Ten Tips for Dealing with the Media

1. Never speculate or go beyond the facts you know. Don't be trapped by a what-if? question.

2. Don't allow yourself to be quoted without a clear understanding of how you will be identified – for example:
   - How your expertise and credentials be established?
   - Will you be identified as a member of the ABA, your section, your law firm, your corporation or your agency?
   - Will your personal views be attributed by implication to the institution you are representing?
   - How much do you care whether other persons might be offended by that identification?

3. Nothing is ever completely off the record. If a reporter gets the same information or comments from another source, his or her obligation to not reveal what you said no longer applies. Although your name may not be used, if you are one of only two people who knew the story, your identity is clear.

4. Assume that anything you say is on the record.

5. You have an obligation to be truthful. You do not have an obligation to tell everything you know. In appropriate situations, remember the admonition to witnesses – don't volunteer information.

6. Don't let a reporter pump you for information. Instead, ask the reporter for details if you don't know the facts. Find out the reporter's deadline, and call back after you've got the facts and you have thought out your answers. If you can't meet the deadline say so, and suggest when you hope to have the information.

7. You don't have to answer every question, and sometimes you should not comment at all. But instead of saying "no comment," which sounds arbitrary and uncooperative, say something like, "that would be speculation, and it would be inappropriate to speculate."

8. Don't be afraid to appear dull. If a reporter doesn't get a quotable quote, that's the reporter's problem, not yours. Sometimes it's better to be left out of the story. And, avoid jokes – they are likely to come across as insensitive.
9. Don't be flattered by the chance to be quoted on the air or in the press. Flattered people make statements they shouldn't.

10. Don't be frightened of reporters. Despite the adversarial tone of these rules, you will generally be in the driver's seat because you have or can get the information they need to do their jobs. With mutual understanding of the rules, you can both be happy most of the time.
What is News?

**News is:**
- Something that makes an impact
- Something unusual
- Conflict
- Scoops
- Trends
- Something new or special
- Activities of well known, key or famous people
- Important to a wide audience
- Important to your community
- Reflects change
- Humorous or mysterious
- Unique, something no one else is doing or thinking
- Tragedy
- Wrong-doing or misconduct in high places
- Man bites dog

**How to make it news:**
- Tie into an issue in the news today
- Follow up on an important story
- Tie in with another event
- Hold a competition or contest
- Give an award
- Issue a report, statistics, evaluation
- Kick off a new program or effort
- Issue a fact sheet

**A reporter’s job:**
- Get the best story

**Our job:**
- Get our organization or spokesperson in the story with our message
How do you interest a reporter in your programs?

- News release
- News advisory
- Provide background information
- Provide a human face for a current issue
- Location
- Timing
ABA Communications and Media Relations Division

Ten Rules of Effective Communication

1. Have realistic expectations. A single communication rarely persuades an audience. Persuasion usually requires multiple communications and a strategic plan for delivering the communications.

2. Identify the “real” audience you are trying to reach? Usually it is a much smaller and more specific audience than you may initially think.

3. Understand what your audience knows/thinks/believes about the matter on which you are communicating. Knowing your audience will help you communicate persuasively.

4. Identify who should be the “voice” in the communication. It may or may not be you. Who will your audience believe and value?

5. Identify what barriers exist to the audience believing what you want to tell them, and what opportunities exist that may help communicate your message.

6. Identify in precise terms what idea you want them to take away and believe from your communication. Actually write it out.

7. Define your competitors. There may be communications going to your audience that say the opposite of what you want them to believe. It’s important to know what else the audience is hearing/seeing/reading.

8. Avoid negative communication. It just doesn’t work. Attacking a competitor is always less successful than communicating your value or the value of your message.

9. Develop your communication in simple, memorable and persuasive language. Use true anecdotes or factual/statistical information to substantiate your message.

10. Include in your communication information that will “connect” with the audience and with the values it holds.
Ten Tips for Managing the Message to Members

1. **Before you talk, listen.** Effective communication requires that the communicator know the audience:
   - What is important to them?
   - How do they like to receive information?
   - How can the speaker make the information compelling enough that the audience will listen and retain it?
   Begin planning your communication with research into member preferences and interests.

2. **Less is definitely more.** As a leader you may have the bully pulpit, but you may not have a willing audience for long unless you make your points succinctly, clearly and purposefully. Longwinded communication just gets tuned out.

3. **Members pull the plug on excessive e-mail.** E-mail offers a low-cost, real-time tool for communication – it’s so good that there’s far too much of it. Because e-mail is so frequently overused, most people are drowning in a flood of communication. In fact, many members won’t provide e-mail addresses, eliminating an important tool for communication when it is really needed. Research what your members prefer to receive via e-mail and respect their wishes.

4. **Measure effectiveness.** After benchmark research on your members’ communication preferences, you can determine if your communications meet their needs through follow-up research. Measuring communication can help you avoid mistakes or making the same mistakes made twice.

5. **Uninvolved members do not think as you do.** Leaders often think that because an issue is important to them, it is important to all lawyers. In general members are not homogenous – they represent many different preferences, views and interests. If you want to know how members will regard a matter, ask them through focus group or survey research.
6. **Media are not your enemy, but they also have a different agenda.** The reporter’s job is different from yours. You may have a great message, but the reporter is not paid to help you communicate it. His or her goal is to tell a newsworthy story that appeals to a wide audience. It is also the reporter’s job to tell all sides of a story, which may not serve your purpose. The best way to get your message across through the media is to be quotable, memorable and factual.

7. **You don’t become a reliable source by becoming the chair.** Being chair, an officer of a section or even a prominent lawyer does not automatically make you believable to a reporter. What does give you credibility is the professional relationship you build with that reporter. If you can help the reporter with his or her stories, if you can provide factual information, if you can speak authoritatively on a subject, then you will become a valued – and credible – source for the reporter.

8. **Don’t say what you don’t want to see published.** The best way to control a news interview or news conference is simply by being prepared, staying on topic and sticking to your message. Many interview subjects talk too much. Say what you planned to say and then stop. Before you reply to a question, pause briefly and consider how you will like seeing your answer in print, on television, on the radio or in a blog.

9. **The best spontaneous interview is highly planned.** Prepare for an interview by developing a written message platform, gathering anecdotal or statistical information that proves your points, and reviewing sample questions and answers. It’s also important to learn as much as you can about the reporter and his or her publication or program. Just as you would not go to trial unprepared, you should not do a news interview without preparation.

10. **You can’t sell what you don’t own.** It’s easier and more credible to talk about a subject when your bar association is doing something about it. Just because the question is about the law does not mean that you have a meaningful answer. The organized bar communicates most effectively when it talks about its activities on behalf of the legal profession. Talking about a subject in which a bar association is not actively involved is merely rhetoric without substance and potentially embarrassing.