter Five

Practical

Officer Shooting

It’s 10 p.m., an officer has responded to a complaint about a man sitting in a car parked beneath a carport. The car’s alarm has gone off and the neighbors were complaining. The officer knows from communications, via the complainant, the alarm had been going off since 1:00 pm. and a white male has been sitting in the vehicle (burgundy BMW) underneath the carport while the alarm was sounding and had been doing so since 6:00 pm.

By the time the officer arrives, the man has left the vehicle and was on the patio, outside his upstairs apartment. As the officer climbed to the top of the stairs, the man appeared to be asleep in one of the chairs on the patio. The officer made several attempts to wake him. He detected an odor of alcohol. At this time, feeling the man was impaired, the officer called for a backup. The officer’s supervisor (sergeant) also arrives as a backup, due to the unknown true nature of the situation.

As the sergeant climbed the stairs, he noticed the man was awake and was looking for his keys to turn the car alarm off. The sergeant thought he recognized the man and asked if they had met the previous night. The man suddenly jumped up and grabbed two (2) large (champagne type) bottles, one in each hand and began moving toward the sergeant in a threatening manner.
Both officer thought the man was holding the bottles as if they were clubs and both drew their weapons. The sergeant repeatedly asked him to back away. The man continued to move closer to the sergeant, who was now forced back against the upstairs railing. The sergeant put his hand on the man’s chest and implored that he not make him shoot. The man began yelling, “Shoot me, shoot me!” and “Get out of here!” The officer re-holstered his weapon and considered using his OC spray, but determined it would not have an immediate effect and the over spray would more likely affect the sergeant and himself. The officer also considered using his ASP, but due to the man’s large size (6’3” 230 lbs.) determined that was not his best option and once again drew his gun.

The sergeant then said he would “back off” if the man would sit down. The man suddenly quit his aggressive behavior, returned to his chair and placed the bottles by his feet. The officer seeing this didn’t want the bottles used as a weapon again and with a leg sweep, kicked them off the patio.

The man reacted immediately, jumped to his feet, struck the officer in the chest and pushed him backward. The officer tried to grab the man’s arms and told him he was under arrest. Because of his large size, he was able to pull away from the officer and charged the sergeant. The sergeant (5’ 8” 160 lbs.) was spun around and forced against the rail with his back to the man. The officer came up from behind and tried to pull him off the sergeant.

As the sergeant turned to face the man, he once again pulled his weapon. The sergeant felt he was being pushed over the railing and could also feel the man pulling on his gun, trying to get it away. Seeing that the other officer had moved to the side and feeling he was about to lose his weapon or be thrown over the railing, the sergeant fired one shot. This did not have an effect on the man or eliminate the threat. The sergeant then fired a second round and the man fell down the stairs.

The time lapse was less than a minute and a half from the time the sergeant arrived to the time the shooting occurred. Fire Rescue responded and pronounced the man dead at the scene. Additional police personnel soon arrived, in addition to the Chief, Assistant Chiefs, Internal Affairs, PBA, Assistant State Attorney, Public Information and other support units to process the scene.
The victim was later identified as a w/m 43. He had no previous arrest record, but police records indicated officers had responded to his address six times in the last ten years. The calls ranged from Check on Welfare, Baker Act, Mentally Ill Person, Suspicious Circumstances and (3) Noise Nuisances.

The sergeant is 45 and a 23-year veteran of the department.

**Discussion**

- What will be the headline in the paper the next day?

- How will TV play it at 11 p.m.? Remember it occurred at 10 p.m.

- What kind of TV coverage will there be the next day?

- What is some “color” in the story?

- Is there a “hook” possibility?

- What video will TV be looking to get?
• What picture will be in the newspaper that tells the story of the incident?

• How should the police treat the incident?

• What should be said to the arriving media?

• Do you think there will be any follow-up to this? If so what?

• How many days of follow-up coverage will it get in the newspapers or TV?

• Who will the media want to talk to? Why?
Camera Incident

It’s a warm summer afternoon; you have been named Acting Sergeant while your regular sergeant is on vacation. Over the radio you hear one of your officers going 10-50 (traffic stop) on a vehicle matching the description of a stolen auto. The city has been experiencing a rash of stolen autos and the Chief has been catching a lot of heat from City Hall. As you head in that direction, you now hear one of your newer officers respond as the primary backup. As you continue to move toward the units, you hear the vehicle has been stopped and the subjects are in custody.

As you arrive you observe the primary unit in the street, its red lights flashing, stopped directly behind the suspect vehicle, an older model Ford. The primary officer is handcuffing two white males (20 years of age) who are both fully clothed, lying on the ground. You also observe several other units arrive and begin working traffic around the stopped vehicles.

You notice the young officer, the primary backup on the call, standing by the arrested subjects. You also see two (2) news photographers from the local paper arrive and begin walking toward the arrested subjects. As they walk, they begin taking pictures. Almost immediately the young backup officer begins a dead run at the photographers and as he reaches them, grabs the strap of one camera and begins pulling on it in an obvious attempt to take it away from the smaller photographer.

As you begin to run toward the altercation, you observe the second photographer now beginning to take pictures of the incident in a rapid manner. From the time it took you to run across the street, the photographer had sustained cuts and bruises on his hand and the camera lens had been damaged.

As the supervisor, you now have control of the incident. The photographer has his camera back and the officer has been moved to another area of the scene. The photographer has called his editor and the chief photographer and informs you they are both on the way to the scene to make a formal complaint.
**Discussion**

- Will this make the paper tomorrow? ___________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________

- What type of coverage will it get? ___________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________

- Will the pictures be shown? How many? _______
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________

- Will the good auto theft arrest get any coverage? __
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________

- Will TV news do any follow up? Why? _________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________

- Will the Mayor/Chief get any mail? `__________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________

- Will the national press photography publications have any interest? ________________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________
  ____________________________________________
• What about the national news media?

• What does the scene supervisor do or say to soften what’s coming?

• What would you have done to prevent this from occurring?

• What positive press was lost because of the altercation?
Chapter Six

Learning From the Media

Learning From The Media Panel Discussion

The following are suggested topics for our discussion with members of the news media.

1. Discuss the role of the media as the “journal of record.” “What went on in the community today:”

2. Media is the representative of the public. Public can’t be everywhere. Public’s eye:

3. Discuss how technology has changed the news gathering business:
4. You (law enforcement) are different from citizens. You have power of arrest, take a life: 

5. Discuss Immediate, Late Breaking, Breaking It First, vs. Getting It Right. Demands on the reporter: 

6. Maximum information vs. minimum delay: 

7. Do headlines sell newspapers or is it habit or subscriptions? 

8. Is media a business? 

9. Coverage and manpower problem for the media. Do we send a crew or not? 

10. Good news is expected, bad news is different: 

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

11. How is the interview at the scene different than doing a feature piece at Headquarters? 

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

12. Demands on the reporter? Similar to police officer demands? 

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

13. What is news? Who decides? What is “news judgment”? 

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

14. Who decides what video gets on the air? Pictures in the newspaper? 

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

15. Who decides how much play a story gets? 

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
16. What are the TV/Print photographers looking for? Discuss Visual, Tell a Story: ________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

17. How important is your time? Discuss deadlines: ____

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

18. Like Law Enforcement, FACTUAL information is used in news gathering: ______________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

19. TV is a picture medium. TV needs to “Tell a story”: ___

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

20. Discuss media’s “Implied Right” to get information for the public: ________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

21. Give an example where an officer helped make the story better, more complete. Also, where officer could have, but did not: ________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________
22. Why do you think law enforcement officers are afraid to talk to the media? ________________
   ________________
   ________________
   ________________

23. Discuss ways for officers to be comfortable talking to the media: ________________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________

24. Discuss ways to avoid an inaccurate story: ________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________

25. Discuss how the officer should get his/her thoughts together. Don’t ramble: ________________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________

26. Explain how reporters don’t want to look bad either. TV or in print: ________________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________

27. Explain why a TV story has to be told in around 1:15 to 1:30 minute/seconds: ________________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________
    ________________
28. Discuss how the (officer) gives a story credibility. Public expects officer to respond: ________________

29. Don’t screw up on a slow news day: ________________

30. Reporters will ask questions you don’t want to answer. Don’t get mad and make the story bigger. They’re only doing their job: ________________

31. At a scene, reporters hear many rumors. Law Enforcement is to present “the facts:” ________________

32. In a crisis, you (law enforcement) are the EXPERT. Place yourself in the public’s position, “What’s going on in my City?” What you say is important: __________

________________________________________
Chapter Seven
What is Reporting?

Competent Reporting

Most editors will tell you competent reporting is the foundation of journalism. Without it, journalism cannot fulfill its function in a democracy; to give people information they need to make good decisions. Journalism oils the gears of a free society and keeps them moving.

Choosing a reporter requires an understanding of and passion for journalism’s essential role. Competent reporters are not passive. They assert their First Amendment rights on behalf of the public. They push for information that some wish to keep private. They accept the sometimes-unpleasant task of being the bearer of bad news.

Reporting presents the opportunity to test assumptions, reveal previously unseen connections, and create knowledge. It takes viewers, listeners, and readers where they won’t or can’t go on their own. It holds the powerful accountable. It gives voice to the voiceless. Journalists do what no other professionals do in a free society. To do that completely, journalists must be able to:

- Distill stories from masses of information.
- Know where to go to collect relevant documentation.
- Organize, sort, and analyze lots of sometimes-conflicting evidence.
• Find, develop, and maintain sources.
• Recognize a lead and know how to follow it.
• Enable reluctant sources to talk.
• Develop a variety of interview styles to match individual subjects.
• Be consciously curious.
• Imagine the visual and aural components to stories and integrate them from the start.
• Recognize their own assumptions, prejudices, and biases and test and challenge them.
• Know how the community works, who the power brokers are, where the money is.
• Be skeptical about even the usually reliable sources of information.
• Know their way around the community they cover, and where the centers of activity are.
• Think independently and sometimes contrarily to ensure fair and full coverage.
• Be persistent in the face of discouragement, and don’t be intimidated in the face of power.
• Be flexible and able to change directions when facts so require.
• Be reflective about their work and work processes to enable continual improvement.

Competent reporters for television, radio, and the internet use sound and video together with words to produce cohesive, compelling, packages. For newspapers, reporters must grasp the power of pictures and graphics to fully tell their stories. Print reporters must use their eyes as a camera, observing and recording telling scenes and details. Using all their senses, they bring to life for readers people and places that citizens must know. Competent reporters in all media understand that information is communicated not solely by words, but by images and sounds as well.

Competent reporters know how to cull stories from the world around them; to approach old stories in new ways; to find the unusual in the routine. Because they are the eyes and ears of the public, journalists need the courage to push them to see the unseen, hear the unheard, touch the un-
They do it on behalf of the people they serve. And when they do it well, they strengthen democracy.

## Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics

### Preamble

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

### Seek Truth and Report It

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.

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2 Sigma Delta Chi's first Code of Ethics was borrowed from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1926. In 1973, Sigma Delta Chi wrote its own code, which was revised in 1984 and 1987. The present version of the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics was adopted in September 1996.
• Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.

• Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.

• Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.

• Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.

• Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information, except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.

• Never plagiarize.

• Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.

• Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.

• Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.

• Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.

• Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.

• Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.

• Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.

• Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.
Minimize Harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

Act Independently

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
• Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
• Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
• Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage. Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money and avoid bidding for news.

Be Accountable

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

Journalists should:
• Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
• Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
• Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
•Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
• Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.
Chapter Eight

Facing the Camera

Your Role

Interviews are the basic tool of newsgathering. The reporter must rely on accounts of survivors, victims, eyewitnesses or investigators for information about accidents, crime or disasters. We all know that crime is a very complex subject and that is where you come in. As a representative of law enforcement, you will be seen as the subject matter expert. As we’ve previously discussed, you as the case detective, first officer on the scene, traffic investigator or community police officer, will be the person the media wants to interview, to quote, and especially the one they want to get on camera.

Most individuals in law enforcement have not had any formal training in facing the camera. Don’t feel alone. Stage-fright is America’s biggest fear. Nobody I know wants to look stupid, especially on TV. Therefore, there are several things you should be aware of before you find yourself staring into that penetrating lens and saying to yourself, what do I do now?
In the Field

If you’re working a zone, investigating an accident, acting as a scene supervisor or handling a problem in your CPA, there is always the possibility a reporter may show up at your location and request an interview. A case detective, out at a crime scene, is almost guaranteed to see a TV news crew. The following tip’s are to help you stay cool, calm and in charge when the camera’s red light is on!

1. Take a few moments and get your thoughts together before you cross under the yellow tape and open your mouth. Take a few deep breaths. It always helps. Once you start talking, it’s “On the Record.” Don’t forget, you’re the “subject matter expert,” the one with the information.

2. Be careful not to come across as hostile or defensive. You and your department will be perceived by your attitude on camera.

3. The reporter is only looking for a short sound bite that may explain the situation.

4. While being interviewed, be careful not to let the reporter get you into the danger zone. You always want to keep the interview at a conversation level. You should know your tension level and work to lower your anxiety level.

5. If it is your first interview on TV, tell the reporter. They will understand your anxiety and will work to make you at ease.

6. It is ok to ask the reporter what they are going to ask you. Explain that you do not want to be surprised, perceived as uninformed or embarrassed.

7. If it is a community-policing problem solving situation, tell the reporter what you are doing to fix the problem. Then provide the reporter and his camera crew the opportunity to show you working on the problem. Example: An officer is seen writing traffic tickets to reduce speeding in a school zone.

8. Remember the microphone is always on. Even when the camera is not on it’s tripod, the microphone is usually hot. The best rule is to consider the microphone is always on and don’t forget, it is on the record, all the time.
9. Don’t ramble. Rambling leads to getting what you said taken out of context.

10. If you find yourself rambling, it is ok to stop and start again. Explain to the reporter that you can do it better and can shorten your answer. TV likes short answers.

11. Do not say No Comment. You’re a professional and the one in charge. Use the TV camera to help you get public information out that will develop leads for your investigation.

12. Be aware that a reporter may ask you a question and then leave the microphone in front of you, hoping you will keep talking and talking and talking. Then, after it’s too late, you realize you’ve talked yourself into conflicting statements.

13. If you don’t know the answer to a question, say you don’t know. Do not try to wing it. That’s a sure fire way to really embarrass yourself. It is always ok to say, “I’m sorry I don’t know, but I’ll find out and get back with you.”

14. There will be questions asked that you may think are stupid and dumb or you just don’t want to answer. Do not get mad and give them color for their story that they were not expecting.

15. Do not try to answer for someone else. Say, I’m sorry, you’ll have to ask him that.

16. Be careful when a reporter shows you a photograph or video and wants an immediate reaction. “What’s your reaction to this? Aren’t you disturbed by what you see? What do you think when you look at this? Always think before you respond.

17. Do not fall into the what if trap, especially if the reporter wants you to discuss another law enforcement agency’s dilemma. A popular “what if” trap is “Firearms and Pursuit Policies.”

18. When doing a TV interview, look at the reporter, not the camera. It always looks more natural to respond to a person and you’ll be more comfortable. The cameraman will be moving around and you’ll be distracted if you try to watch him.
19. Be careful not to jingle the change in your pocket. Stand as you would talking to another person, not parade rest. This makes you look too stiff. Try to think of it as having a conversation. It’s not easy, but with experience you will get better.

20. Always remember, you are not the story. The story is the incident or the crime and that is what the reporters will be focusing on during the interview. They are not out to get you, but to get your thoughts as the subject matter expert.

21. Stay cool. Some reporters, especially the national media, deliberately seek to provoke responses with certain questions. Do not take it personally; it is just a technique to get more colorful information or controversial quotes for their story. Work on staying calm and unemotional.

22. In the field, a lot of information, especially at a crime scene, will be investigative. It is ok to say, “I’m sorry, at this time, that’s investigative information. We will be providing updates later this afternoon. Hopefully I will have more information that can be released at that time.”

23. Be careful of sensitive comments you may make to reporters off camera, thinking it’s off the record. Just because the camera’s not rolling, doesn’t mean it’s not on the record.
In the Studio

If you are scheduled to do a formal interview at the TV station, do your homework. Unlike the field interview, take advantage of the time you’ll have to prepare. It’s difficult enough to remember everything about your assignment when you are not under pressure. It is even more difficult during a stressful situation in front of all those TV lights. So before you head off to the studio, take a moment and review some time proven advice.

1. Do your homework. Read the newspapers and watch the TV for crime news. What’s going on in the law enforcement community? Brush up on current events that may affect the nature of your interview. The reporter will have information provided by their research assistant and will have done his/her own homework. Several examples are: crime stats comparing your city with surrounding cities; traffic fatalities (increase or decrease); pursuit or firearm policies; prisoner transport procedures; domestic violence procedures; medical treatment of prisoners and drug arrests (increase or decrease).

2. If possible, watch several editions of the TV show you will be on. Get to know the program’s format and personality of the host. This gives you a feeling of the show and is all part of your homework.

3. It is acceptable to ask in advance for topics to be covered. The reporter will provide them, but not the questions.

4. After watching the program, anticipate key questions and then prepare key answers.

5. Rehearse your answers out loud. Get comfortable with them. You want your answers to be natural, not forced. Always be you!

6. It is ok to challenge questionable facts and assumptions. Always be professional.

7. You are allowed to question dubious sources of information.

8. Always work to personalize your answers. “I will always remember the first time I had to investigate a DUI fatality. It is something I will never forget.”
And I guess that’s why I feel so strongly about DUI enforcement and why I am here today to talk about drinking and driving.”

9. Be aware of hidden agendas. You have the right to know if there will be other guests on the program with you. If so, what will be the nature of their role? It is acceptable to ask the reporter or host how much experience or knowledge they have on the topic(s) to be covered or why the topic was chosen.

10. Tell your story! Make the interview worthwhile for you. Think of the interview as an opportunity, not as a threat or confrontation. Regardless of the subject, there is always a way to make positive points. Get the facts out you want out. Especially those that will help develop investigative leads or solve a community problem.

11. Listen very carefully to each question. Questions that are “off the subject” may be a signal that the interviewer doesn’t understand the topic and you’ll want to offer a quick overview. Always be professional.

12. Speak only for yourself or your department, not for the law enforcement community as a whole, unless you have been designated as their spokesperson.

13. Do not be evasive. Evasiveness is a signal to the interviewer that you have something to hide. You can avoid this by anticipating questions and rehearsing your “key answers.”

14. Do not try to “wing it” and give “shoot from the hip answers.” If you don’t know, say it. If it’s “investigative information,” then explain that too.

15. It is ok to have index cards with you, but only if you need to remember certain numbers or exact language. You want to be spontaneous in your responses. Departments brochures are ok, i.e. Recruitment, Crime Prevention and Neighborhood Crime Watch.

16. Always try to be positive, not defensive. The camera will magnify either attitude to the viewer. Remember you have the “knowledge advantage.” Very seldom will the interviewer know anywhere near as much as you do about the law enforcement subject you’re discussing.
Media Guidelines

Each U.S. Attorney strives to maintain a positive and productive working relationship with federal, state and local law enforcement officials. There are times when they all work together on joint investigations and they want to let the community they serve know about the successful outcome of these efforts. This is often done through a “joint news conference” where agency representatives stand together and tell the public, through the news media, about the conclusion of the investigation.

It is important to note that the Department of Justice has strict media guidelines. They apply to all criminal and civil matters and cases, are intended to ensure that the media relations are coordinated so they serve the interest of the public’s right to know, but protect the interests of the particular case and of law enforcement.

Under the Department of Justice media guidelines, the responsibility in the Justice Department for all matters involving the local media is vested in the U.S. Attorney. Furthermore, the U.S. Attorney is responsible for media coordination within the Department of Justice on matters of multi-district, national or international importance.
Any agency, federal state, or local, which are handling any cases or matters to be prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney’s Office must comply with the Department of Justice Media Guidelines, the Local Rules of the District Court, and the media policies of the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

Joint Press Conferences and Releases

If the case is to be tried in Federal Court, the U.S. Attorney must approve all press conferences/releases sponsored by a local agency, including One-on-One Interviews.

If approval is granted, the local agency must be briefed by either the Public Affairs Specialist (PAS) or the Managing Assistant U.S. Attorney (MAUSA) on the Department of Justice guidelines and local federal rules on dealing with the media.
Chapter Ten

Press Release Tips

Press Policy Tips

Press Conference Tips

Press Release Tips

Most newspapers and TV stations are deluged with news releases on the hour, seven days a week. The media has stated that the quantity of information far out-weights its quality. So, if you’re going to send a press release to a news media organization, here is some background information and a few tips:

Try to avoid calling it a News Release. The media determines if its news, not you. I have always used Fact Sheet. Don’t waste your time trying to write a story for the reporter. They’ll just fold it up, stick it in their notebook and proceed to ask you what they want to. All the while you’re saying to yourself, “Why did I just spend hours working on that release if they’re not even going to look at it?”

1. Keep in mind the fact sheet is just the raw material for the reporter’s story or newscast.

2. Think about what makes the information news: Why is it timely? Why is it significant? How will it affect the community?

3. The lead sentence must grab attention. Your Fact Sheet should have POLICE OR SHERIFF in big letters at the top. It must be easily seen in the stack of faxes.

4. Focus on facts. This is why you call it a Fact Sheet, not a news release. Get to the point. Jack Webb it,
“Just the fact’s ma’am.” All the information should be self-explanatory.

5. Use simple language. Avoid law enforcement jargon, unfamiliar terms and acronyms. Don’t get bogged down in detail. For goodness sake, don’t say perpetrator, offense, transport, reside or residence.

6. Use quotes. The media likes quotes, but always make sure the person being quoted has approved his/her quote.

7. Add a suggested headline. The suggested headline only plants a thought in the reporters mind. There is no guarantee they will use it.

8. The end. Always indicate the end of your Fact Sheet by including the symbol ### at the bottom or MORE if you go to another page. You will sometimes see –30- at the end, which also means in journalistic language, No More To Come.

9. Provide a contact name. All Fact Sheets should have the date, contact name and phone number. Always make sure the contact person has a copy of the Fact Sheet and has agreed to be the contact person.

10. For Immediate Release. Always use this term so the reporter or editor will know its ok to use the information you’ve sent them. Sometimes you will hear the term “embargo,” which means you are specifying a specific date and time for the information to be released or used by the media. Don’t do this unless you have good cause. This can really mess up an investigation.
Press Policy Tips

When preparing a Press Policy for your department, there are several important areas that must be included.

**Policy Statement**

The Policy Statement says you recognize the media’s right to have access to public records and report on matters of public concern. Always include in the Policy Statement a reference to the state statute in your state law that governs law enforcement public records. Include a sentence that says your department wishes to have a professional working relationship with the media so both may accomplish their objectives.

**Information That Will Be Released**

The information that will be released section is where you list, according to your state law, all the topics that will be released under applicable state/federal law. Examples include: booking dockets; accident reports (that do not contain criminal investigation information); arrest affidavits; address of the incident; complainant or victim (except as prohibited by state law); investigating officer and case status.

**Information That Will Not Be Released**

The Information that will not be released section is where you list, according to your state law, all the topics that will not be released under applicable state/federal law. Always refer to your state law in this section and you may wish to use the exact language from the state statute covering police public records.

**Who May Release Information**

Who is the spokesperson for the Department? Obviously the head of the agency is the chief spokesperson, but the policy should list who is the primary or day-to-day contact for information. Who will be responsible for releasing matters pertaining to personnel? At the crime scene? Policies or administrative changes? And who is required to respond to the media while off-duty? Is it the PIO or does it include
members of the Executive Staff? What role does the on-duty Watch Commander play?

Watch Commanders

Certainly a key player after normal working hours is the on-duty watch commander. This section should clarify that during normal working hours, all calls from the media should be referred to the PIO. After normal working hours, calls may be directed to the communications supervisor, watch commander or department designee. There should be some language that says the watch commander will notify the communications supervisor and provide a synopsis of the incident scene. In most agencies, after normal working hours, the communications center will get a majority of the calls from the media.

Communications

Just as the watch commander is a key individual, so are the supervisors in the communications center. During normal working hours, calls should be directed to the PIO. After normal working hours, the policy should say what are the responsibilities of the communications supervisors, as it relates to releasing information to the media. In this section must be included a list of “major incidents” which the department will prepare a press release i.e., homicides, SWAT call-ups, officer involved shootings, traffic fatalities, disasters and fire deaths. The PIO, watch commanders and communications supervisors will be the main personnel in building good sound media relations for your department.

Sources of Information for the Media

Don’t assume reporters know whom to contact for information. This section should spell out who to contact during normal working hours and after normal working hours. Also include whom reporters should contact when wanting to do a feature story. Generally, all requests of this nature start with the PIO. Make sure your policy has a paragraph that reminds all department personnel that all conversations with the media is ON THE RECORD.
Press Credentials

It is advisable to have a procedure to issue a press pass or press credentials to “accredited” members of the media assigned to the “police beat.” Reporters should understand the press pass is the property of the Department and may be suspended or revoked by the Chief of the Agency for cause.

Crime Scenes

This is one of the most important sections in any press policy. This section lays out what law enforcement will and will not allow the media to do at the scene. You want to state that a “briefing” will be held as soon as practical at the scene. You need to also state that law enforcement has an obligation to preserve the integrity of the crime scene, to gather evidence and complete other needed activities. Then list out what the Department will be doing to comply with its Press Policy. As an example:

- News media, with proper ID’s, will be allowed to pass beyond the general public.
- Officers will establish a clearly defined crime scene.
- In a joint investigation, all agencies will participate in the press release.
- If the owner of the property, where the scene is located, asks the media to leave, the scene commander will insure the request is honored. Otherwise, the media have the right to remain on private property, outside the established crime scene.
- Supervisors will take into consideration the “deadline” time of the media and work to issue a timely response, even though it may be limited information.
- The decision to allow the media to pass beyond “Fire Lines” will be the responsibility of the on-scene fire commander.
- Photographing uncovered bodies will be at the discretion of the news media.
- Photographing individuals in custody is permitted, but prisoners will not be posed. Booking photographs should be released.
• Persons who are in custody will not be allowed to discuss the incident with the media.
Press Conference Tips

News conferences are a necessary evil, but when you have something truly newsworthy to release it is the only way to go. It would take you all day to release your information to each individual news outlet, so you do it once at a news conference.

During major investigations or incidents, chiefs, supervisors, PIO’s, detectives, traffic investigators or community police officers may want to use the press conference to release information to the media. But, before you decide to quickly jump in front of the cameras and a barrage of questions, there are some things you need to consider as you prepare.

Number one is to determine whether the information is of such importance that you need to call a press conference, rather than releasing it through normal PIO procedures. NEVER call a press conference for a minor news story or give the media the impression you have some “Big Announcement.” Remember the “Cry Wolf” story. If you continue calling press conferences for something less than major announcement, then don’t be surprised one day when the media doesn’t show up.

All the media assignment editors talk to each other and they can ruin your credibility. Remember their time is crucial. You want to be known as a department that respects their time constraints and let them know you appreciate their coming to the conference. A simple “thank you” goes a long way, because in most cases, the other departments do not and that what will set you apart.

The appearance of the key speaker is very important. While he/she is on camera, they ARE your department. Another is the preparation of the individual. Anticipating tough questions is a good way to reduce anxiety. Professional appearance, control of the setting and careful preparation can facilitate the press conference and make it a win-win situation, rather than win-lose. The following are some tried and true examples:

1. Always have the PIO or supervisors announce the speaker, provide the correct spelling of his/her name and title. This also is the time to lay out any ground rules. Never have more three (3) speakers. Too confusing. If it is more than one speaker, use a podium.
If several people are sitting behind a table, then you constantly have people getting up to move behind the bank of microphones.

2. If the speaker is on a tight schedule, then announce it in the beginning. “The chief has exactly 30 minutes in which to answer your questions.” This way there will be no surprises, when after 30 minutes, the conference concludes.

3. Don’t call a press conference and then have the speaker stand in front of the cameras and only say “I’m sorry that’s under investigation.” This is a sure way to embarrass the chief or the speaker on the 6 o’clock News.

4. Always check the speaker for appearance, straight tie, hair combed, etc. Remember, the speaker IS your department at that moment. You don’t want the public watching TV saying, “No wonder they can’t catch the criminal, just look/listen at that officer/detective.”

5. Always have the facts of the investigation or announcement prepared to hand out. You want to make sure all your important information reaches the media’s hand. Don’t rely on their note taking.

6. When you hand out any Press Releases or Fact Sheets, do it prior to the speaker coming into the room. Don’t do it while the speaker is on, because everyone will stop listening and start reading and flipping pages. This is very disruptive. I like to provide handouts prior to the conference starting. It’s no big secret why the media is there. More than likely the PIO has already explained to the assignment editor what you are going to announce and why they (media) should attend. Don’t forget the PIO has to “sell” them on the information. Your conference will be “competing” with numerous other organizations or law enforcement agencies.

7. After the opening statement, the PIO or supervisor (who should always stand next to the speaker) should take charge and ask for questions. It works best to start at one side of the room and work across. This will let all the reporters in the room see that they will get a chance to ask a question. It will also reduce the common practice of yelling out
questions and will allow you to have a more professional conference.

8. When participating in a news conference, it goes without saying that once a statement is made, “It is On the Record.” The press conference is not the place, nor the time, to ask for something to be held out of the papers. Remember, the cameras are on and running and the reporters are writing.

9. During the conference don’t forget to keep your answers brief. You must think in terms of what you “want to see on TV that evening or in print the next day.”

10. Another role of the supervisor or PIO that introduces the speaker is to listen carefully and see if the original intent of the press conference is being met. In a criminal investigation, it is best to have other squad detectives there to not only hear what is being said, but to also “cue” the PIO if the speaker is getting off message.

11. Another role of the PIO is to listen for unclear questions or answers. If there is a misunderstanding or misconception by the reporters, then in all probability, that will be misconstrued to the public. It is perfectly acceptable for the PIO to say to the reporter, “On the question of….I want to make sure we made ourselves clear on the department’s position…."

12. Always be prepared for emotional questions. In most cases, the media has already talked to the victim’s family and has an emotional response on tape. The speaker should discuss the department’s response before going into the room with the media. In this way if the subject comes up, the speaker will be prepared, rather than having the “deer in the headlight” look.

13. If a reporter’s question is not clear, the speaker should have it repeated or restated. Remember, the rest of the media in the room is listening as well and also must understand the question.

14. Probably one of the most important guidelines for the press conference is that the speaker should admit if he/she doesn’t know the answer. If you really want to embarrass yourself and the department, there is one sure fire way to do it. Go into a press
conference and “shoot from the hip,” by releasing erroneous information to make you knowledgeable and respond with answers that are not correct. If you don’t know the answer, then say so. Here again is the reason all key people in the conference should get together prior to the conference and discuss possible questions.

15. An accusatory statement about the department, the speaker, the case or a member of the department, should be dealt with at that moment. It is very important for the speaker NOT to lose his/her cool, but to take a deep breath and say something such as, “Let me set the record straight on that particular matter. The facts have shown this is the way it occurred.”

16. In the case of an officer shooting there is one additional way to respond to numerous media inquiries. The department may want to make another officer that has been involved in a previous shooting available to speak on “how bad the officer is feeling at the moment and how he had similar feeling at the time of his shooting.” This simply adds a human touch to an already emotional situation.

17. The speaker should be made aware that after his opening statement and a few responses to questions, the TV photographers will begin to take their cameras off the tripods and began moving about the room to get “B-Role” video and various reactions shots to use during the edit process. The speaker should continue responding and let the photographers do their work. They usually will go back to their tripods and continue as before.

18. It works best to have someone in charge of any pictures that you plan to release. Always have an easel or the pictures mounted on a large sheet of poster board in order to easily display it in the room. After the conference is over, all the photographers will want to video tape it from various angles. They will be doing this while their reporters are trying to get a few more answers from the speaker as he/she leaves the room. In this confusion, someone other than the speaker or PIO should be responsible for keeping an eye on any evidence or display material.
19. For the credibility of your story, it is important to hold the conference in a professional atmosphere. The department’s conference room is probably the best. You should have your department’s seal on or behind the podium, along with the American flag and state flag.

20. It is best not to have more than three (3) speakers. Always have the “subject matter expert” on hand. It gives the speaker a chance to collect his thoughts, if necessary. Too many people giving statements opens up the door for a confusing press conference, statements taken out of context and loss of the original intent.

21. The photographers (TV and Print) in the room are not necessarily listening to what you are saying. Print photographers are thinking about getting a unique picture that will tell the story of the press conference. TV photographers are trying to keep the speaker in focus and looking for unique angles and getting B-Role shots. It is always good to hold up a picture or evidence that you want to see in print. Also, they like to take pictures of the speaker at a chart. So remember to make your displays big and clear, not cluttered.

22. It is helpful to your story to let the reporters have a chance to hold and look at your photographs or articles, including bagged property pertaining to your conference. This is a small way to get the reporters more involved in your story.

23. The best time to hold a press conference is between 9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. This allows the TV photographer to go back to the truck and edit the tape. The TV reporter will also have to go back to the truck, write the story, record their audio track to be put on the tape and then give it to the photographer/editor to put it all together. They like to have time to put a professional piece on the air. Don’t forget their boss is watching. The print reporter probably has several stories he’s working on and his editor wants to see some copy as soon as possible, as they are trying to decide, depending on importance and size, where it will fit in tomorrow’s paper.
24. When responding to a reporter’s question, don’t refer to that reporter by name. It all but eliminates the other stations from using it.

25. If you’re responding to a disaster or other major event where there are 50 or more people, it is best to choose a location away from the department, which can accommodate a large group, and this will also give everyone at the department some “breathing room.” Don’t forget to use a PA system so everyone can hear and get the correct answer. Have a blackboard and use it to write names of speakers, correct spellings, and the time of the next briefing. All of this should be in your EOC Plans.

26. Don’t let a reporter put words in your mouth. If a reporter summarizes your comments by saying, “So you’re saying…?” or “Do you mean…?” Don’t respond by saying, “Yes.” Repeat your main idea or “What I am saying is…” If a question contains offensive language, don’t repeat it. You could be quoted in or out of context.

Always hold the press conference in a room or area away from the Chief or Sheriff’s office. That way, once the press conference is concluded, everyone is not standing around waiting for the cameras and lights to be taken down and the chance for conflicting statements is reduced.
Chapter Eleven
Lessons Learned in a Disaster

St. Petersburg Police Department

Some police departments don’t realize how crucial media relations are to their overall success as an organization. When a department is under fire, as St. Petersburg was on the afternoon of October 24, 1996, and then again three weeks later on November 13, a solid public information program is critical. Without accurate information and credible sources to rely on, emergency situations can spin out of control as reporters swarm to a scene and rely on hearsay and rumor.

Media relations during the riots were a plus. Especially when it turned out to be the largest number of media to cover a law enforcement story in St. Petersburg.

Public Information Chief Bill Doniel was out of town and immediately returned. “Prepare to be overwhelmed,” Doniel said. “In the beginning we simply couldn’t handle all the camera crews and reporters jostling for facts and faces to interview. One mistake we made the first day was to have a media area that was too close to the staging area. Reporters were walking around and interviewing officers as they got ready to go into the riot area. Many of the officers were from other agencies, which added to the initial confusion.
Doniel said it’s important to hold media briefings away from the staging area and all the confusion, so you can have some semblance of order and hold a controlled press briefing. This can be at Fire Headquarters, which occurred in St. Petersburg or at City Hall or a large unoccupied warehouse. What happened in St. Petersburg is that the media got caught up in the violence at the initial shooting crime scene. A TV truck was burned, along with a reporter’s personal car and a police cruiser. All of this added to the original story of a white officer shooting a suspect, who was black.

“We tried to have individual interviews for each television station and other reporters,” Doniel said. “But you don’t have the time to do individual sound bites in the field. Instead we organized press conferences with regular updates.” Doniel and his assistant were handling telephone calls from the BBC in London and media outlets throughout the world.

A problem Doniel encountered during the initial stages of the disturbance involved a breakdown of obtaining accurate and complete information from the scene commanders. “They were so busy with on scene problems, they didn’t have time to relay information back to the command post for the media. Doniel said that was a mistake, because it allowed the media to give the impression ALL of South St. Petersburg was on fire. In those first few hours it’s a balancing act. Doniel also said, “When you’re under fire, you have to deal with the disturbance first, including the safety of the officers and citizens.”

Without accurate and complete information the media will go off and talk to unreliable sources. And that’s what the media did in the early moments of the first riot. As a result, rumors were flying and misinformation was broadcast to viewers about the size of the disturbance and the locations of the outbreaks. This does a disservice to everyone. One reporter actually reported the police had shot a bystander, when in fact it was not true.

Throughout the crisis, Doniel organized frequent press briefings at Fire Headquarters (training classroom) so the Police Chief, Mayor and Fire Chief could respond to questions and update the situation.
What the Media Learned

The Police Chief at the time was Darrel Stephens, who was at the scene. “What disappointed me most about the media was that after the first barrage of rocks and bottles, I asked them to move out of harm’s way, but most refused,” Stephens said. “As a result several were injured.”

The Department tried to isolate the affected area by blocking off the streets. But employing enough manpower to block off streets when you have limited resources diverts officers from their main purpose, which is to deal with the riot. Doniel said, “The media has to be responsible enough to back away when they see they are adding to the tension of the crowd. Unfortunately that did not happen.”

During the first riot when the media ignored police requests to withdraw the presence of television cameras, as it was inflaming the crowd, the reporters and photographers plunged into the crowd anyway. Some critics felt the reporters violated one of the first precepts of journalism. Journalists are supposed to cover the news, not make it.

After the riots Doniel met with the news directors from every television station and discussed the way the media injected themselves into a volatile situation. He feels the discussions made a difference when a similar riot situation occurred within a few weeks in Tampa.

When Tampa police asked television crews to retreat from the potentially dangerous situation, they agreed and pooled their coverage to minimize their cameras on the scene. Print and radio reporters were allowed to remain. Tampa police are convinced the strategy was important in keeping the situation from getting out of hand. The news director of Channel 8 said, “If you provide a stage for people, they will give you a performance.”
• The PIO must have a backup, especially when he/she is out of town.

• Several non-sworn police personnel must be reassigned to the PIO and trained to work the press phones, due to the large volume of calls that will be coming in. In addition there will be phone calls from people wanting to donate food and money. There needs to be a separate phone bank to handle the calls from the public.

• Have manpower plans to support the press information office, 24 hours a day.

• Have several locations identified as the “Media Center.” The locations must be able to accommodate numerous satellite trucks and have ample parking.

• The media center should have blackboards or easels to display written material.

• The PIO Chief or a ranking member of the Department should meet with television news directors and print photographer supervisors to discuss ways to prevent the media from becoming involved in a potentially dangerous situation, should it occur in their city.

• Department staff members should review their crisis incident plan and have a process in place to get accurate information to the media in a timely manner.

• The city should establish a Crisis Intervention Team who can respond to flashpoints and assist with the dissemination of accurate information and work to dispel rumors.

• The PIO must not try to handle individual requests for interviews at the scene. It will be overwhelming, due to the volume of requests.

• The PIO should contact the local hospital PIO, as they will begin having arrivals and he/she will be invaluable in providing injury information for the press briefings.
• The PIO and people on the phones must let the media know where to go for the briefings.

• The PIO should have a dedicated phone line in which taped press updates can be recorded. This will save the phone people from repeating the same press statement over and over. Make sure the people working the phones have the latest information.

• The PIO may choose to invite other agency PIO’s to assist at the PIO office or command post. They can help monitor what is being broadcast, which will provide the Chief or Sheriff with an idea of what will be asked at the next press briefing.

• Don’t forget uniform security at the media briefing. Hostile witnesses may try to barge in and steal the show.

• Cell phone use will be hampered, due to the large number of cell phones being used by reporters and the tactical operation.
Columbine High

While at a Florida Police Chiefs Mid-Winter Conference, your instructor had the opportunity to discuss the Columbine shooting with Steve Davis, PIO, for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department. Thought it would be worthwhile to note a few points he discussed and shared them with the class.

- Jefferson County S.O. is a medium size department and the school had 2,000 students.
- The parent's had nowhere to go after the word got out that a shooting had occurred. We must expect many parents will begin arriving and breaking police lines.
- There were not enough phones or phone lines for all the tactical people. They also discovered that hundreds of students had cell phones and they were calling out (parents, friends, media) and therefore the cell lines became tied up, similar to the St. Petersburg Basketball Final Four cell phone problem.
- The library became the media center. They were overwhelmed with calls from the public. Is my cousin ok? Where can I donate food? Where do I bring it? Donate money? They brought in phone banks to handle all the public calls. PIO's from other agencies helped out with media. You need a group to staff the public phones aside from all the media calls. Whoever is on a public phone, MUST be given the same information that is handed out to the media and on a regular basis.
- They put all the local media satellite trucks (90) in a ball field next to the school. All the national media showed up the next day. 400 reporters alone, plus their support people, brought the media to approximately 4,000. FEMA sent people in to help coordinate. They are a resource.
- Steve Davis, PIO, had two other PIO's act as assistants to help coordinate and schedule interviews and one to record questions and monitor the news broadcast. This helped Steve know what was being reported or questions he and the Sheriff may be asked at the next press conference. What are the issues? To reduce misquotes, a PIO assistant had a tape recorder at each press conference and typed up a hard copy after each
session. This reduced misquotes. Copies were immediately handed out to the people on the phone banks.

- There were many SWAT teams (from other agencies) standing around waiting for assignments. This gave the false impression that was seen by TV viewers as police/sheriff NOT taking any action, when in fact there were several SWAT teams in the building (only 1 team per floor). They did not have a layout of the school and spent time trying to put one together. SWAT now has blueprints.

- There were so many agencies coming to the scene to help, and coordination became a major problem for the Jefferson County S.O. people. Who was in charge? Where do we go? Their first info upon arriving at the school was there were bombs inside the school and that the shooters, (maybe 3) had blended in with the other students. They never proved a third shooter. Upon going into the school SWAT teams found the water sprinklers and fire alarms were going off, making communications almost impossible, especially with students behind locked doors.

- They later discovered two propane tanks that did not explode. The plan was to explode the tanks and shoot the students as they ran out.

- 48 ambulances on scene, five hospitals involved, 160 triage, 28 critical, 15 dead. 4,000 people interviewed, 10,000 pieces of evidence, 10,000 photos taken.

- Their concern now is what to expect on each April 20, the anniversary. Another media event?

- In the beginning a press update was held every hour to address rumors, myths, etc. They didn't give the rumors a chance to spread. It was almost impossible to get away from the media, even after the press conferences. The media phones constantly rang. Calls come from all over the world.

- Media helicopters were a problem. One picked up an officer to see if any shooters were on the roof and went in low to take a look, but when he did all the other helicopters, not knowing it was being used by an officer for observation, followed creating noise and dust for the SWAT teams outside.

- Counseling must be available to the officers.
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