


Advisor

The Newsletter of Effective Communication

The Ammerman[®]
Experience

**Handling a 60 Minutes Interview:
It's Not as Tough as You Might Think ▶
A Lesson from Tiger Woods ▶**

**A 60 Minutes Success Story ▶
Two New Ways to Spur Audience Involvement ▶**

▶ Forward to a friend  Print this out



Handling a 60 Minutes Interview: It's Not as Tough as You Might Think

Quick Bites

A 60 Minutes Success Story

Looking for an example of a company that went toe to toe with *60 Minutes* . . . and won? There may be no better case study than the Adolph Coors Company.

Famous for its "Rocky Mountain spring water" system of brewing, Coors is something of a legend in the beer industry. But throughout the 1970s and early '80s, the company's reputation was in trouble, in part because of conflicts with organized labor.

In 1976, a contract dispute between management and one of the local unions erupted. After more than a year of negotiations, union officials called for a strike. When management announced plans to replace striking workers and called an election to decertify the local union (employees ultimately voted in favor of decertifying the union), AFL-CIO officials declared a nationwide boycott of Coors beer. Labor leaders also protested Coors' hiring and promotion practices –

In the [previous issue](#) of this newsletter, we provided a behind-the-scenes look at the 42-year-old TV news phenomenon known as *60 Minutes*. Now let's look at how to participate in a *60 Minutes* interview (or any other investigative report) – and succeed.

It's been said that the four most feared words in corporate America are, "Sixty Minutes is here." Indeed, a call or visit from *60 Minutes* usually triggers a "No comment" response from anyone in that program's crosshairs. But that could be a mistake. A common misconception about how investigative reporters operate is that if the topic is unfavorable and you don't cooperate, perhaps the reporter won't have enough information to write the story. The Internet and a reporter's perseverance make that a faulty assumption. All that approach will do is limit your opportunity to get your side of the story told.

And *60 Minutes* can help you tell that story to millions of viewers. The show consistently ranks among the top programs in the Nielsen ratings. If you've ever wondered why people agree to go on programs such as *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Nancy Grace* or *Countdown with Keith Olbermann*, where the hosts are always tough, sometimes theatrical and usually abrasive, the answer is usually viewership. When someone can tell you that more people are going to watch you on a particular show, that's a very powerful incentive to appear. *60 Minutes* can make that claim.

Do your due diligence

Before talking or agreeing to talk to any reporter, ask a few questions of your own. Such as: What is the story about? What subjects will be covered? (Caution: Investigative reporters are unlikely to share too much information. They may emphasize one

alleging the company discriminated against women and ethnic minorities.

Enter: *60 Minutes*. Program executives at CBS were well aware of union accusations of unfair employment practices at Coors, and wanted to investigate the multi-year battle between the brewery and organized labor. So in 1982, CBS producer Allan Maraynes and reporter Mike Wallace contacted Coors about plans for a *60 Minutes* report about the company.

Coors was understandably concerned. Many corporations saw *60 Minutes* as anti-big business, and the firm's corporate communications director wasn't sure how Coors officials would respond to the pressure of an on-camera grilling. Also, Coors had traditionally avoided the public spotlight, and company chairman Bill Coors and company president Joe Coors were afraid of airing the company's "dirty laundry" on national television.

Coors knew that *60 Minutes* was determined to do the story, and that a "no comment" defense would mean organized labor's side of the story would go uncontested. So, in a move uncharacteristic for the firm, Coors decided to go on the offensive. It adopted an open-door policy with CBS and provided the network with access to about a dozen non-union employees at its Golden, Colorado brewery. These employees, interviewed as a group in the plant's break room, came across on TV as honest, hard-working and pro-company. They effectively shot down the union's allegations of discrimination. The broadcast left viewers with the impression that the union represented only a small portion of Coors' otherwise satisfied workforce.

In short, Coors hit a home run! What started out to be a story "explaining that a fascist state exists at Coors" (producer Maraynes' words) turned out to be

element of the story, while leaving out other aspects, so as not to frighten you off. You may have to "read between the lines" to get a true sense of what the story's really about.)

Who will do the interview? (Reporters have different styles, and you may decide to accept or decline the interview depending on who the reporter is. There are plenty of *60 Minutes* pieces you can review to get a good feel for a particular reporter's style.)

What are some of the questions that will be asked? (Explain that you want to be sure you have the most up-to-date information to share.) What is the reporter's deadline? In short, know as much about the program, the story and the reporter as the reporter knows about you.

Know what you can and can't control

First of all, you can decide whether to participate. (Believe it or not, some people feel they have no choice but to talk when approached by a reporter. Think: family members who talk to reporters immediately after some tragic event.) You can also decide who will speak, and usually, where the interview will take place.

Media-savvy interviewees sometimes record their interviews with reporters in order to have an indisputable record of what was said during the interview. (One company, Metabolife International, did this when it anticipated a hostile report from ABC's *20/20*, and posted the complete 70-minute interview with its president on a special Web site – **before** ABC's story aired.)

Never turn down an interview request because you're afraid of a few questions. You don't need to answer every question; in fact, prior to the interview, you can indicate that there are some questions you can't or won't answer.

What can't you control? You have no say about who the reporter will be. (Notable exceptions are certain public figures. For example, President Obama and some celebrities probably have the clout to specify whom they want to talk to. Or a story may be so desirable that *60 Minutes* may agree to the choice of reporter specified by the interviewee.) Don't ask for an unedited interview; that request won't be honored. And finally, don't expect to get a chance to review the story before it's aired or printed. There are times when you can politely offer to review the piece for accuracy (trade press reporters are especially open to this), but most reporters are unlikely to oblige you – mainly because of control and deadline issues.

Prepare and Practice

As retired basketball coach Bobby Knight said, "More important than the will to win is the will to prepare to win." A successful interview with *60 Minutes* or any investigative reporter starts with preparation. Know exactly why you're going on the program. Have your objectives clearly in mind. Develop an agenda consisting of several key message points. The time you spend talking to the

the story of a company that deserved high marks for its treatment of employees.

Two New Ways to Spur Audience Involvement

The best presentations engage their audiences. And one proven tool of engagement is interactivity. Here are two new technology-based tools you can use to get your audience more involved in large-group presentations:

Google Moderator is a free Google service that lets a presenter or event moderator manage feedback from a large number of people. Audience members go to the site to submit questions, suggestions or ideas. (With laptops and WiFi, this is easy.) The service then allows the audience to see all the questions and vote for the ones they think should be posed and answered. The goal is to help the speaker(s) address questions the audience cares about most.

Google Moderator was used by President-elect Barack Obama's transition team in December 2008 in a public series called "*Open for Questions*," in which they answered questions from the general public. The first series ran for less than 48 hours and attracted one million votes from 20,000 people on 10,000 questions.

The Google staff that created the service initially referred to it as Dory – after the fish who asked questions all the time in the movie *Finding Nemo*.

Another tool – this one fee-based – is **Meridia Audience Response**. It uses wireless keypads for audience participation during conventions, sales meetings or other situations where immediate audience feedback is desired.

reporter will be much longer than the time you actually appear on TV. That means editing will occur. During this process, the producer and reporter are watching and listening to every second of footage – looking for a few seconds of something different, powerful, damaging. So make your answers memorable by using stories, anecdotes, analogies, examples and quotable lines. These add texture, dimension and color to your message.

Anticipate the questions you'll be asked, along with the questions you hope won't be asked. Write them down, then answer them out loud.

And don't forget **media training**. It takes some of the mystery out of the newsgathering process, and it gets you and your message focused. Even if you have been media trained in the past, an encounter with *60 Minutes* is the big leagues, so consider a refresher. A half-or full-day of practice will provide the confidence and competence needed for a successful encounter.

Prior to the on-camera interview, *60 Minutes* may ask you to participate in a "backgrounder." It's an unrecorded discussion that may or may not involve the reporter, designed to gather information – from your perspective – about the story. Take advantage of this opportunity, but treat it as an interview because that's what it is. Be careful of what you say. Don't let your guard down.

A call or visit from *60 Minutes* doesn't have to cause panic – if you know the rules of the road . . . and can follow them.

[Back to top](#)

A Lesson from Tiger Woods (Sorry, it won't help your golf game)

There's been no shortage of people offering their opinions on how Tiger Woods should have managed his recent crisis, or what he needs to do down the road. So we won't weigh in on that discussion. But his situation does illustrate a key point: a crisis can happen to anyone.

Another key point: a crisis can occur at any time. Unrelated to, but during, Tiger's crisis, a Texas software company's proprietary software was illegally compromised by someone seeking access to the records of one of its clients. News reports of the incident aired on Minnesota Public Radio, prompting the company's CEO to place a weekend call to our firm seeking advice on what to do.

Both of these developments illustrate another very important point: you must manage your crisis before it happens. What does that entail?

Here's how it works: A question is shown to the audience on the screen. Audience members then press a button on their keypad as their response. Meridia collects all the votes, then displays the result as a bar graph back on the screen. The presenter comments on the results, then proceeds to the next question.

At a sales meeting, for example, you can test the product knowledge and identify the strengths and weaknesses of your sales force. In a training presentation, you can use the system to ensure that the audience fully understands the content. The system can handle everything from small focus groups to large conferences of several thousand.

More info is available at www.MeridiaARS.com

[Back to top](#)

2010 Ammerman Public Training Dates

Effective Media Communications Training

February 5
March 9
April 20
June 8
August 10
September 14
November 2

Effective Presentations:

June 9
September 15

Advanced Media Skills for Communications Professionals

November 3-4

The Ammerman Experience Public workshops are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, and are available to a limited number of attendees to ensure

Have a crisis management plan:

Crisis plans have changed since the discipline of crisis management emerged some thirty years ago. Back then, plans were far too detailed. They filled big binders that usually sat on shelves – unused. Today, the best plans are concise. Rather than trying to address every conceivable aspect of a crisis, they are more like road maps or checklists. They should have several components.

First, a crisis plan should address a company's overall approach to handling a crisis – the philosophy that will guide the company's actions. This is the part of the plan where you'll hear about such things as a company's commitment to health, environment and safety, or its pledge to provide the public with complete, accurate and timely information. These statements are not platitudes; they let stakeholders and others know what to expect from the company during difficult times. During its well known Tylenol poisoning crisis, Johnson & Johnson was lauded for having a clear and well articulated philosophy that established the company's priorities and defined its responsibilities to its constituencies.

Second, the plan should cover the policies and procedures that should be followed by those who end up managing the crisis. For example: "Only authorized spokespersons who have been trained will be allowed to speak on behalf of the organization." "Names of employees who were injured or killed in an accident will not be released until their families have been notified."

Third, the plan should contain reference materials such as a current list of crisis team members (including roles and contact info), sample news releases, media contacts, etc.

Need help developing or revising your crisis management plan? We have a checklist of the recommended content for a best-practices crisis management plan. [Contact us](#) for a free copy.

Have a crisis management team:

Remember the chemical release that killed and injured scores of people in Bhopal, India? One of the criticisms of Union Carbide's handling of that crisis was that it had no crisis management team, and that it failed to set up a command post at company headquarters. In a crisis, trained people with assigned responsibilities will carry the day.

Train and test that team:

It is neither necessary nor possible for a company to anticipate every disaster that could conceivably affect it. What it can and should do is help its crisis managers develop the analytical ability and confidence needed to handle any kind of crisis. That takes training, which has become even more crucial in the face of the

maximum personalized attention. To register for a course, contact our office at 1.800.866.2026.

The above schedule lists Ammerman **public** workshops. For available dates for private (individual or group) training, please contact The Ammerman Experience at 1.800.866.2026.

[Back to top](#)

increased number of crises. And it takes practice because simulations continue to be the best way of learning to deal with the unexpected.

Identify potential outside resources:

Regardless of the size of your organization, in a crisis you may need to call upon outside help. The software company mentioned earlier had neither a staff communications professional nor a PR agency it could call on to develop the communications strategy and tools it needed. PR firms, media monitoring services, grief counselors, and emergency notification technology providers are just some of the outside resources worth identifying or developing relationships with prior to a crisis.

[Back to top](#)

Our firm is a pioneer in understanding the link between effective communication and professional success. What we've learned and what we teach can improve your performance . . . and that of others in your organization.

[forward to a friend](#) | [print this out](#) | www.ammermanexperience.com

Copyright 2010 The Ammerman Experience. All rights reserved. All logos, trademarks, service marks, and services remain the property of their respective owners.

Comments, questions or concerns? Email us at ammerman@ammermanexperience.com.