

The Media Will Make Me A Star

Realities of Public Relations and Media Myths

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You've just written your first book. Congratulations! Your family and friends love it. "It will be a bestseller," they proclaim. Call Oprah. She will want first dibs on interviewing you. You start planning your rise to fame. What will you say to Oprah? And what will you wear? You envision your book signings, your autograph sessions and your new bank account! This is it!

Maybe you've created an exciting over-the-top-seminar. You're packing the house every time you speak. Everybody tells you that you're destined to be the next male or female Tony Robbins. Audiences love you, don't they? Why, you are the best motivational speaker they've ever heard. The media needs to know about you. So, all that's left for you is to get yourself positioned on television, in the *New York Times* or in *The Wall Street Journal*. You're poised for prime time.

Right? Wrong! Fantasies are worth exploring, but here's the reality check: the top-10 myths speakers need to know about public relations and the media before running up those credit cards. They aren't pretty, but dispelling these myths will help you produce more rewarding experiences with your public relations and media experiences.

Myth # 1 Everybody needs to know about your book, product or service.

It's a good thing to be enthusiastic about your work, but guess what? Everybody thinks their stuff is the best invention since champagne. A minor problem appears: the assignment editors, reporters and producers have heard it all before. You and the rest of the world are vying for five minutes of fame in the same crowded field. It will help if you take an objective stance of what you offer and who needs it. You want to define the "news" value in your story. Ask yourself questions such as,

"How will my book make a difference in people's lives? What solutions are my services providing?" News is called "news" because the media looks for something different with value.

Myth # 2 The one-size-fits-all media strategy. What worked to promote one speaker colleague will also work for you.

One story angle will not get you mass media coverage no matter how great your product happens to be. In theory, let's say you've written a potential bestseller or your solution will solve a specific problem. Your product might be hotter than Google, but your strategy needs to answer questions such as, "Who is your target market? What segment of the population will get the most value from your story? Which media outlets are more suited to your subject?"

You want to create different angles and story ideas for specific media markets. For example, if you've written a diet book, you would likely get coverage in health and lifestyle sections, but it becomes a business story by positioning the cost companies pay for workers who are absent from work due to weight-related illness. Creating strategies is common sense when you think about it, but you would be surprised how many people believe what they're selling is in world demand. Be objective and put yourself in the reporter's position. Think of yourself as the viewer, listener or reader. That's how the media thinks.

Myth # 3 You never say "no" to a media interview.

Yes, you should say no in certain situations. If the subject is not related to your field or area of expertise, pass on it. You can't be an expert on all things for all stories, no matter how tempting. Once you've decided the interview isn't right for you, take it one step further. Offer to help the reporter/producer or assignment editor find an appropriate source. You will build credibility. Plus, there is a good chance the reporter will likely remember you when a story comes up that is right for you. And by helping the reporter, you start to establish a relationship with this media contact. Some people try to become the expert in the news du jour and wonder why they never develop business from all of their media appearances. The reason is because nobody understands what it is that they do. The same principles apply to our business. We can't be authentic speakers if we say we're experts on all topics.

Myth # 4 You don't need to hire a PR agency. You can get media coverage yourself.

Maybe, but more than likely you can't do it as well—unless you want to make getting publicity your new full-time job. I've been on both sides of the fence, or in my case, the camera. In entertainment PR, which is where I started before making the transition to television, the phone would ring off the hook for requests to interview the celebrities we represented.

More often than not, we said “no” due to the time restraints of the celebrities. But for the rest of us, getting coverage takes a lot of work, creativity and, here’s where most people fall down, F-O-L-L-O-W U-P. You can find books, how-to-guides and Internet support on how to do your own PR. Some people will manage to pull it off with great success, but for most of us, the time it takes from our speaking business is a higher price tag than retaining a PR agency. Keep in mind: a publicist serves two VIP clients: you and the media. It takes a long time to learn who the media players are and to build relationships with them.

Myth # 5 You’ve retained a PR firm. Now all you have to do is sit back, relax and wait for the phone to ring.

Wrong! Your media game plan is a partnership with your publicist. You need to keep feeding your PR professionals information and news to help them strategize. You must be honest with them. Don’t promise what you can’t deliver. It is also critical that you be there when they need you. Nothing frustrates a publicist more than working hard to arrange an interview for a client and then finding that the client isn’t available. Or clients change their minds because they decide they aren’t prepared for prime time after all.

Myth # 6 Media exposure happens just like that! It’s like magic!

Ahh, don’t we wish? Yes, once in a while it happens overnight even when you aren’t pursuing it. Thanks to my PR friends, I’m interviewed in the media without seeking coverage. They will get a call from a media contact needing someone to interview right away. If it’s in my subject area, and I can accommodate the deadline, I do it. But in most cases, it takes time. Set realistic expectations with your PR agency, or for yourself, if you’re your own publicist. And it’s important to remember that media coverage isn’t a one-time-only event that will make you an instant hit. To successfully build your brand or your business, it takes ongoing media strategy and coverage.

Myth # 7 Publicity is like a commercial, only it’s free. Not quite. People who blatantly promote their products and services by referring to them in

every other sentence may find themselves without any coverage at all. Your story might not get printed. On a live radio or TV show some guests will keep picking up their new book while telling the audience to read chapter 12 or 15 for the tips. Guests who practice this kind of self-promotion can find their segments cut short when the host or reporter cuts to a paid commercial! People who over-plug the product don’t get invited back.

Myth # 8 The media is obligated to cover your story.

We know you don’t think this way, but some people believe this myth. If you want a guarantee you’ll see yourself in the news or on a TV talk show, you’d better buy an ad. Publicity is free, but it doesn’t come with any promises. Even when you’re told a TV reporter will cover your event, if a breaking news story happens, there goes your coverage. TV stations have a limited resource of reporters and camera crews. Breaking news takes priority.

Myth # 9 You don’t need to prepare or practice for an interview. You can just wing it.

If every media coach had a dollar for each time we heard that line, we would be among the rich and famous ourselves. Speakers are blessed with a gift of gab. We’re not intimidated to be in front of audiences and cameras, but media interviews can be a curse for a speaker. More than any other people we coach, we find that speakers have the tendency to answer a question with a monologue. Practice your answers for the questions you anticipate being asked, and keep your answers short. Get your key points up front and elaborate more if there is time, but please, no speeches.

Myth # 10 Reporters will only ask the questions you provide.

People new to media interviews will always ask, “Can I send a list of questions that I want the reporter to ask?” Yes, you can. Will the reporter ask those questions? No, or rarely. A public affairs show might follow your line of questions, but the majority of reporters and interviewers formulate their own questions. A savvy interviewee will find a way to work the information they want people to know into his or her answers. Keep in mind this telling quote from Henry Kissinger to reporters, “Do you have any questions

for my answers?”

Now that we’ve helped you dispel some of the PR and media myths, keep this thought in mind: If you’ve just invented the cure for Spam, forget everything you’ve just read. You won’t need a publicist. Your phone will ring non-stop. Every media outlet and reporter will be calling you. Within a snap of your fingers you are an overnight hit—this week anyway. In the meantime, use these tips to help you with your approach to media coverage. See you in the news!

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