



# COVID HIGHLIGHTS THE NEED FOR MEDIA INTERVIEW SKILLS

IN OUR COVID-DRIVEN WORLD LEADERS NEED TO BE PREPARED TO FRONT UP TO THE MEDIA MORE THAN EVER. BY **PETE BURDON**.

Covid-19 has shown how quickly leaders from business and other organisations can be thrust into the media spotlight without warning. While this has always been the case, Covid has become the latest example.

Some leaders have had to front media because of confirmed Covid cases among staff, others when their premises became a location of interest, while another group attracted attention because of safety concerns such as inadequate social distancing policies.

Are you ready to front media in a similar situation? In most cases it's far better for your reputation to agree to such requests. The alternative is a sentence in the story saying, "The CEO refused to comment." Most people interpret that as the CEO hiding something.

## THE NEED FOR SPECIFIC SKILLS

Most leaders are great communicators. That's probably a major reason why they became leaders in the first place. But media interviews are like no other form of communication. Most leaders treat them as Q&As with the reporter or presenter. They simply answer the question asked of them and then wait for the next one.

That seems like the correct approach because it's how we communicate in every other part of our life.

But a media interview is a different ball game. You need your own message and the skills to get it across. Otherwise the reporter has all the power and you have no way of influencing what is covered or what parts of



the interview are used in the news stories that follow.

It also makes you more likely to get misquoted or quoted out of context.

With print media interviews and all broadcast interviews that aren't live, only snippets will make it into the subsequent story. That's why you need the skills to continually refer back to your points to make sure that they are the snippets used.

This takes practice to master because you still need to answer the questions, but then transfer back to your message without sounding like a broken record.

## HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

In a nutshell, you need to create the three key points that you want the reporter to use.

You then dress these points up by using interesting language like analogies and examples. Then they become attractive to the reporter and you also have a number of different ways of expressing the same point.

The ability to create these points, dress

them up and then get them into the story is a skill like no other. It takes practice, but once mastered is valuable to any media spokesperson and his or her business or organisation.

John Key was an expert. He regularly used analogies with the All Blacks to get his points across.

He would have known they were almost guaranteed to pass through all media gatekeepers and into stories. David Seymour is now the politician who does this the best in New Zealand.

A possible message if you have a Covid case could be the following:

- Our thoughts are with our staff member and her family.
  - We are doing everything we can to prevent more cases.
  - The safety of our staff is our top priority.
- Those points as they are may not be overly attractive to media, but by dressing them up in attractive language, they would be.

The points outlined here show a glimpse of how to master the media interview process. I must emphasise that there is a theoretical and practical side to this.

It's no different from learning to ride a bike. You can read as many books as you like to understand how to ride, but you only learn and improve by doing it.

This is exactly the same. The only way to master it is by focusing on one part of the theory before putting that into practice on camera. Then move to another area. There is no other way. M

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