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## ACTUARIES MEET THE MEDIA

Moderator: LINDA M. DELGADILLO\*. Panelists: WILLIAM MACFARLANE\*\*, ROBERT W. WALDRON\*\*\*

1. How do the media decide what is newsworthy?
2. What makes news, and how is it defined, both for the general public and a specific industry?
3. What makes news from the actuarial profession?
4. Why is a story news today but not news tomorrow?
5. What variables are involved in making news, and how do these change from day to day and from publication to publication?
6. How do the media cover public issues?
7. What do the media look for in interviews and background information?

MR. WILLIAM MACFARLANE: I will briefly summarize how the trade press functions. Actuaries will have their news ideas and articles published in the trade press if, and only if, they meet the needs of the trade press or of individual members of the trade press.

The trade press needs what its readers are interested in, which is another way of saying the trade press needs what its readers need. Therefore, you must constantly ask if you have directed your story to the reader of the trade publication. Most often, if you direct your story towards the marketing side of the business to include the marketer and the agent, you will not be far off the mark. I do not mean that you must confine yourself to the marketing side of the business, however. There are other important issues you discuss, such as cost disclosure, personal taxation, and risk classification. If you have something to say about these issues, you will probably find a receptive trade press audience.

Some of the trade publications which will use your stories, if they are directed to the appropriate audience, are: The National Underwriter, which you are familiar with; Life Association News, whose audience consists of agents, marketers and home office

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marketers; Life Insurance Selling, with about 25,000 readers, most of whom are marketers who may also read Life Association News; and Best's Review, a monthly magazine which may publish one article every other issue written by an actuary.

Publications which are small and regional, like The Advocate and Underwriters Reporters, most of the time will not use articles by actuaries. A publication like Business Insurance is not a trade press publication for actuaries, but rather a consumer trade press for risk managers. It, therefore, would not use your stories.

#### How the General Press Functions

MR. ROBERT WALDRON : I will discuss how the general press functions. Included in the general press are the media: radio, television, the public prints, the news magazines and the dailies. In discussing the general press, I have both good news and bad news. The good news is that the general press has finally started to recognize the life insurance business as a source of news. The bad news is that the general press has finally started to recognize the life insurance business as a source of news. The fact that this is both good and bad news reflects the ambivalence of our own business about being covered by the general press. This ambivalence is well placed.

For the most part, the general press does not know what the insurance business does. And on those occasions when an issue arises, the general press has very little time to find out about the insurance business.

The first thing to recognize about the general press is that, for the most part, it is not interested in the problems of the actuarial profession or its need to reach the public with its message. The press has daily problems of its own. It must find, write, edit, and print a sufficient number of stories to convince readers to buy its newspaper or convince viewers to turn to its channel. If the press cannot do that, it will go broke because its advertisers will desert.

Essentially a daily newspaper, news magazine, radio or TV station is a conduit that gathers an audience and sells it to a retail advertiser. This is how the media function economically, and they must meet that economic imperative every day. To editors and reporters, there is a simple set of imperatives, namely, the logistics of the business. The first two imperatives are: find the stories and write the stories. Only after that has been accomplished do the media concern themselves with the matter of professionalism or the issue of representing some reality to their audiences and readers. This, then, becomes

the third imperative: get it straight. Please note, however, this is the third priority. And, incidentally, it is this order which caused problems for The Washington Post with the story "Jimmy's World," about the eight-year old heroin addict who never existed.

What happened to The Washington Post can happen in modern journalism to any newspaper or broadcast station, no matter how lofty it might be. The competition for audiences and, consequently, the advertiser, is that stiff, and the stakes are that high. The people newspapers and broadcast stations rely on to maintain professionalism and ethics are also in competition for the big stories. It is a function of the Watergate syndrome. Because everyone sees themselves as "Woodstein," their drive is to get the prize winning story, the attention-getter, the Page One byline, or the network news spot.

Beyond the professionalism issue, the average reporter still must overcome the logistics of getting the story and getting it written. His resources are: the agenda of government, which he covers regularly; agendas of the political process; daily rounds of accidents and disasters; written reports from various parts of the environment; and press releases from various sources, including that ubiquity of our age, the consumerist. Added to this are the interview for an enterprise story the reporter or his editor has thought of, plus the antagonist source to counter that interview, because each story has at least two sides.

The life insurance business usually comes in as the counter-source to an enterprise story that has arisen on a city, metropolitan or national desk. An editor will decide to run a story on life insurance and then assign a reporter to it. The first thing the reporter will do is contact the Federal Trade Commission, and the FTC will define life insurance in its terms. Then the reporter will question Ralph Nader about the life insurance business, and he may say something like "it is a bunch of sacred cows peddling sacred bull." After that, the reporter may contact a consumerist organization and be told that the life insurance industry misrepresents information to the public. By the time that reporter finally contacts people in the industry, he halfway believes that the industry swindles the public. And then it is our job to not necessarily convince him that we are not swindlers, but rather to convince him to at least place our counterarguments in the public arena. The public will make up its mind.

The last telephone call a reporter makes to check his story will probably be to the antagonist source, who may ruin the story. In fact, the general joke around the city room often is, "I had a great story until I made that last call." So because a reporter does not want to lose his story through an antagonist source, he may not call us. Most reporters tend to stay with a given issue and, having once defined its terms, tend to

stay with those terms. Reporters do all this against a deadline and the antagonism of an editor who always thinks a story should be completed five minutes earlier.

What has happened is that the life insurance industry has been out of the media game for a long time. In the meantime, consumerists have gained power, federal agencies have lined up on the sides of their constituents, and state, Senate, House and Legislative committees have aligned themselves with consumerists. During this time the press became familiar with arguments against insurance products, our business and, on some occasions, our pompousness. They have tended to cast their impressions of us in stone. Consequently, the insurance industry must roll back. As someone once said, the times are changing, and we will also have an opportunity to change in a new environment.

One aspect of the industry is that we are an irregular source of news. And if the press is biased, as we all believe on occasion, it is biased in favor of regular news sources--those who set the agenda. As I said earlier, generally those who set the agenda are government people. The life insurance industry does not set agendas. What we usually do is react to agendas. This means that we are secondary and irregular sources of news, called upon without forewarning to respond to issues.

And because it is proprietary information, newspapers do not reveal their agendas to us when they call. What happens, then, is that we are caught, not unprepared, but rather on someone else's time, obliged to respond to someone else's terms. If actuaries can understand this, they will be greatly relieved of agitation when dealing with the general press. I would like to stress, however, that these things occur largely as a result of the system rather than as a result of any particular bias the media have against you.

One thing to remember about press relations is that, unless you have initiated the news story, you are not likely to have much control over it. The best you can do under such circumstances is to respond intelligently, appropriately, and authoritatively in language that the reporter and his audience will understand. Technical explanations will require additional translation out of their original context.

#### The Climate in Which the Press Functions

Two things, each 180 degrees apart, have developed in the climate the media function in. The liberal community has lost credence but has not lost its voice. What has developed is a political and ideological overlap between new and old dispensations. Constituencies of liberal bureaucracies have become victims of the budget cutting process. And because the media know the public currently favors budget cuts, they are having a grand time. How? By reporting the wonders of the new administration's budget cuts on the one hand, and then by

reporting the horrors of the new administration's budget cuts on the other hand. The media are condemning those budget cuts which affect the little man, but they are cheering the general budget cutting process. This may seem inconsistent, but in fact it is what the media are all about: reporting conflict and drama.

They are not necessarily concerned about professionalism or the ultimate outcomes of conflicts. They are interested in the clash. And because they are interested in the clash, that is our way into the media game. It requires that we not only become known, but that we become known as willing to face the issues and fight it out in print. We also must demonstrate that we can put up a reasonably decent fight. The media do not want mismatches.

Why should we get into the media game? What are the stakes for us? We do not pick the battleground--someone else usually does. We do not pick the terms of the fight and, as any general can tell you, if you can pick the terms, you have won the battle. And we do not pick the timing. So, why should we fight at all.

One school of thought is that we should keep quiet. We should let our challengers expend themselves in the attack. If we keep our heads down, the issues will subside due to lack of conflict. By engaging those issues in conflict, we simply expose them more. Unfortunately, the industry has been ambivalent about the press for over 20 years; because of that, we have lost many issues by refusing to fight.

At stake now is the risk classification system itself, that marvelous structure that makes insurance possible and saleable. It is under attack as discriminatory. There also is the policy loan problem in which, state-by-state, we face not only hostile consumerists but, in some cases, hostile agents.

There is the very definition, after all these years, of what we sell when we sell a whole life insurance policy. And there is the cost disclosure issue. The list is practically endless.

As a business, can we really turn our backs on some of these fights in the public prints and on the public airwaves? Of course we cannot, and we do not have to. All we have to do is get our point of view across in an understandable manner. That means seeking access to the media and being prepared to answer when someone else raises the issues. Since we know what the issues are, we can prepare.

The underlying dynamic of all confrontation in public relations, which is what the media game is all about, is to achieve access in our favor which is at least as powerful as our opposition's argument. Even though the media seem to be biased, and the game appears to be rigged, and all the elements of battle seem to be against us, the public is fair. The public

will not act in the face of ambivalence. And because of that, it is important to have our counterarguments aired. In the face of ambivalence, the public will not call upon their legislators against our business if it is not sure about an issue. The idea, then, is to make the public unsure about an issue. If your argument is fair, proper, and articulated in an understandable language, this is an ethical thing to do.

If the actuary will try to understand how this game is played and why it is important to learn its rules, he can contribute mightily and authoritatively to achieve the visibility that our old, honorable, and socially valuable business deserves.

### Questions and Answers

QUESTION: How do actuaries become involved in the media game?

MR. WALDRON: It really depends upon the circumstances. For example, if your company's president or public relations department is media-oriented and willing to become involved in public issues, you can serve as a spokesman for your company when a technical explanation is needed. This will require, of course, that you convince the president or the public relations practitioner that you speak a language that is understandable. However, I would advise you not to imitate the Ralph Naders or anyone else whose business it is to attract the public's attention by outrageous hyperbole. I think it is demeaning, and I do not think it is necessary.

MR. MACFARLANE: Also, the media frequently lay the ground rules or the battlefield. But if you wait for a reporter to call you, you will wait a long time. If you initiate a call to a reporter--and there are many situations where your company may want to react to an item published in the trade or general press--your reaction can be an initiation. I do not like to use the word "reaction," because we are always accusing the industry of reacting rather than initiating. But remember that reacting can be an initiating process. So instead of waiting for the reporter to call you, if you see an article you should respond to, call the reporter and discuss it.

QUESTION: I would like to question the role of the antagonist. If you find a story and feel that an actuarial viewpoint should have been represented, but was not, is it too late to become the antagonist and tell the reporter he missed a point?

MR. WALDRON: It really depends upon the locality. If the story appears in the New York Times, you will have a difficult time first, trying to reach the reporter and second, insisting that the newspaper should devote space tomorrow to a story written today. A local newspaper, on the other hand, will listen to your viewpoint. When I talk about a local newspaper, I mean a paper the size of The Milwaukee Journal, The San Francisco Examiner or The Miami Herald.

You must remember that the large newspapers do not have the space to go after a story twice in a row, unless it is a running story, because the story does not mean that much to them. In fact, with all the other news in a paper like The New York Times, it is probable that many readers have not seen the first story. In such cases, it might not be worthwhile to push for a second story. The second day story on something that is losing its color does not have much impact. However, if the president of your company says, "Correct that story," you have to do it. Usually a letter to the editor is the best way to handle it.

QUESTION: Do you try to develop media contacts by giving them background information before something makes headlines?

MR. WALDRON: Very much so. There are two ways to do this. At the American Council of Life Insurance, we do it via the trade goods route, which simply means we act as missionaries to these newspapers with stories of a relatively soft character. These stories are not really urgent, but are of interest on the soft news side of that newspaper: the women's pages, the focus pages, the science pages, the "magazining" type of story. We constantly move stories like that, not necessarily because they do us much good, but because they maintain our access with the media for that terrible time when a crisis strikes. Then the media know where we are and how to reach us. We know which issues will strike, but we do not know who will start a brush fire somewhere. Therefore, this process is designed to keep the media close to us.

As a trade association we also send out visitors to newspapers annually to let them know who we are. In addition to that, we recently started a networking program in 33 cities across the country. We designated spokesmen, technicians, and media contact people to respond to issues locally which may develop in Washington.

QUESTION: Do the local papers like to have that kind of network reacting to a story? Is this popular?

MR. WALDRON: There is a famous story in journalism I would like to share with you. On a famous day in 1927, a headline appeared in the Bronx home newspaper, and it read, "Lindbergh flies over Bronx to Europe."

Our business is to spread out across the country. The local paper's concern is very important. If a newspaper can localize a story generated in Washington, it will. For example, sometimes local newspapers send reporters on the street to ask people what they think of Ronald Reagan's economic speech. What we must develop, then, is local access, provided we can find the spokesmen on the local level who want to play the media game.

MRS. LINDA DELGADILLO : What would make the actuary a spokesperson or valuable press resource for either the trade or general press?

MR. MACFARLANE: The actuary can be very useful to the trade and general press in a teaching role. Actuaries understand the most complex aspect of a very complex subject, and if an actuary can clarify something for the reporter, he becomes invaluable. This is particularly true in the trade press, where we are writing for people who know what life insurance is about. The important thing about assuming a teaching role is that, once you have done it, you can exert some control over that reporter in the future. What I mean is that, because you did him a favor by giving him information he could understand, he has an obligation to you. In other words, he has to pay his tuition, if he is a decent individual, which most reporters are. Therefore, in the future, if your company or industry is criticized, chances are good that the reporter will contact you for your side of the story. If you had not assumed that teaching role in the first place, this might not occur.

MR. WALDRON: I would also like to add a few thoughts here. As our world becomes more complex, as it becomes centrifugal, in a sense that different fields fly apart from each other, the valuable person is the one who can translate among fields and translate to the general public. How are we going to establish public policy on matters of a highly technical aspect unless the public understands what is at stake? We need metaphors to translate scientific jargon into a language the public can make some judgments about. Therefore, the person who stands at the translating gate becomes extremely valuable in establishing public policy.

We all know what it is like to attend a committee meeting and reach a consensus of opinion because we know how to run committee meetings and arrive at an opinion based upon information that is brought to bear. The owner of the information owns the consensus. Therefore, as an actuary, if you learn the metaphor of common language, apply it to your highly technical trade, and stand at that translator's gate, you will not only become valuable to the press, you will also become extremely valuable to your business.

QUESTION: Actuarial matters are very complex, but more than that, there are different kinds of actuarial matters where one actuary could answer much better than another. What problems do the media have in finding the right actuary who really understands the subject they are interested in?

MR. MACFARLANE: I can tell you from experience that it is



difficult. I have a few contacts in New York and Chicago, but that is because I am inside the business and I know where to look. I also know that I should go to different sources. But the general press does not know where to go.

MR. WALDRON: Actually the standards of differentiation are practically nonexistent in the general press. If the media find an actuary, we are lucky. If that actuary will clarify his remarks by indicating that something is not his field of expertise but rather his general understanding, the media are happy. You must remember that the standards of translation do not require exact idiomatic translation from the field into the lingua-franca. Your translations need to be roughly accurate, but not precise. For example, if you are an ordinary life actuary asked about group annuities, you can answer some questions. You took Part 7. It does not matter if your answers are not precise, just close. I recognize that actuaries have problems with this because they tend to speak for their own audience.

MRS. DELGADILLO: I would like to add something from a staff person's point of view. I encourage Society members to keep in touch with me on particular issues and to send me copies of their remarks. This helps me identify spokespersons within the profession. I frequently receive requests from the media asking for a qualified spokesperson, and it is important to me that the reporter speaks to someone who can give him the right information.

QUESTION: In media relations, actuaries are typically torn between our public relations professionals' advice and government relations professionals' advice. I think this is especially apparent in the American Council of Life Insurance (ACLI).

For example, I have a press release which introduced the Economic Equity Act of 1981. The press release states that "discrimination is nowhere more rampant than in the life insurance industry. The insurance industry was gendered with increased rates and reduced benefits for women. It ignores all the variables and concentrates exclusively on sex. In some states disability insurance is not available to women for any price or on any terms...."

My immediate reaction to this was to do something controversial. The advice of my company's government relations staff was to educate the legislators and their staffs quietly, professionally, and noncontroversially. They felt that the issue would be blown out of proportion. Would you comment on that?

MR. WALDRON: You are right. There is a conflict between public relations and government relations, and I do not know if it is resolvable. The legal profession tends to not pick a fight. The public relations profession tries to achieve a balance in

print. I think our business is starting to address the issue of whether or not we should fight. The incident which has brought us to this point was the Federal Trade Commission Report. Public relations people were incensed, chief executive officers and their boards were incensed, and even government relations people were incensed. The reason was because they did not receive copies of the FTC report before it was released to the press. In fact, when they requested copies on the day the report was released, they could not get them. Because of this incident, they are starting to agree that on some issues there are times when we should fight it out in print.

QUESTION: Does the ACLI have a similar conflict between its public relations and government relations practitioners? How should an issue be addressed?

MR. WALDRON: The conflict is circumstantial rather than ideological. We have not decided to involve ourselves in a conflict over every issue. On the other hand, we have decided to ask the question as each issue rises. To be sure, there are conflicts and confrontations on given issues, but we try to deal with these things on a circumstantial basis. We think them out. We discuss what is at stake with the government relations practitioners in terms of what sources and contacts may be alienated if we use confrontation. And they discuss with us our assertions of what will happen in public relations if we do not confront a particular issue. The final judgment on these issues is not made by either government or public relations people but by Robert Froehle, the head of the ACLI.

QUESTION: You mentioned earlier that actuaries should discuss issues in terms that the general public can understand. How do you handle a situation where the only response is boring and complicated?

MR. MACFARLANE: If your response is complicated and boring, the response of the individual you are aiming your message to will be negative. You must speak in terms that people understand. Here is an example of what I mean. I read an article in Forbes recently on problems companies have with the 1959 Insurance Company Tax Act. I read that article twice, and I still did not understand it, even though I had a sense of what was said. I think if I read it a third time, I will understand it. I am going to the trouble of reading it a third time because I am in this business and I have to understand that information. The average reader, however, does not. He must understand the first time. If the information is boring, if it is overly complicated, you will lose that individual.

MR. WALDRON: The most valuable tool you can use in this translation process is metaphor. To the degree that you can liken whatever initiative, whatever product, whatever technical issue is at stake in terms of something familiar, to that degree will you be more understood.

QUESTION: How do we handle interviews with reporters and avoid being misquoted or misinterpreted, particularly when discussing complex issues?

MR. WALDRON: You can be more assertive in an interview. It takes a while to learn how, but sometimes you must do it. For example, a reporter will have a list of questions prepared in advance, possibly given to him by his editor. It is possible that he does not understand the question, and all he really wants from you is a response he can write out. If the reporter does not ask a follow-up question that you think is important, you should ask it and answer it. In addition, if a reporter seems to have a hidden agenda during the interview, ask him what his agenda is. Tell him to give you a better idea of his story's context so you may respond to it appropriately.

MR. MACFARLANE: Try to find out what the reporter's thinking is. It is not inappropriate to avoid answering a question directly until you know that. Another thing to do before answering a question you are uncomfortable with is to simply say, "Before I answer that question, I think there are a few things you should know." Tell the reporter what you think he should know and then answer his question.

MR. WALDRON: There is another technique which is particularly useful for television. Renegotiate the question. For example, if you are asked a question which you cannot answer without sounding foolish or further confusing the issue, you should say, "I think I understand your question. What I think you are really trying to get at is, etc...." What has happened is that you have flattered the reporter, and you have restated the question. Then you answer your own question. You can turn an interview around that way.

It takes practice, and one of the functions of practice is that there is risk involved. You will stumble several times before you can do this properly. And I can assure you that it is painful to be quoted in print accurately, especially when you have said something incorrectly. However, that is the way you learn.

QUESTION: What is the newspaper editor's relationship to reporters, and who determines what types of stories are covered?

MR. WALDRON: As I said earlier, government activity sets much of the daily news agenda. For example, reporters will regularly cover the Supreme Court and, to some extent, the local courts. They use court clerks as regular secondary sources to tell them what may be developing as a good story.

How do reporters know what is hot within an agency? The agencies will push what is on their agenda and, because of that, they often determine the media agenda. Most government agencies have individuals on staff who are media-wise. These are the

sources the reporters cultivate for news tips.

Other news stories march in the door and sit on the city editor's desk via the press release. This type of press release is a news story from a special interest. It is up to the editor to judge whether or not the story is of broad enough interest to his readers. Sometimes the editor will assign a reporter to cover the story, depending upon what else is developing in the news day.

Another type of news story is the spontaneous news story, in which an unexpected emergency or disaster occurs, like a major fire or an airline crash. Then there is the enterprise story, which usually runs in summer when government activity is slow. Enterprise stories use middle-of-the-road topics, such as middle-income housing, and are published in a three or four-part series. The enterprise story will almost invariably engage a business like life insurance as a commentator or a source of information which is used against it. Enterprise stories almost invariably are hostile, because the reporter must find something bad. Good news does not exist because good news is no news, and it is printed toward the back of the paper.

QUESTION: Is journalism hostile to all business?

MR. WALDRON: Over the last 15 years, journalism has become an extremely hostile institution. This is probably a function of the age which journalism has been catering to, the 60 million baby boomers, all challenging their institutions. During these 15 years, journalism has managed to severely damage the credibility of practically every institution in the country, from government to business to charitable organizations. In fact, as The Washington Post has shown with the untrue "Jimmy's World" story which won a Pulitzer Prize, journalism is not above damaging its own credibility. The world is hostile, but it can be worked.

MR. MACFARLANE: But remember this. When you read your newspaper, what is the first story you read? It is the story up front. And what story is up front? It is the story of conflict, of antagonisms of the press against institutions. What makes news is what people read and what they demand of the newspaper. Newspapers can give you anything you want, and they will give you anything you want. In fact, they have given you anything you want.

QUESTION: Are there particular instances where actuaries have succeeded or failed in dealing with the press?

MR. WALDRON: Yes, but this is more a function of inexperience than anything else. It does take experience to deal with the

press, and even those who are experienced often fall on their faces. However, something else important to the actuary, and possibly rightly so, is that when he appears in print, he is concerned that he appears in a manner his peers can approve of. That is a conflict. If you are effective in print, your peers probably will not approve of what you have said, because you will have foregone standards of precision to make an actuarial issue accurate and translatable.

MRS. DELGADILLO: Should the press conference be used as a vehicle to obtain media coverage?

MR. MACFARLANE: Press conferences should rarely be used.

MR. WALDRON: You should not call a press conference unless you are the President of the United States, the governor of a state or someone who is covered regularly by the media. The media view the press conference as an event staged for the benefit of those giving it, rather than as a source of news. The press conference has become self-serving. If the media do not have the manpower available to staff a press conference, they will not cover it. You may call a press conference, then, and no one will come. Public relations practitioners avoid press conferences.

QUESTION: While you may be able to control an interview with the media, you cannot control the story printed afterwards. If you have been grossly misquoted or, because of a reporter's misunderstanding, an innuendo has crept into the story, what recourse is there after the damage is done?

MR. WALDRON: If the innuendo or misquote is unintentional, or if the damage is not severe, usually in the interest of maintaining a contact with a reporter who has not been hostile, you should swallow it. You can, on the other hand, write a letter in a very nice way to the reporter, but do not write to his boss, telling him you thought the story was not handled very well.

If the damage is severe, you should do the same kind of a letter, but as a letter to the editor. However, do not challenge the reporter in print, because he has his own credibility and his job to worry about. You should try to be civil in your comments.

The best way to avoid misquotes, if you are prepared and if you are media-wise, is the live television interview in a studio. And I do not mean the ambush interview where you are chased out of the grand jury room by a reporter and a camera. You have the best chance to avoid misquotes in the live studio interview because you cannot be edited.

MR. MACFARLANE: The advice about being civil in your comments is very important. When you are responding to something, either in speaking or writing, do it in such a way that you appear as cool, reasonable and unemotional as possible.

QUESTION: Actuaries are interested in providing facts. Is the press interested in hearing the facts?

MR. WALDRON: They are interested in those facts which support their point of view.

MR. MACFARLANE: The trade press is different. We walk a tight-rope. On the one hand, we want to tell the story, report the conflict, and sell papers. On the other hand, we have an entire industry which is a news source. And this industry comprises both our readers and advertisers. We have to balance those two audiences. Therefore, the rules that apply in the general press do not apply in the trade press. The trade press writes to experts who know something about insurance. We want to get the facts straight.

MR. WALDRON: The media look for the facts that support the original terms of the story when it is first surfacing or those facts that provide the conflict in the story--the antagonist source.

When a reporter interviews you for a story, it is in your best interest to determine what the story's context is. After that you should organize your responses so you give him what he needs, and that could be conflicting facts, if your facts do conflict within the context of his story.

This almost involves thinking like a journalist. You can ask what the reporter's editor wants from the story. The answer is that he wants a conflict to present to his readers which appears to be a credible, plausible fight reported by the newspapers.

As a spokesman for the insurance business, I have found that reporting rather than advocating a viewpoint is much more valuable. It puts you in a much more credible position. For example, rather than saying, "I believe this," you can say, "My business believes this." What has happened is that you now represent a special interest. If you can bring yourself to that neutral position of reporting, you will be a valuable source both within and outside the business.

MRS. DELGADILLO: When I am dealing with the general media, I do not usually discuss the statistics or the mortality ratios or the standard experience of the business. I try to weave the human aspect into my discussions. It is easier to make your point talking about people living, babies being born and people marrying. This example emphasizes again using metaphors rather than actuarial jargon to reach your audience.

QUESTION: I think actuaries could make a significant contribution to legislatures and the public on many social issues. However, actuaries are rather conservative by nature, and I think the leaders of our profession are reluctant to speak on

behalf of the profession because they have too much respect for their peers. For example, 10 actuaries may have 10 different opinions. Do you have any suggestions on how we should deal with this problem?

MR. WALDRON: I cannot resolve technical conflicts of perspective which arise among reasonable actuaries disagreeing on reasonable points, and no one can. Perhaps the Society of Actuaries' position to avoid public conflicts as a professional association is good. However, this does not mean that individual actuaries or actuaries representing their company or governmental agency cannot speak on technical imperatives or defend against a public policy initiative. In fact, I think this is where your value is. The Society of Actuaries preserves a professional stance before the public by not speaking out. Therefore when an individual actuary speaks out, his posture is enhanced.

COMMENT: The Society of Actuaries has told the American Academy of Actuaries that it is their responsibility (the Academy) to interface and to provide public information and public service needed by editors, legislators, and regulators.

QUESTION: How do other organizations, for example, those comprised of agents or doctors, express their opinion?

MR. MACFARLANE: The agent organizations very often ignore important issues. But sometimes an issue surfaces which they must take a stand on. There are two ways to do it. The first way is to reach a consensus among the membership. After that happens, the consensus becomes policy and is announced as such. The second way to address issues is through a board of directors consensus. This does not happen often because it places the board in conflict with perhaps 40% of its membership.

MR. WALDRON: Perhaps another question to ask in this regard is how does the public view professional associations? Who takes public stances on public issues?

When professional associations speak out on issues, the public views the associations either positively or negatively to the degree that the public perceives an association's self-interest. For example, if an association comments on an issue and clearly supports the public interest, then to that degree are those public positions valuable and positively received by the public. If, on the other hand, the issue is one of self-service, and it is perceived by the public as such, its reaction will be negative. Therefore, it is important to carefully select the issues to comment on publicly. Such issues must clearly be in the public interest.

MR. MACFARLANE: How does the American Council of Life Insurance handle divergent opinions on major issues?

MR. WALDRON: When I act as a spokesman for the ACLI, and if the divergence of opinion is not too large, I will report the different schools of thought. I believe that is my job. I try to report the different viewpoints as factually as I can.

QUESTION: Can you coach those of us who are members of public relations or publicity committees on how to communicate what an actuary does?

MR. WALDRON: We can start by asking you what an actuary is.

COMMENT: It is difficult to explain **because the public has no** relation with the actuary. It never sees the actuary or hires the actuary except indirectly.

MR. WALDRON: What you need to do is simplify the definition of an actuary, or forget about ever being a profession that people will immediately recognize. There is another alternative. You can use a metaphor to describe what you do. I once described you as the design engineers of the insurance industry. That definition is not precise, because you are involved in many other businesses. Nevertheless, that definition is short, and it would get some recognition. Sometimes you must trade off a little to become better known.