

## Interview Tips for Difficult Situations

### Loaded questions

The reporter may list three to five items to build a case and then asks the "loaded" question. Begin by either accepting or countering the statements, then bridge to your message.

**Example question:** "Statistics show that the amount of accidents involving alternative fuel vehicles is increasing every year. First responders know how to deal with conventional vehicles better than AFVs. Don't you think this shows that AFVs shouldn't be on the road?"

**Possible response:** "While your statistics are correct, your conclusion is not. The number of alternative fuel vehicles on our nation's roads continues to grow, a testament to their safety and an important reason for first responders to be trained in dealing with these environmentally friendly vehicles."

### Hypothetical situations

The reporter may create a hypothetical situation and follow up with a specific question. Don't respond to the hypothetical; state your message.

**Example question:** "Let's say some first responders from smaller towns believe alternative fuel vehicle training is too complex and time consuming for their purposes. Why should they bother learning this information?"

**Possible response:** "An increasing number of alternative fuel vehicles are appearing on America's roadways, and the proper training on these vehicles will ensure the safety of first responders and accident victims."

If the reporter doesn't give up, don't try to answer in a manner that will make him or her happy. You might rephrase your answer, but stick to your message.

**Example question:** "What do you say to individuals who believe that alternative fuel vehicles are more trouble than they are worth and put motorists and first responders in unnecessary danger?"

**Possible response:** "I would say that alternative fuel vehicles have many benefits to our nation, and first responders need to contribute to the acceptance of those vehicles by being properly trained to safely deal with them at the scene of an accident."

### Commenting on others' comments

Essentially, the reporter is asking you to speak for someone else. Don't do it, especially if you did not hear the individual make the statement yourself. It's possible the person was misquoted.

### Machine gunning

The reporter asks a string of questions simultaneously. Use body language (your hand) to stop it. Respond by simply answering the one question that you most want to answer, ignoring the other parts, then bridge to your message.

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### **False premises and conclusions**

Reporters' questions may contain false premises. Respond by countering immediately, or a viewer may accept the false premise.

**Example question:** "With technology constantly evolving, isn't it impossible to keep alternative fuel vehicle training for first responders current and accurate?"

**Possible answer:** "First responders appreciate the NAFTC offering up-to-date alternative fuel vehicle training, so they can learn more about these vehicles."

### **Negative entrapment**

Never repeat a reporter's negative statements. Reporters often ask questions in a hostile manner. When responding, turn the sentence around and stress the positive.

**Example question:** "Some first responders have told me they get a lousy training in dealing with these vehicles."

**DON'T answer:** "I don't think the education is lousy."

**DO answer:** "These vehicles are relatively new to our highways, but there are excellent training programs available, such as the NAFTC's, where first responders can get a very good training about these vehicles."

### **Interrupter**

The reporter interrupts you while you're trying to answer a question. Respond politely, yet firmly: "Let me finish answering your last question first."

### **Embarrassing silence**

Beware of the reporter who remains silent, encouraging you to ramble. Once you feel you've answered the question, stop. If you continue, you may end up providing him or her ammunition with which to shoot you.

### **Set-up**

If you feel the reporter is setting you up, chances are you're right. Reporters often think they know the answers before they've asked the questions. Let them know that you are the expert by dressing professionally, speaking eloquently, being confident and giving them a business card.

### **When asked a question on top of a question**

Slow down. Patiently answer one question at a time. The reporter often will look rude in these situations.

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### When heckled by a questioner

Be sensitive to the feel of the interview. You may want to answer a question very briefly or be silent while the reporter continues. Keep your cool.

### When asked a tough question

It is all right to pause briefly before responding. Dead time is seldom aired on the news, and silences can't be quoted in print. If your interview is live, a short pause often will give the impression that you wish to make a thoughtful response.

- Avoid such platitudes as, "That's a very good question" or "I'm glad you asked that question." The audience recognizes this as stalling.
- Avoid saying, "Well, as I said in my speech..." or "I already told you..." These responses sound as if you're insulting the reporter.
- Use the reporter's first name, showing that you still feel friendly in the face of difficult questions.
- You may want to rephrase the question, giving your audience a chance to hear it in your words: "If I understand your question correctly, you're asking..."
- If you disagree with something a reporter or talk show host has said, you must counter it. If you don't, the audience can only assume that you agree.