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Marketing Yourself Through Public Relations

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Summary: Whether you need to promote your own business or you want higher visibility in your company or community, a working knowledge of public relations (PR) techniques can help. This panel of award-winning PR pros from the Communications Department of the Society of Actuaries will explain how to create tools that can add value to your company and energize your career.

Ms. Cecilia Green: I'm the public relations director for the Society of Actuaries. We thought we'd tell you how we became PR professionals. I think I always knew, even though I studied journalism in college, that I would end up in public relations because the editors of the newspapers I wrote for always asked me why I put a happy spin on every story. So I was destined for public relations.

Before I came to the SOA, I was vice president at an advertising agency and in charge of the PR function there. Before that, I worked for a school system in the public relations department. During the first week I worked there, we had a teacher murdered in his basement by a student, so that was a real challenge. I've also done a lot of pro bono work for arts organizations. I'll let Jackie tell you about herself.

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Ms. Jacqueline Bitowt: Unlike Cecilia, I thought I wanted to be a journalist and no one ever accused me of putting a happy spin on a story. I have a degree from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. I decided that if I were going to pursue a career in journalism, I would have to run around the country and move from place to place. My friends and immediate family were more important to me, so I switched, very happily, to public relations and worked for Sears for 11 years. One of the big stories we handled at Sears was the purchase, in a single week, of Caldwell Banker and Dean Witter. Another PR story I recall involved a man named Steve Goodwin who put on a Spiderman suit and climbed the Sears Tower. So I've had some adventures in public relations.

After leaving Sears during its reorganization, I spent a brief amount of time at a public relations agency and another nonprofit organization that used to be known as the National Society to Prevent Blindness. I happily moved back into business-related communications with the Society, and I'm very happy to be here.

I also worked with Duff & Phelps. It is no longer a financial services company or a diversified company. It broke apart, which is why I'm not with them. They still have a credit rating agency that's growing.

Ms. Linda Heacox: I'm a public relations specialist in the communications department, working under Cecilia and with Jackie. I do a great deal of editing, media relations, and writing for the Society.

I came to public relations out of journalism school by the extremely honorable route of journalist to advertising writer to political writer. I sort of came through the back door. Before I came to the Society, I worked in Washington for about 10 years—first on Capitol Hill and then for the Red Cross and also with a trade paper.

Ms. Green: What we hope to cover is how to develop a simple communications plan using the RACE formula, which stands for research, action planning, communication, and evaluation. This formula shows how to assess your situation, how to set some realistic goals, choose strategies and tools to implement the goals, and then evaluate whether you've accomplished your goals.

First, let's score our PR IQ test. The correct answer to question one, "Which is the correct definition of PR?" is D, a planned effort to use two-way communication to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance. *Planning* is a key word in public relations. If you answered B, you get a half point because building relationships is an important part of public relations, but the overall best answer was D.

The answer to question two, "Which is the best definition of marketing?" is C, designing products and services and distribution channels that will achieve maximum sales and customer satisfaction in the target markets. Many people get public relations and marketing confused. There is marketing public relations, but it's a public relations effort to support the designs and the services. A, developing messages to distribute through controlled media; B, planning and implementing special events to gain high visibility for your product; and D, point-of-purchase displays and demonstrations are all tools that marketers use, but these answers were not the best description of marketing.

Question three was, "What corporate functions are typically considered part of PR?" The answers are A, sales meetings; B, employee communications; C, public affairs (government relations); and D, media relations (including publicity). Media relations is one that all PR departments deal with. Sometimes public affairs is a separate department, sometimes employee communications are done through human resources, and sometimes sales meetings are done through marketing, but typically, public relations gets involved in all of those areas.

The answer to question four, "Which of the following are usually considered PR vehicles?" is A, news releases; B, direct mail pieces; C, speeches; and D, op-ed pieces.

From the Floor: What is "D?"

Ms. Green: You actuaries have your lingo, and we have ours. Opposite the editorials in newspapers are the opinion pieces. We often have an op-ed section in *The Actuary*.

Question five is, "What approach should you use if you decide your business/career should be written up by the newspaper and you live in a major city?" The correct answer is C, look hard at what unique value your business or career offers to the area, position that in light of your community service, and call the business editor of a suburban newspaper. Sometimes, in the old days, when newspaper or media people had more time, they would allow a public relations person to take them to lunch or a game of golf. It still works sometimes, but most people are too busy and consider it an infringement on their time.

Answer D is, place advertising in the newspaper and then tell the editor that, as an advertiser, you're entitled to a story. Some of us have worked on trade journals where a lot of the advertisers think they're entitled to a story. If they spend a lot of money on advertising they believe they should get a story, too. It just doesn't work

that way because most of the time advertising and editorial are different sections and don't interact that much.

The correct answer to question six, "What must be added to your media relations efforts to produce good results?" is B, your services and/or products are rock solid in quality and you conduct your business ethically. You could hire a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter to do your publicity, but it won't help if you don't have good services, a good product, and a good reputation. Public relations can't build an image that doesn't exist.

From the Floor: You said public relations cannot build something that's not there. Does that apply to politics?

Ms. Green: Ask Ms. Heacox. She was in politics.

Ms. Heacox: Your question shows that the public is becoming less and less inclined to buy empty promises. I was listening to one of the Sunday morning news shows and they were discussing the fact that nobody believes the promise to cut taxes. It just isn't working. People that used to campaign on that promise now have to find new things to promise because that one's not going to work anymore. Even in politics, there is a minimum substance requirement.

Ms. Green: If you answered "C" on number one, shame on you because a misperception about public relations is that we can put a positive spin on things even when they are negative, or, another misperception is that we try to hide negative things.

A good public relations person will be the first one in the door of the president when a negative situation develops, and will advise that you immediately be open and honest about what has happened. The PR person will be the first one to get the information to the media rather than let them start making up stories, which reporters will do. If you won't talk to them, they'll invent something to write in the newspaper. After giving an explanation, the important thing to do is to say you're going to make sure this doesn't happen again.

What I'd like to do now is talk about public relations planning. Anyone who wants to use public relations techniques needs to think about developing a simple plan. You need to focus on what you want to achieve first and how much time and money you'll have to invest, considering your resources. Different people have different situations.

If you want to try to develop a communications plan on your own, go ahead, but you may want to consider using public relations help. Our office is always willing to give advice. We can't write things for you, but if you have something you want to talk over with us, give us a call. If you decide to hire a PR person to help you out, you don't have to hire an Edelman or a Hill & Knowlton. PR practitioners work in every community. There are independent practitioners who can help you for \$65 or \$75 per hour. We do hire freelancers quite a bit to help us out.

If you want to take a crack at it yourself, I'll lead you through the process using the RACE formula, the campaign we did for Social Security, and the brochure we did for the SOA Foundation. It's almost a textbook case of using the RACE formula.

I'm just going to talk about the brochure part of the campaign because there are many aspects of it. The "R" in RACE stands for research. In research, the first thing you want to identify is the problem. You can't proceed on any plan without knowing what the problem is.

The impetus for the Social Security brochure came from actuaries, especially Bob Berin, who was the Society President at the time. Bob said that people didn't understand Social Security. Many didn't understand how it was funded, didn't foresee a future for it, and many people thought Social Security was doomed. That really bothered actuaries because they knew that it wasn't doomed. There could be some fixes that would keep it solvent in the future. The problem was, what could the foundation do to educate the public with unbiased information? We identified the problem as people believing that Social Security was doomed and began our research effort.

Our secondary research involved reading everything we could get our hands on about Social Security, especially the consumer information that was out there from the different organizations that talk about Social Security. We also read media reports, many of them using headlines very much slanted toward the scare tactics. That's what sells newspapers and magazines. We also obtained consumer material from the Department of Labor and other organizations.

Then we started some primary research. We first tested the distribution channel that we wanted to use. We thought we could use actuaries in companies to distribute this brochure to the employees, or to take it to the people who would be able to distribute it to their employees. We got a consulting actuary to pave the way for us by talking about the brochure with the people at six companies. Our primary research was our interviews with the people at these six companies. We did interviews by phone and in person.

You can't stop doing research once you start on the campaign. You have to keep testing. The initial brochure copy was almost a white paper that a committee wrote on Social Security. It was 10 pages long so we had to bring it down to the average citizen's reading level, which we didn't quite accomplish. We tried to write it for someone between a sixth- and eighth-grade reading level, and ended up at more of a ninth-grade level.

We needed to test the brochure copy out on our target audiences, so we showed it to a group of employees who worked at an insurance company. We conducted a focus group with corporate PR people because sometimes those are the people who distribute materials to company employees. We also sent packages of material to human resources people and asked them to answer questions about the material. We did quite a bit of research before we ever got started.

The first action that we take in the RACE formula is to set objectives up front. That way, you won't lose track of what you're doing along the line. We knew our first objective would be to increase the public's knowledge about Social Security. An underlying objective was to raise the actuarial profession's visibility. We wanted people to recognize that actuaries are able to help solve the social problems that we face today. This was our overall objective.

Then we set some goals. The more quantitative you can make your goals, the better off you'll be. Our first print run was 75,000 brochures, so our goal was to distribute 75,000 brochures. Then we had a survey card, which was an evaluation tool that we were building up front. We want to know what people thought of this brochure, so we wanted a 2% return on the surveys. We didn't set a quantitative goal, although I wish we had. We also wanted to involve the SOA members in helping distribute this brochure. We thought it was very important to get buy-in from the members to get it out.

It's also important to know who your target audience is up front. Our prime target was the membership and then everybody else in the world, but mainly the working public. We wanted to get these brochures into the hands of the people who were currently working so they could feel a bit reassured that there would be Social Security when they retired.

The "C" in RACE stands for communications, and that's where the execution portion of your plan comes in. You develop the materials and, of course, the brochure was the first piece of information. We hoped that Uncle Sam tottering on top of a Social Security card would catch people's eyes.

In addition, we created what we called a partner package for companies that were thinking about distributing the brochure within their company. It included an order blank, a description of what was in this package, questions and answers, a list of who was involved, a suggestion of how they could involve their employees and put on a retirement seminar using these materials, and a sample article for a company newsletter. There were also sources for retirement planning. The brochure took them to a certain point, which was that Social Security is going to be there in the future and what some of the possible fixes would be. We found that people in the focus groups wanted to know more, so we put an action line at the end which gave various sources of information on Social Security and retirement planning. We developed this sheet on sources for retirement planning, and we tried to make it easy for people to order. We offered 200 free and if they wanted more, they had to pay what it cost us to produce them.

We also developed news releases that went out to the media about our campaign. We carried articles in *The Actuary*, and developed an article to be placed in newspapers all over the country through a service called North American Precision Syndicate, Inc. (NAPS). NAPS creates a camera-ready article that it sends out to syndicated publications. Many of these publications carried it. I think we ended up with more than one million articles in circulation.

We also had speakers. I went out to a lot of human resources groups. Anna Rappaport opened the door for us to speak at gatherings of human resources and employee benefits people. We even brought Harry Ballantyne in to speak to one of the groups. Harry is the chief actuary of Social Security. Those are some of the ways that we implemented the program.

About six months later, when the campaign was winding down, we decided that we'd better evaluate how well we did. Did we accomplish our goals? We had set 75,000 as our distribution goal. In the first four months, our first print run was gone and we had to reprint. The total number of brochures distributed so far is 108,000 but our circulation is actually more like 177,000. Our survey card asked whether people were going to pass the brochure along to anyone else, and 66% of the respondents said that they would.

Did we increase knowledge? After people read this, did they understand Social Security a little bit better? Our survey card asked them that question. Ninety-three percent agreed that they did understand Social Security better. The return on the survey cards ended up being 2.6% instead of 2%, which was our goal. We did involve the members. We had 232 members who ordered brochures, and 440 companies overall. Companies in addition to actuarial firms received the brochures.

Did we increase visibility? That's harder to measure. I think we did because people came up to us and said, "This is a great brochure, but the real problem is Medicare right now. That's the one that's in more trouble. We ought to be talking to people about Medicare. The Foundation asked us to develop a Medicare checkup. It will be sent with the November 1997 issue of *The Actuary*."

If you have your own company, use these brochures as PR tools. Send them to your clients and to people you want to be your clients, as a sample of some of the thinking that actuaries do. You can get your name printed on the back of them, or you can put your own stamp on them. You can use these in your own company to gain visibility. You can take it to your human resources person, your PR office, or who ever passes these types of things out to employees and say, "Here's something from actuaries. Can you make these available to the employees?"

For the Medicare project we teamed up with the Health Care Financial Management Association (HFMA). This group comprises the financial people in the hospitals and health groups. They're doing senior seminars all over the country next year, and they're using our brochure. They also want actuaries to be on the program and help them plan and speak at the sessions. Let me know if you're interested in helping with that Medicare project with HFMA, and I'll connect you with the right person.

Ms. Bitowt: I'm staff editor of *The Actuary* newsletter. There's a wrap up article in the November 1997 issue on the Social Security project. Much of the information that Cecilia has given will be in there as well.

The work that you do in the RACE process—creating a newsletter article, an article for *The Actuary*, a letter to the editor, a brochure for your company—can be used from one tool to the next.

Now, that might sound a little basic, but it's something that Anna Rappaport pointed out to me this year. She wrote an article for the May issue of *The Actuary*, "Family Diversity," which addresses the old-age crisis. It was based on a presentation she had done for Mercer. She took that information and turned it into an article for *The Actuary*, and that article has subsequently been reprinted in a newspaper published by The American Society on Aging. So you can take any of the research and produce presentations or a sales piece for your own company and use that as leverage for other work.

We're going to cover four basic tools. Op Ed pieces; speeches and presentations; and newsletter articles.

The longest section of my presentation is on news releases. Linda Heacox will talk about interacting with the news media, so if you have the opportunity to be interviewed by a reporter, you can present yourself in the best light possible. What often happens before you get called for an interview is that you, your company, or an organization that you belong to, such as the Society, sends a news release to a list of journalists about your newsworthy accomplishment.

For new Fellows, we prepare news releases. We call them boilerplate releases, but they're personalized for each person by name, hometown, and so on. If you have a small company or if you are an individual looking to create some visibility for yourself or your profession in your community, you could create a news release. Much of the information that you would gather for a news release would then feed into the other tools, such as writing a newsletter article, writing a letter to the editor, or doing a speech.

You might want to put together a news release if you are launching a new business or moving your office to a new location. If you're signing a major client and your client agrees that you can make an announcement, you might want to write and issue a news release for that occasion. You might want to issue a news release if your company is having a landmark anniversary such as your first year in business or your 10th year in business. You might also want to have some sort of theme or celebration on that occasion. If you, your business, or an employee should win an award for something, perhaps for community service, that would also be a good time to do a news release.

A media advisory is a slightly more sophisticated use of PR. This would be used in an instance when you have expertise or information that you can contribute to a wider news story or to a topic of the day. The PR firm Hill & Knowlton put together a media advisory for the American Academy of Actuaries on the availability of actuaries to speak on the UPS strike. The value that actuaries could provide was to bring a more objective viewpoint to what was a very emotional situation at that time.

On a more local level, if you're capable of commenting on a local economic situation, such as asset/liability issues in your region, I think reporters would be very interested in having more people who would talk on those issues. You do need to evaluate the benefit that kind of quotation can bring to you. If you determine that there is benefit, you can get very good exposure if you handle it well.

If you do a study, or are involved in a study on a newsworthy topic, the news media is always looking for those kinds of things. One of my jobs at the Society is to promote some of the research that the Society does. One of my first assignments

was to promote the Society's study on large claims in health insurance, and that ended with a small piece on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, as well as other coverage.

The Society, of course, is a big organization. Hundreds and hundreds of hours and a great deal of money were put into that study. If you look at *The Wall Street Journal*, you will frequently see studies that are done by money management firms and others that are more casual than what the Society does. They still have some validity, though, so you might want to consider that approach as well.

We've been talking mostly about businesses, but if you're an individual looking to market yourself through public relations, news releases would be appropriate if you're promoted, if you're moving to a new company, if you have won an award of some kind and, of course, when you achieve Fellowship or Associateship status within the Society. In those cases, media relations can often be a very institutional thing. It's your organization that will probably issue the news release, but you might have to call it to someone's attention. Linda automatically does Associateship and Fellowship news releases. If you receive an award from the Society, you might want to call it to the attention of your supervisor, or perhaps your public relations department directly, depending on your organization.

I'd like to talk a bit about developing and issuing a news release. The first point is to decide how important your news is to the business community or other communities. Who is your audience? Who should know about what you've done? How important is it? That will help you decide who your media contact should be. In the cases of attaining Associateship or Fellowship in the Society, we send releases to major papers and hometown papers. The greatest number of clips come from the smaller papers. In many cases, smaller businesses have a better opportunity to develop good relationships with smaller newspapers and radio and TV stations in their communities, than they would with a major metropolitan daily like *The Chicago Tribune* or *The Washington Post*. I'm assuming that many of you are consultants or have small businesses. Eventually, you certainly could develop these relationships, and that's not to say that you shouldn't, but don't be surprised if journalists at major news organizations are less interested than neighborhood or suburban newspapers. Look at who's available and decide just how important your news is and go from there.

Seek out reporters who cover issues related to your business. You should talk to the editors of the business sections of your local newspapers once you decide that you're going to do media outreach. You'll want to develop media relations with those people. You'll also want to look at editors and reporters of industry

publications. Don't forget about publications such as the *National Underwriter* or *Pensions & Investments*.

If you're going to develop a news media list, there are some good sources available, including books called *Bacon's*, *Burrelle's*, *Editor and Publisher Yearbook*, and *Broadcast Yearbook*. If you are going to write a news release, you'll probably need to share that ahead of time with anyone involved in the interview. If you're writing for an employee, you should make sure that person is involved in writing that release. If you are announcing the signing of a major client, you'll want to make sure the client approves what you've written.

Another tool is letters to the editor. These appear in *The Actuary* and are examples of actuaries using the letter format to express their expertise. Op-ed pieces are commentaries on the news, opinion pieces usually positioned on the page following—or opposite—the editorial page. Hence the label, op-ed. In *The Actuary*, the op-ed label is used for an opinion piece that is written by one of the editors, but the piece could be written by anyone.

From the Floor: Op-ed columns are much more common in *The New York Times*.

Ms. Bitowt: Yes, they are. Let's discuss speeches and presentations. The Society put together a speakers kit a few years ago. It's very current, has very good sources, and includes a bibliography at the end. There are examples of how you might use mathematics in a speech. You will need some preparation for your speech. I don't mean preparation only in terms of writing and researching, but practice in giving a speech. Very few people feel comfortable and are successful speakers without some amount of practice. You might join a group such as Toastmasters, or hire an independent speech consultant, but they're fairly pricey. Colleges, universities, and junior colleges also have courses that are quite good.

Newsletter articles are another tool. There is *The Actuary* or your own company's publication. You could develop a newsletter for clients. As an employee, you might look at your company newsletter and see if they accept articles from employees. You might want to see if the organizations you belong to have newsletters similar to *The Actuary* that would accept articles with your byline. It's nice to have a bylined article to turn into a reprint. If you have a small company, you could send articles you have written for *The Actuary* to clients. Remember copyrights. You will need to get reprint permission. In the case of *The Actuary*, we almost always grant permission to reprint articles.

Some other public relations tools are radio and TV public service announcements (PSAs). An example of a PSA was one that was done for a career information fair

that was sponsored by the Society for high school and college students. We showed pages from the Society's Web site, such as a special publicity Web page for a conference that is being sponsored on risk measurement and financial services in December 1997. If you are speaking at a conference, or your company is sponsoring a conference to which the public would be invited, and you're trying to reach an audience that has an interest in the topic, you might want to consider putting a notice on the Web. The September issue of *The Actuary* has an article by Paul Polchert that talks about consulting via the Web. Toward the end of the article, he talks about getting onto the Web if you don't have a site or a home page.

If you're interested in enhancing your career with or without public relations, there is another session at this meeting called *The Actuary's Career Planner*. It was put together by the Committee on Management and Personal Development.

Ms. Heacox: I've been asked to talk about media relations, and specifically interviewing. Has anybody ever called a reporter about a story without being called first? I would urge you to do that, and I'll tell you why. I was a trade reporter for *The American Banker/Bond Buyer* newspaper, which covers the banking industry, and my beat was the thrift industry. I had to produce five stories a week on the industry. The savings and loan crisis was happening at that time. I needed a lot of input from experts to get those five stories, as you might imagine. Sources are extremely important, and reporters need you. You can be one of those sources.

One way to do that is by calling the reporter directly. If you notice people writing in your local newspapers, or in trade publications. Call them up and compliment them whether you like the story or not. Tell them that it was a wonderful story, well-thought-out, and well-written. Find something to compliment. Begin to discuss the story with them, giving them some of your ideas on it. You can never be mean to them. You can never criticize them harshly. That's not acceptable. You have to be nice, but you'll find that if you do that, the reporters will almost always, unless they're on strict deadline, talk to you at that moment. They'll almost always be willing to talk to you, and almost always be interested in the fact that you're an expert in that field, or at least a professional in that field, that has an informed opinion. You'll find it's an easy way to contact reporters and start to become the kind of source you want to be if you're in the market to become a source.

Another way to do that is to go through a company's PR department or come through us. We get requests several times a week and sometimes daily for people that can be interviewed for stories. Many of them are on issues that are not exactly related to actuarial science, but business issues nonetheless. We're always looking for good actuarial sources. The three good ways to make contact with reporters are:

through your company's PR department, the Society's PR department, or by calling directly. I would urge you to try that. I think you'll find that reporters are approachable.

Jackie went over many of the tools you can use to build relationships with the press. But what do you do when a reporter actually calls you? How should you conduct yourself? The first thing to remember is that you don't have to be interviewed on the spot. You can usually ask for the reporter's deadline and buy yourself a little bit of time, if not a lot of time. Sometimes they work with a long lead time. It depends on the publication and what kind of a story it is. Even if the deadline is immediate, and the reporter says, "I must have this this afternoon," tell him or her you're working on a task that you have to get accomplished, and say you'll call back within 15 minutes. Remember that you don't have to agree to an interview. You can always decline. If you are willing, tell them you'll call them back within 15 minutes, and then do that. Even that little amount of time will allow you to get your thoughts together.

I want you to take that time and ask yourself about the issue the reporter called to discuss with you. Imagine that the interviewer were to say to you, "You have 30 seconds to give us your message. What's the most important thing you have to say to our readers?" How would you respond to them? Another thing I'd like you to remember is that interviews are not interrogations. Your job is not limited to just answering questions. You should do that, of course, but it's also an opportunity to offer your ideas and opinions. So think about what you want to say and condense it down to a core message.

Has anybody here given a lot of speeches? When you write something down, the act of writing clarifies your thoughts and helps you memorize what you want to say. You'll find that you remember it by rote. Condense what you want to say into just one or two sentences. The simpler the better. I don't want you to read your message to the reporter when he calls you back or when you are being interviewed, but if you write it down, you'll find that it will clarify your thinking on this subject and, therefore, it's very valuable.

Answer issues, not just questions. The interviewer might phrase the question incorrectly or even go off on the wrong track. The interviewer might get distracted. You'll find that they do that a lot. So if you know, in general, what you're trying to say, keep it on the track you want it to be on.

Know your corporate viewpoint. You should know if your company has a public position on an issue, and you should honor it. If your company has a PR department tell them what you're trying to do. One actuary called Cecilia and told

her that when he talked to his PR department about becoming a spokesman on actuarial subjects, the PR department was thrilled and immediately sent him to a radio interview.

You might discover that your PR department has a great number of sources. We are trying to find a spokesperson who can go to the University of Maryland and give a speech. We get those types of requests all the time, and I'll bet your company does too.

Think about your audience. They might be actuaries or they might be people from the wider business community. If the latter, you need to relate to them to make them care. I don't need to tell you not to use technical jargon because you've probably heard that a million times. Keep it simple and stick to the main points.

Use evidence. If you're speaking to print or television reporters, provide charts, graphs, or photographs. The more colorful and simpler they are, the better. Reporters love that stuff. If you have to use statistics, make them visual.

If the reporter asks you to allow him or her to tape the interview. Don't be afraid of that. I always tape my interviews. Use common business courtesy. Take and return your phone calls. Answer all questions. Never use the term "no comment." It sounds like you're covering up. If you don't know the answer, say so and offer to get someone else to answer the question. If you can, find someone else in your company or another professional who can talk to the reporter. It will make you look connected and accessible. Offer to follow up with the reporter if he or she wants additional data. If you think of something after the fact, fax it to the reporter. You want to appear helpful.

Never speak off the record. Don't say anything you don't want to read about tomorrow. You will not be given the opportunity to edit it yourself, so always speak as if you know that you're on the record. Remember Mrs. Gingrich and Connie Chung. Keep that in mind.

Being a good source doesn't always mean you have to be quoted. If you refer the reporter to another source who can answer their questions, it will make you look more professional. Don't use humor or tell jokes unless you're extremely confident of the outcome. It doesn't always appear in print the way you think that it's going to.

You should also remember that the number of questions interviewers can ask is infinite. They will start out with preselected questions in their mind when they set out to interview you, but those questions and answers will lead to other questions

and answers. They will ask other questions based upon an answer. Their ability to come up with questions is infinite. You cannot directly prepare for every question that you're going to be asked in an interview. You need to keep that in mind. When you are interviewed, you need to be patient, keep your sense of humor, and go with the flow.

Those were my do's for giving interviews. I'm going to show you a video of a mock interview.

[Video played]

Did anybody notice anything that the interviewee in the video did correctly or incorrectly? What did he do wrong? There were some obvious things.

From the Floor: He should have held his calls.

Ms. Heacox: Definitely. He didn't use business courtesy.

From the Floor: He wasn't prepared.

Ms. Heacox: Yes. He didn't think about what he wanted to say. He didn't see it as an opportunity to give a viewpoint or an opinion.

From the Floor: You said earlier that you should allow taping.

Ms. Heacox: Yes. He was paranoid about being taped. There's no reason at all to be uncomfortable about taping.

From the Floor: He was too technical in his definition of actuaries.

Ms. Heacox: Yes. Has anybody ever been asked what an actuary is? What do you say? Does somebody have a good one-line answer?

From the Floor: There was an article in *The Actuary*.

Ms. Heacox: The article asked for a definition. If the reporter doesn't deal with actuaries at all, that's the first thing he or she will ask you. If you don't have a good definition, it's a good idea to get one. It should be a one-sentence answer in easy-to-understand language.

From the Floor: He said, "off the record."

Ms. Heacox: Right. And what did the reporter do?

From the Floor: She wrote down what he said.

Ms. Heacox: Yes. Once you get into that interview, it's hard to go off the record.

From the Floor: The things he said that actuaries do were everything but Medicare and pensions. Aren't actuaries qualified to do that?

Ms. Heacox: Yes.

From the Floor: Why was he speaking about Medicare issues in the first place? Why did he accept the interview? Obviously, this wasn't his area of expertise.

Ms. Heacox: This video was a good, humorous look at things you should avoid. It shows how silly you can look to a reporter if you don't avoid these mistakes. It's just a matter of common courtesy and a matter of honesty. You don't have to be scintillating. You just have to be helpful to the reporter.

Ms. Green: And if you were writing up that interview, what part would make the paper? What would you use from that interview?

Ms. Heacox: If I was going to use it at all, it might be a small piece. You often interview several people and get some information from each person.

Ms. Green: Let's look at the case study and answer some questions as a group.

Alan Actuary is an FSA, a member of the American Academy of Actuaries (MAAA), and a Certified Life Underwriter (CLU). He began his own firm about six months ago after 20 years of experience working in a life insurance company. When he left the company, he was vice president of product development where he was responsible for all aspects of life insurance product development from design to implementation. He worked closely with legal, sales, marketing, administrative, and customer service areas. He has served on state advisory groups and industry groups. Alan also has been a speaker and was among the first group of professionals approved to be independent assessors. He is an expert in life product development, especially pre-need insurance and market conduct.

With all the media stories on suits brought against insurance companies for misleading sales illustrations and other misconduct, he believes he's well-positioned, as a single practitioner, to offer independent assessments for smaller insurance companies who don't have the internal staff to conduct them. He also

offers peer review services. He has developed some software to do the independent assessments. Despite all these qualifications, he has a lot of competition from Big Six accounting firms, and sometimes people are willing to pay the big bucks to have that name doing their business. He has built some alliances with attorneys because they sometimes are competitors, and he believes lawyers have broad backgrounds like his.

We've already discussed his situation and problem. The research part of the RACE formula is done. Maybe we can go into the action planning part of it. Who would be his audiences? He's making his PR plan now. Who should he aim his messages at to be perceived as an expert in this independent assessment business?

From the Floor: Small life insurance companies.

Ms. Green: Why?

From the Floor: They don't have the staff to do the work that he can do.

Ms. Green: Would you say that's his prime target?

From the Floor: That's what I would shoot for.

From the Floor: I have a question about that. How do you differentiate between audience and market?

Ms. Green: It's the same.

From the Floor: The market is small insurance companies and the people who work with small insurance companies.

Ms. Green: Right. There are various audiences within that larger group. One could be the trade publications that these people read.

From the Floor: When you say small insurance firms, do you mean that there are particular people within the small insurance firms that you should target? Should you seek out actuaries, the president, the market conduct people, or all of these people?

Ms. Green: That's why you do a plan because you have to hone in on your prime target and how you can reach them. What's the channel you would use to reach them? The small insurance companies are the target audience, and the tools

needed to reach that audience might be trade publications or speaking at meetings of the organizations that we talked about.

From the Floor: Why is it limited to small companies?

Ms. Green: Those are the people he is most likely to be able to do business for. The larger companies have staff performing these functions internally. You can either do it internally or hire outside people to do it. That's the way it was explained to me, but I'm not in the business, so I'm not sure. Can we set one or two goals for him?

From the Floor: He has to let people know what he does.

Ms. Green: He needs to get visibility for his services. That's what I call an objective. What are some ways he can get visibility?

From the Floor: My goal would be to have an article published in *The Actuary*.

Ms. Green: He needs to have one article published within the next year in *The Actuary* or another publication. If he can't get in *The Actuary* for a few months, maybe *Contingencies* or another trade publication would publish an article.

From the Floor: He could speak at an industry meeting.

Ms. Green: When I need a speaker on technology, I call a gentleman who has very large fees for consulting. I'm always reluctant to ask him because he's traveling all the time, and his time is very valuable. He says, "Don't worry about it. I get business from every speech I make." So that's a good one. Let's say Alan Actuary should try to speak at one industry meeting during the next 12 months? Is this a year plan? Quantify your plan so you'll know if you reached your goals.

From the Floor: When you say the industry, do you mean an actuary should speak at an actuarial function? Should not he try to speak outside the actuarial profession? You might want to think of your industry there. It's one thing to speak to an actuary and another thing to speak to a bunch of elderly people.

Ms. Green: Yes. There might be actuaries in the meeting, though, who are in small insurance companies. We have a special interest section for smaller insurance companies. It also has a newsletter.

From the Floor: I'm not saying it's not a good idea. That's a great thing to do because you're honing in on that particular market segment. I'm asking, should you

look at another market segment? You could possibly look at another type of opportunity that might be outside what you normally do.

Ms. Green: As long as it fits your description of who your prime target is.

Ms. Bitowt: For instance, if there were organizations called The Small Insurance Association of America or the Small Insurance Company Presidents of America, those would be good targets.

Ms. Green: We've identified some tools and tactics. Another thing Alan might want to try to do is establish a newsletter to send out to clients and prospective clients giving his views on what's happening now. It could tell what Alan is doing now. Put it into a news format rather than a letter format. Make it short and newsy and people will read it. Are there any other tools and tactics you can think of?

From the Floor: Should you first do a mass mailing to tell people you are starting a new business, and then follow up with a newsletter?

Ms. Green: A mass mailing of what?

From the Floor: You would mail something to introduce yourself instead of making a call.

From the Floor: You could send an announcement of your new business and the services you are offering.

From the Floor: Then you could attach a newsletter.

Ms. Green: It could take the form of a brochure or a letter.

From the Floor: You could include a postage-paid postcard so people could indicate whether they are interested in certain areas.

Ms. Green: We call that a bounce back. It is a way for them to respond to you.

From the Floor: It could be done on a Web site.

From the Floor: Should we do this type of mailing before we actually make the move? If no one responds to the bounce back, then you might start to question whether you should start the business. Maybe I should continue working where I am.

Ms. Green: Most entrepreneurs that I talk to have the passion and the persistence to make the move. You should already know before you go into this if you have a market for your services. Are there any other tools and tactics that this person might use?

From the Floor: I'm not sure if this is a tool, a technique, or an objective. You might want to become recognized as an expert. How would you characterize that?

From the Floor: There's good visibility and bad visibility.

Ms. Green: That's true.

From the Floor: You'd want to be recognized as someone to call.

Ms. Green: Exactly. You want visibility as an expert in your field.

From the Floor: What about volunteer service?

Ms. Green: Excellent. I would think clubs like the Rotary, Lions, or other clubs would be a good place to make contacts. I know many people join those organizations just to make the contacts to get business.

Ms. Heacox: Try the local chamber of commerce.

Ms. Green: Yes. Don't just become a member. Volunteer and get involved in the projects because that's how you're going to become well-known.

How is he going to evaluate a year later whether he was successful or not?

From the Floor: Is he going broke?

Ms. Green: Does he have the business? Were his articles published? Did he develop his newsletter? Then there is the feedback on all of this. Did he get phone calls as a result of these efforts? He needs to evaluate all the different tools and techniques one by one to see if they were successful. If the newsletter is not bringing in contacts, he should scrap it. If it's costing quite a bit of money, try something else. Is the person in this case study in the audience?

From the Floor: Yes.

Ms. Green: Is that you?

From the Floor: That's me. I spoke at a workshop this morning.

Ms. Green: That's right.

From the Floor: I'm also doing the market conduct session for the Smaller Insurance Company Section. I've had five articles published because of the premium situation. The Smaller Insurance Company Section's newsletter is publishing an article I wrote. I have my own newsletter that I send out, and I did develop a brochure that I sent you a copy of. I'm trying to do everything that you're describing.

Ms. Green: Yes. And we were impressed with your efforts. But I think you told me you were experiencing a little frustration with the competition.

From the Floor: I have to realize that I can't be too optimistic when people call because I'm working on other people's time frames, and things take a long time to develop. You can't be too pessimistic either because you might get a call. I am a sole proprietor, so it's tough trying to work on current projects and market myself at the same time so there will be additional business when I finish my current assignments.

Ms. Green: Most people starting out say they spend 50% of their time doing work for the clients and 50% of their time looking for new clients.

Ms. Bitowt: There are two things I'd like to add. One is that I have become very active in my local chapter of our public relations group. I serve as the hostess for our local networking lunch once a month. People from the chapter know me. Even the people who don't come to the lunches call me for information. I ask them, "How did you get my name for this?" They say, "We just know." It's funny how doing some volunteer work for a small organization will get your name out there.

The second thing is that one member who wrote for *The Actuary* (and had to rewrite his article three or four times) came up to me and said, "I'm so glad I did that because I really wanted to work on this project and I found a partner to work with. We're actively going forward on it." He happens to be in a nonprofit situation, but there's no reason that couldn't happen in a for-profit capacity as well. Getting the word out can bring back benefits that you would not have expected.

From the Floor: One more suggestion is to get a partner. That person might have the clients, and you might have the expertise. It might even be a nonactuary that has the clients.

Ms. Green: Form alliances with other professions.

Ms. Bitowt: They also have Web sites.

From the Floor: And I can develop my own Web site, although I haven't done that yet.

Ms. Bitowt: One last pitch. We have a speaker's list that we're updating. If anyone's interested in being a speaker, just contact us.