



Leadership NOTES

Media Tips for School Administrators

This Leadership Note offers some success principles for communicating clearly and effectively through newsletters and memos, newspaper articles, television news coverage, and social media posts.

Note: A principle is a guiding bit of knowledge that produces positive results most of the time. It is important to differentiate principles from laws and suggestions. A principle exists in the middle of the continuum between a suggestion and a law- more dependable than a suggestion, but not as dependable as a law. Gravity is a law. Gravity affects objects in predictable ways 100% of the time. Don't use your school's Twitter account to like or retweet controversial or sensitive posts- that's a principle, not a law, but more than a suggestion. Don't write long memos- that's not a law or a principle. It's just a suggestion, but a good one.

Success Principles for Written Communication

Stick with factual information, mostly. Since written communication lacks the non-verbal cues that accompany spoken communication, it is particularly unreliable at conveying nuance, emotional tone, and energy level.

Say the most important things first, like a headline. Don't bury the most crucial information deep in the text where only the most dedicated readers might find it.

Remember that written information is by definition an artifact. That means it has a long shelf life. Resist committing things to writing that will appear dated and obsolete in the near future.

Proof read everything. Even better, have someone else also proofread everything. It is difficult to spot one's own mistakes. For education leaders, grammatical mistakes, misspellings, and poor sentence structure are particularly embarrassing.

Success Principles for Newspaper Interviews

Ask the reporter what type of article he/she is writing. A human interest story is a different animal than an investigative report or a typical news report. This will allow you to know more about the author's purpose in writing the article. Remember that the reporter has an agenda that may be different than yours. It is a good idea to know ahead of time what the reporter is seeking to accomplish through the interview or article.

When possible, ask the reporter to provide you with the questions ahead of time so you can be better prepared to provide quality responses.

The reporter will likely ask you more questions and record more responses than can appear in the article. A newspaper article must fit into a predetermined number of column inches.

Remember that "no comment" is a comment.

Consult with district leaders when you suspect the interview will be adversarial or controversial. It is a good idea to review what types of information can be shared and what is confidential.

The vast majority of newspaper reporters and writers are high quality professionals who operate ethically, want to do good work on behalf of their publication, and want to establish a positive relationship with school officials. It is good business to reciprocate this approach.

Success Principles for On-Camera Communication

A professional education reporter will advise you on the basics of how to appear natural and competent on camera. Follow their advice.

Remember that most of your on-camera time will be edited in post-production and only a short segment will actually be shown on air, perhaps only seconds. So, get to what you want to say right away and say it succinctly.

Unless your interviewer asks you to do so, don't look directly at the camera. Rather, look off to the side into the eyes of the interviewer.

The camera shot will likely frame only your face and perhaps a bit of your shoulders. Therefore, your gestures and posture will go unnoticed. Communicate emotion and enthusiasm with your facial expression.

Typically, because of the lack of a full body image, a video interview subtracts energy and emotion. To appear enthusiastic and engaged, it is important to dial up your energy a bit beyond what would feel natural for a person to person interaction.

If you know you'll be on camera on a particular day, avoid wearing tight patterns or stripes. Also avoid pure white or black clothing. Blue, red, and green always look good on camera.

Do the interview outside if possible. The lighting is usually better and more natural. It also suggests that you don't spend all day behind your desk.

Your camera crew will likely attend to this, but if they don't, be sure to check what is behind you during the interview. The camera flattens depth perception and causes the background to appear closer than it really is.

Success Principles for Communicating through Social Media

Post positive messages, not critiques or negative reactions to other posts.

Use social media to highlight what is positive at your school, to recognize great work, to highlight accomplishments, and to promote others—not as a platform for self-congratulation.

In keeping with the above, if you post a selfie, be sure that the intent of the selfie is to promote or highlight the person(s) or setting, not yourself. Humility is refreshing and compelling on social media.

Be careful of abbreviations, slang, emojis, memes, and tropes that you do not understand.

Remember that liking and retweeting other posts implies your support and agreement—even if you comment to the contrary.

Some people hold religious beliefs or other strong values that preclude the use of social media. Remember to be sensitive to these constituents.

An image is much more compelling and interesting than text.

Don't be too concerned about the number of followers you command. Use social media to have a quality impact on a few important stakeholders, not thousands of strangers.

Avoid using your school social media accounts for political activity. Great schools are non-partisan.

Author's Note: Media Tips for School Administrators is adapted from the Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS) Developing Level Facilitation Guide- Mike Rutherford, Lead Author, copyright 2017 by Rutherford Learning Group, Inc., Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MoDESE), and the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).