

## Winning Edge #26 – Acing Your Radio Interview

This is Trevor Bragdon with Commonwealth Partners' *The Winning Edge*: Tips to help conservatives persuade and win.



In the 1970s, if you tuned to KQV Radio in Pittsburgh, you would hear the DJ, Jeff Christie, spinning the top 40 hits. He'd read ads and talk about the artists and news between songs. But Jeff wasn't an ordinary DJ. He practiced. He practiced lines before his show. He tested different sayings to see what his audience liked. But he didn't take himself too seriously and joked at the formulaic DJ persona, saying, *"Now, I'm going to play two commercials, a public service announcement, and a record, with one hand behind my back, and I will do it all flawlessly in 8 minutes and 10 seconds."*

At the station, Jeff was known for relentless preparation. You'd find him pouring over newspapers and staying up to date on current events. The problem was despite his best efforts to develop his on-air personality, Jeff never quite fit the mold of a DJ. He wanted to talk about topics beyond top 40 music. After a management change, Jeff was fired. He bounced around various radio jobs, did a stint in corporate sales, until finally landing on his true calling—talk radio. By this time, he had abandoned his "Jeff Christie" persona and started using his real name: Rush Limbaugh.

Now, you don't need "talent on loan from God" to ace a radio interview. However, we can learn from the approach Rush took to planning, practice, and personality.

As a candidate, you'll have several opportunities to do radio interviews throughout your campaign. You'll encounter two main types of interviews: the Talk Radio and the News Radio interview.

The Talk Radio interview usually involves a friendly, politically aligned host who wants to help get your message out. Then there's the News Radio interview on a local news or public radio station.

While both require having an interview plan, practice, and personality, you take different approaches in each format.

## Talk Radio Interview

These interviews are live and go by fast, with a typical interview lasting 5-8 minutes.

Your goal: Leave a lasting impression on listeners without overwhelming them with details.

You want them to associate your name with a good person who will do a great job when elected. To achieve this, focus on the three Ps of a radio interview: First, you need to have a Plan for the interview. Then you'll want to Practice what you'll say, and do it with a Personality.

**Planning** - Start by answering a few questions about the show:

- **Who is the show's audience, and what do they believe already?**
- **What's the one point I want the audience to remember?** This can be hard to think about at first because we may have dozens of points we want them to remember. But people always do something else when they listen, so only expect them to remember one point.
- **What are the stories I can tell?** Plan to have three stories you could use to answer the host's questions. Several story types work well on the radio. One story should focus on why you're running, similar to the character story we discussed in Winning Edge [Episode #22](#). Another story could highlight a problem you want to address and give the audience a memorable line or tidbit they can share with others. The third story could be an interesting fact about an issue important to your campaign.
- **What's the emotion I want to convey?** Another way to think about it is, "What kind of energy am I bringing to the interview?" There's a saying in radio that "If you're not having fun, the audience isn't having fun." So, think about your personality and what you want to highlight.

**Practice** for your interview. Practice telling your stories in a quick and engaging way. Radio is called "the theater of the mind" for a reason. You want to create a picture in the listener's mind, so add vivid details to your stories. You also need to be concise, so practice telling your stories in 30 or 60 seconds. Think about what questions you'll get asked and practice answering them. (See the [Episode #24](#) and [#25](#) for tips on this.)

**Personality** - For personality, there's two you need to consider, your personality and the host.

- **Talk Radio Host Personality** - The audience of a talk radio show have a close relationship with the host and feel like they know the host on a personal level. Consider how you can genuinely compliment the host at the start of your interview. Maybe compliment them on a previous segment, article they wrote, or something else. The key is signaling to the audience that you respect the host.
- **Your Personality** - Radio can strip away some of your personality, so amp it up by 10% to 15% to break through and sound like your usual self. You want your personality to shine, but avoid being overly bombastic and don't compete with the host. Instead, remember the emotion you want to convey for the interview and practice it. It could be hope for change, an urgency to act, or the cheerful persistence we discussed in [Episode #16](#).

### **News Interview**

The second type of interview is more informational, often found on NPR or with news reporters. These interviews are usually prerecorded where a reporter asks you a series of questions. For a 10-15-minute interview, they may only use 1.5 to 3 minutes of what you said in the final segment. Preparing for this style follows a similar pattern to talk radio, only with a little more nuance.

- **Planning** - First, have short stories or answers prepared in advance. When you can answer the "why are you running" question in 30 to 45 seconds, you provide a pre-made soundbite for the reporter. Second, have a short story about the issue you want to highlight. Focus on the single point you want to get across, as these short-format interviews only allow you to communicate one main idea and emotion effectively.
- **Practice** - For reporter-style interviews, practice delivering short, crisp answers. Use your cell phone timer to rehearse responses to several questions, aiming for 30- to 60-second answers that are both substantive and radio-friendly.
  - **Advanced Practice** - Listen to one or two other interviews the reporter has done to get a feel for their style of questions. As you listen to their interviews, pause the recording after a question. Then, practice giving your answer to the question. This exercise will give you a sense of how their interview style feels in real life. Also, notice what they highlight in the interviews and the types of clips they select. Think about how you can give them answers that are easy to place in their final story.

- **Personality** - Get a feel for the show's personality and match the tone and tenor of the program.

### **The Details**

Lastly, in any radio interview, be mindful of the technical details.

- Find a quiet place where you can speak freely. If the interview is via computer, use a decent microphone to enhance the sound quality. For phone interviews, use a headset and remain stationary to keep a clear cell phone signal.
- If time allows, listen to the show for 10 to 30 minutes before your appearance so you can reference earlier content to make the conversation more engaging and relevant.
- Always record your side of the interview to have a complete record of what you said, just in case your words get taken out of context.

Remember, radio is a fantastic medium to get your message out there. Focus on having a plan—know the one point you want to drive home and the emotion you want people to feel about you and your campaign. Practice what you'll say and how you'll say it. Then, have fun and show your personality to ace your radio interview. With the right preparation, you, too, can create excellence in broadcasting.