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How to talk to a reporter – by a reporter

By Mike Sugerman, CBS5 and KCBS radio

Reporters are just like you. They have a job to do (and most of them love it or they wouldn't be doing it), and then they go home to their dogs and families. They generally aren't out to GET anyone---they're just looking for a good story. So give it to them.

We ask two different kinds of questions. One kind is to get information. The other is to elicit a response. Especially for those of us in the electronic and digital world, we need you to say something interesting. Consider this: we are artists who paint in broad strokes. Our narration is mostly black and white; your quotes are the color.

You are passionate about what you are doing. You wouldn't have a reporter call you unless you were very involved in some issue. **SHOW THAT PASSION.** Let them know how exciting the project is you are involved with and why you are so excited about it. You will speak better if you do and you will make a much better sound bite.

I know “sound bites” get a bad reputation but they really shouldn't. No one has time to listen to a lengthy debate about the pros and cons of every issue. Sound bites break down the issues into their elemental essence.

In broadcasting, unlike the written page, people can't stop and go back to what you said if they didn't understand. That's why we have to allow them to understand it **THE FIRST TIME.** Things are changing with digital media (you **CAN** actually go back) but the old rule still applies: Keep it simple. Very few people know the issue like you do. Think in your mind that you are explaining it to someone who has very little knowledge about what you talking about; you probably are. Speak that way.

If you can't answer a question, admit it. No one knows everything.

For broadcasting, props help. Let the reporter see something he or she can photograph or use in a standup (when we talk directly to the camera). If your issue is food, bring some along.

What to take away from this? Be passionate. And keep it simple.

Mike Sugerman is among the most honored broadcast journalists in California; read his complete bio [here](#).

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