



The Problem Interview

So you have an upcoming interview and are anticipating the need to navigate some controversial or contentious issues.

Follow these tips to smooth the waters.

For media relations support:
jennifer.hartman@utoronto.ca
437-833-2897

1

Seek advice beforehand on how to approach the interview by contacting the Office of Communications and notify your Dept. head of the potential problem. Ask the Office of Communications to help you prepare for potentially controversial questions a reporter may ask.

2

Stay within your area of expertise and responsibility and don't be coaxed into making speculative statements that might backfire on you. The Office of Communications can help set up an additional interview for the reporter, if necessary. Never speak off the record.

3

Avoid saying "no comment." It sounds suspicious and unhelpful and leaves the impression you are hiding something. Instead, give a reason why you can't answer the question, e.g. the matter is before the courts or still being negotiated/reviewed, etc.

4

In responding to a negative question, answer with a positive.

Q. "Why has your research failed to...?"

A. "My research has expanded understanding of..."

5

Keep your emotions in check, especially for an on-camera interview. Remember, for an issue-oriented story, other sources will be contacted for their comments. Avoiding a tough interview won't kill the story but it will kill your chance to get your messages out.