

How to Ace a Radio Interview

BY BILL WINTER

The phone rings. It's the producer for a local radio talk show. She's inviting you to appear as a guest to discuss your libertarian group's activities.

Congratulations! You're about to do your first radio interview. Your voice will be heard by thousands -- perhaps tens of thousands -- of people. So, how can you best take advantage of this opportunity?

Here are some pointers. Follow them, and you'll be a more poised, persuasive, and entertaining talk radio guest.

Before the interview:

- **Find out how long the interview will be.** "Knowing the length of the interview will help you better prepare your answers," notes the National Women's Business Center. "The shorter the interview the more critical it is that you condense your main messages into sound bites."
- **Listen to the show beforehand.** You'll be much better prepared if you do, says former Delaware talk show host Jim Walsh. "Understand the format of the show," he advises. "Understand the type of listener. Understand the temperament of the host."
- **Write down three main points you want to make during the interview.** "Your aim is to get your message across, clearly, concisely and repeatedly," writes Alistair McConnachie in *Sovereignty* magazine (March 2001). "Go into each interview with a mental list of the main points that you must convey, and make sure that you say them."
- **Anticipate the questions you're likely to be asked.** In fact, make a list of the most hostile questions you can think of. Study your opponents' arguments. Anticipate obvious criticisms. Prepare answers or rebuttals.
- **Tape yourself doing a practice interview.** Listen to it. How did you sound? Were there questions you could have answered better? Did

you talk too fast? Too slow? Did you convey enthusiasm? Work to improve.

- **Finally, right before the interview... relax.** "Take a deep breath, laugh or yawn," urges Ricky Telg, assistant professor at the University of Florida. "Why yawn? Because you can't yawn and be tense at the same time. Even a nervous laugh to yourself will help relieve tension."

During the interview:

- **Be prepared to give a 30-second overview of libertarianism, your organization, or your issue.** Don't assume the audience -- or the host -- knows anything about what you're doing. And be ready to explain why your issue (or activities) are important to the average person in your community.
- **Be animated and energetic.** Don't speak in a monotone. Don't talk too fast or too slow.
- **Be likable.** Show your personality. Show your passion for liberty! "Remember talk radio is primarily an entertainment medium," says Walsh. "This doesn't mean you can't discuss serious issues -- but it does mean you have to be entertaining."
- **Remember that your job is not to win a debate with the host, but to win over listeners.** "I'm not there to win arguments; I'm there to persuade," says two-time libertarian presidential candidate Harry Browne. "I don't expect to change [the host's] mind, but I do hope I'm persuading listeners to come around."
- **Don't get into arguments with callers.** Politely explain your position. Attempt to answer any objections. If a caller becomes combative, say, "I see we disagree on this issue. Let's move on..."
- **Don't get trapped by interview tricks.** If a host tries to pressure you into a yes/no answer, explain, "It's not that simple." Then give a more detailed answer. If a host makes a false statement, correct it. Don't let misstatements of fact stand unchallenged. If a host tries to get you to answer a hypothetical question, decline to do

so. Say, "What an interesting hypothetical question! But I'd rather talk about the *real situation* we face, which is..." Then get back to your main message.

- **Be concise.** Radio is a fast medium; hosts get impatient if your answers drag on. "Say what you have to say in as few words as possible," advises Walsh.

- **Avoid Libertarian buzz words and phrases** such as Rothbardian, classical liberal, "taxation is theft," and minarchist. Most listeners have no idea what they mean. (As one blogger wrote, many people will assume a "minarchist" is a midget anarchist.)

- **Don't punctuate your answers with *uhs*, *ums*, or *you-knows*.** If you find yourself doing this, *pause* for a second. Gather your thoughts. Then, speak in clear, uninterrupted sentences.

- **Always supply a libertarian *solution*.** If you just complain about liberals and conservatives, listeners will dismiss you as a grumpy naysayer. Criticism of "the other guys" is an opportunity for you to present positive libertarian ideas.

- **Tell listeners how they can contact you or your organization.** Give out a phone number or a Web site address -- several times. Invite listeners to join your group or cause. Use the interview to increase the size of the libertarian movement!

After the interview:

- **Thank the host and producer for inviting you.**

- **Strive to improve.** Ask people in your libertarian group: "What is the *one piece* of advice you could give me about how to improve?" That gives them permission to be honest.

- **Finally, pat yourself on the back.** You survived your first radio interview -- and shared the news about liberty with thousands of people! Remember: radio interviews only get easier with practice. The next time, you'll do even better.

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