



# Trapping Matters Workshop

## *Communication Tips*

Whether you are preparing for an interview with a local newspaper or TV affiliate, writing a short message for a trapper's association newsletter, or crafting a response to a negative post on a blog or online forum, there are a few basic "rules" to follow to make your story more engaging, more useful, and more effective.

### **Know your story**

Think hard about what you want/need to say about trapping to your audience. What does your audience want/need to know? Think about it from their perspective, as well as yours. Write down your objective before you write or speak a single word of your story. Everything else should work toward achieving that objective.

### **Use key messages**

You should be able to tell your story with a few key messages, preferably three or four. Communication research suggests that three or four points are easy for audiences to remember. It also makes them easier for you to remember. Counting down the key points also adds focus and emphasis. Use the *Key Messages* handout. Flag your key messages; e.g., "The most important thing to remember is...;" "It all boils down to this...;" "And don't forget..."

### **Use positive language**

Trapping can be a controversial topic, and you may need to respond to some very negative and perhaps erroneous messages. Don't dwell on those. Make corrections as necessary, but quickly return to delivering your key messages in a positive manner.

### **Avoid jargon and buzzwords**

Every field has its own list of buzzwords that are meaningful to insiders, but don't usually translate well (and often cause confusion among) outsiders or the "general public." Carefully consider your target audience before using any jargon.

**Stick to what you know**

Don't make claims in an interview or article if you aren't sure they are true. You might "get away with" making rough generalizations in a private conversation at the local diner, but there is no place for that in formal communications venues. Writing or saying something that is later discovered to be incorrect or imprecise is much worse than not saying anything at all.

**Be enthusiastic!**

Whether you're writing or speaking, let your knowledge and passion for the topic come through! People are much more likely to "tune in" to your message if you deliver it with confidence and enthusiasm.

## **Tips for Media Interviews**

In many situations you will need to conduct an interview in order to deliver your information to a broad public through a representative of the media—whether it be traditional media or social media. Following are tips to help you prepare for and conduct a successful interview.

**Preparing for an interview****Know your story**

The key to giving a successful, message-driven interview is to know what story you want to convey to the reporter. What is it you want to say about trapping? What would you like to see written about trapping? What would you like the headline in tomorrow's newspaper to be? This should be the focus of your interview. Remember that it is your story, and no one is better able to tell it than you. Give examples of your personal involvement with trapping to illustrate your point. "Trapping has been important in my line of work because ..."

### **Use simple facts and figures**

Use simple facts to describe the situation with qualitative distinctions, e.g., "Wildlife biologists use trapping as a method with which to manage wildlife populations."

Reporters crave quotable figures, numbers and statistics. These provide evidence for the story you are telling. Just be sure your figures are correct. "In this state, we have (x) number of active trappers each season."

### **Use quotable language**

Reporters will listen for quotable language—one or two quotes that will help tell the story. They are looking for interesting, unusual and vivid language, quotes that will sum up an issue or explain a difficult subject. Use metaphors and stories to explain complex information in plain terms. Example: "Because of trapping, we've been able to relocate otters to this area. There are as many otters living here now as when Lewis and Clark first explored this region." Avoid negative or defensive language. Remember that reporters find negative language to be very quotable ("No, we don't make that product any more;" "It wasn't a failure;" "I am not a crook."). Keep what you say very positive and distance yourself from the negative.

### **Put yourself in the reporter's shoes**

The reporter must write a story that is newsworthy, takes a new look at an issue, goes beyond what everyone has already said, or reports on something new. He or she must talk with a lot of people in the industry in order to find a good story. You can help by having a story that is useful to the reporter. As long as it is neatly summarized, supported by facts, has quotable language and is completely understandable, your story has a good chance of being told.

### **Consider the audience**

Think of the interview process as talking to the public through the reporter. The reporter is simply the conduit through which you can reach your audience.

Remember, an interview is not an intellectual discussion, debate or argument. Reporters like to talk to "real" people, not slick spokespersons. This approach gets your message through the reporter and to the people you want to reach.

### **Use key messages**

You should be able to tell your story with a few key messages, preferably three or four (see Communication Tips above). Always develop some personal messages, too. A reporter may ask you why you are the best person to be speaking on behalf of your organization. Use your own personal experience to build credibility for yourself and for trapping activities.

### **Anticipate tough questions**

Anticipate questions (especially tough questions) and attitudes the reporter may have. Prepare answers that defuse these questions and give you room to make transitions or refocus attention on your key messages. If you are prepared to address the toughest questions and know how to make transitions to your key messages, you'll feel more comfortable talking to reporters.

### **Giving the interview**

Although the tone of an interview should be that of a lively conversation – engaging and enthusiastic, open and forthright – it is your responsibility to remain focused.

Decide in advance just how candid you will be. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and offer to follow up later with an answer. If you can't respond to a question, explain why. It is a good idea to give the reporter an indication of when you might be able to respond more specifically.

Remember to be concise. A 20-minute interview may end up as a seven-second sound bite on TV later that night or as only three lines in print. Be able to crystallize your thoughts into a few hard-hitting sentences.

Throughout the interview, proceed with caution, although never with obvious hesitation. Listed below are several procedures:

### **Take control**

Realize that if you have a story to tell, if you are driven by enthusiasm for that story—if your messages are, in a sense, a mission—then it will not be unreasonable for you to take control and begin to tell your story. Take the initiative. Explain. Emphasize the key messages that must be understood or taken into account. Use rich examples that help tell your story. As you answer questions that move away from your story, make transitions back to what's most important. Answer the question, and then come back to your point. Use phrases such as, "Let me put that into perspective..."; "What people really need to understand is..."

Correct misstatements made by the reporter as soon as possible in a courteous, non-threatening manner. Your interview may live forever, and you want all the information to be absolutely correct.

### **Turn negatives into positives**

If you are asked negative questions, answer with positive responses. You may have to stop the negative impression with a simple "No" or "That's not true" responses but do not dwell on it. Move on to your positive story. Don't repeat the negative language. Make transitions to your message as you respond.

### **Avoid profession buzzwords**

Jargon and lack of clarity confuse the reporter, reducing the effectiveness of his or her primary tool: language. Every industry has its own jargon that will not translate well to outside audiences or to the general public. Use language that the reporter and the audience will understand, find meaningful and perceive as appropriate.

### **Beware of "off the record"**

Do not say anything to a reporter that you don't want to see in print or on the air. Don't talk "off the record" and don't assume when the tape recorder is off, the note pad is tucked away or the cameraperson is packing up his equipment that the interview is over. Avoid off-hand comments, sarcastic remarks and inappropriate humor. Your tone, manner and discussion before, during and after the formal interview should be seamless, emphasizing the same story.

### **Don't speculate**

Sometimes reporters will ask questions that are speculative. That's perfectly fair; people (their audience) tend to think that way. So always be prepared for the "what if" question. However, do not answer this type of question. Speculating can often lead to misquotes or misunderstanding.

### **Always remember**

When discussing trapping issues, be sensitive to the following truths:

- The public cares deeply about wildlife.
- The public doesn't take lightly the killing of animals.
- The public is highly uninformed about trapping.
- Show people you care—about wildlife and their interests.
- Seek informed consent. You don't have to convince people to become trappers themselves—just to allow regulated trapping to continue.