When You Give an Interview: The Six “Be---------------------------------------’s”
(From Population Reports)

- **Be truthful.** Never mislead a reporter. If you do not know the answer to a question, simply say so. Never make up an answer.
- **Be complete.** Avoid giving “yes” and “no” answers. Instead, answer questions in complete sentences, and support your answers with key facts and relevant details.
- **Be prepared.** You should be able to support each of your statements with facts. Journalists often follow comments with the question, “why?”
- **Be interesting.** Journalists like new ideas, unusual observations, and striking statistics.
- **Be clear.** Use language and give explanations that the journalists’ audience will understand.
- **Be positive.** Do not criticize or complain about other people, other organizations, or the news media. Stand up for your own actions and point of view.

Eleven Rules for Effective Interviews
(From Carlson Communications, Honolulu, HI)

1. **Get your message out.**
   Many people have the mistaken notion that they’re being interviewed for the primary purpose of answering the reporter’s questions. **WRONG!**

   *The only reason to talk to the media is to get your message out.* Yes, you answer questions in the process, but that’s not the essence of what the interview is all about. This point cannot be made too often: *The only reason to talk to the media is to get your message out.*

2. **Prepare your message in advance**
   Decide your message *before you get anywhere near a reporter.* Being secure in the message – and practicing getting it out – will help you overcome the tough questions that will come.

3. **Boil your message down to three main points.**
   Three – and no more. You can remember three, the reporter can remember three, and the public just might be able to remember three. Going for more will just tend to confuse and diffuse your message.

4. **Anticipate the tough questions.**
   What do you do with those tough questions? One thing you *don’t* do is simply answer them. Remember your message, and divert the difficult questions back to your message. Use transition phrases like, “But that’s not the issue here. The real
issue is...,” “A more important point is...,” or “You’re overlooking what’s at stake here...,” Use the question as an opportunity to get your message out.

5. **Pause to reflect on your answer.**
   *Don’t rush.* You’re under no obligation to blurt out an answer. Besides, the TV and radio stations will edit out the routine pauses from their reports. *Take your time,* and think briefly about your answer and the main points you want to make.

6. **Repeat your main points.**
   *Remember this:* To be successful with the news media, you have to express your main points over and over again. That’s how you maximize the chances for your points to be published or broadcast. *It’s not enough to get them out once;* they could be edited out. But it’s hard to edit them out if they’re sprinkled throughout the interview.

7. **Keep it short!**
   Sound bites for TV or radio should be *short bites!* In 1970, the average length of an interview bite on the network news was 42 seconds; in 1990, it was only 6 seconds! You literally *do not have the time to go on and on.* Give the reporters what they want and need – short information bites they can use.

8. **Take control of the interview location.**
   The reporter’s preference for an interview location may not be right *for you!* Don’t be interviewed in unfavorable surroundings – e.g., near demonstrators picketing your office. And *beware of “ambush” tactics;* people shown being interviewed on TV as they rush into their office frequently have been indicted for something! *Take charge* by helpfully ushering the reporter to a neutral place where you can be interviewed – after *you collect your thoughts.*

9. **Respect the media’s needs.**
   Reports and deadlines go together. To be treated fairly and with respect, *treat reporters with respect.* Be mindful of their deadlines, and you’ll improve your chances of getting the coverage you want.

10. **Be confident, look strong.**
    In the words of an old “Saturday Night Live” routine, “*It’s better to look good than to feel good.*” Seriously, TV viewers, audiences, and reporters for that matter make instantaneous judgments on your sincerity, credibility, believability, and honesty – simply by *how you handle yourself.* You know you’re all of those things, but you only have a few seconds to convey that to your audience. *Look the reporter in the eye* – eye contact is critical – and make your point, with confidence.

11. **Be courteous.**
    Most reporters are like other people – they’re honorable and are just doing their job. In their case, however, the job often involves putting newsmakers on the defensive. That’s just the nature of their business, and *there’s usually nothing personal about it.* What goes around, comes around – and that goes for the courtesy you extend to news media representatives.