

MEDIA RELATIONS TOOLBOX



CONCEPTS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FIRE SERVICE PROFESSIONAL

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TEXAS FIRE MARSHALS' CONFERENCE

AUSTIN, TEXAS

OCTOBER 17, 2012



ORDER OF THE DAY

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- **The Fire Service Image**
- **PIO Day Planner**
- **Press Releases**
- **Conference and Interview Considerations**

THE OLD APPROACH

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“Why should we give them anything?”

THE NEW APPROACH

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“Why shouldn't we give them something?”

IMAGE IS EVERYTHING

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- What do you think your Council, Board, etc. thinks your agency image is?
- What do YOU think your agency image is?
- What do your citizens think your agency image is, and how do you know?
- What is your single biggest image problem and what are you doing to address it?

OUR PUBLIC IMAGE

George Mason University Report to IACP (2001)

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- Citizen confidence depends more on the perception of an Investigator's motives rather than the outcome of a citizen contact.
- The perception of how we treat people is more important than crime reduction and case closure.
- The perception of how we treat people affects willingness to obey our authority.
- The perception of how well we do our job affects how the public rates us when we actually have to do it...good or bad.

SITTING ON A GOLD MINE

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- We have for free what corporations can't buy...immediate access to the news media.
- People ALWAYS want to know what we are doing...let's tell them!
- We get to tell people how good we are any time we want...and they listen.
- People like us even though we ARE the government.
- The public is hungry for heroes. If not us, then who?

CAN YOU DO IT ALL?

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- **Maybe, but why?**
- **Choosing a PIO and what makes a good one**
- **Training is IMPORTANT!**
- **Develop a Media Policy**
- **Although you can't control the media, you can control how you interact with them**

PIO DAY PLANNER

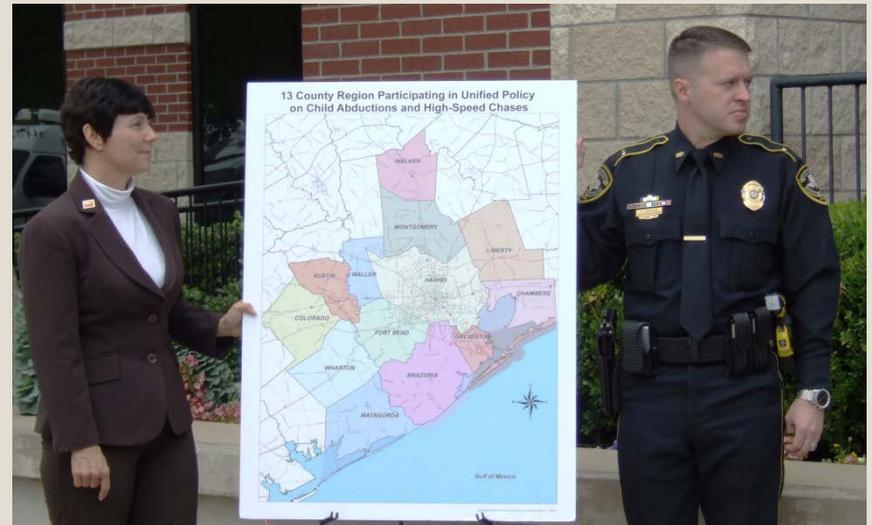
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**Because wearing the “PIO Hat”
should be more than just a fashion
statement!**

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

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- Background
- Agency media efforts prior to 2005
- Current agency media efforts
- Trusting your instincts



BECOMING A “NEWS JUNKIE”



BECOMING A “NEWS JUNKIE”

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- *BAD examples are sometimes the best learning tools.*
- *Nothing like the WRONG message given by the WRONG person.*

BECOMING A “NEWS JUNKIE”

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BECOMING A “NEWS JUNKIE”

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- *Remember...it doesn't have to happen in your backyard for reporters show up in your front yard! This may be an excellent opportunity to showcase your agency's proactive efforts.*

BECOMING A “NEWS JUNKIE”

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STARTING YOUR DAY

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- While you were sleeping...



The importance of “Pass-On” Information:

- a. How are you getting it?
- b. Do your people give you a heads up?
- c. Electronic options

STARTING YOUR DAY

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USING GOOGLE™ ALERTS:
very good and very FREE!

1. Go to www.google.com
2. Top bar, click on “more”
3. Then click on “even more”
4. Select  **ALERTS**
5. Create a Google™ Alert with your email address
6. Refine search terms as needed

STARTING YOUR DAY

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STARTING YOUR DAY

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Running your “traps” – *Conducting Local News Searches*



- Many online stories also have a public comment section...read some of them, but don't take it personal!
- Let agency personnel and city/district leadership know when a story is printed
- Be sure to check editorials as well

STARTING YOUR DAY

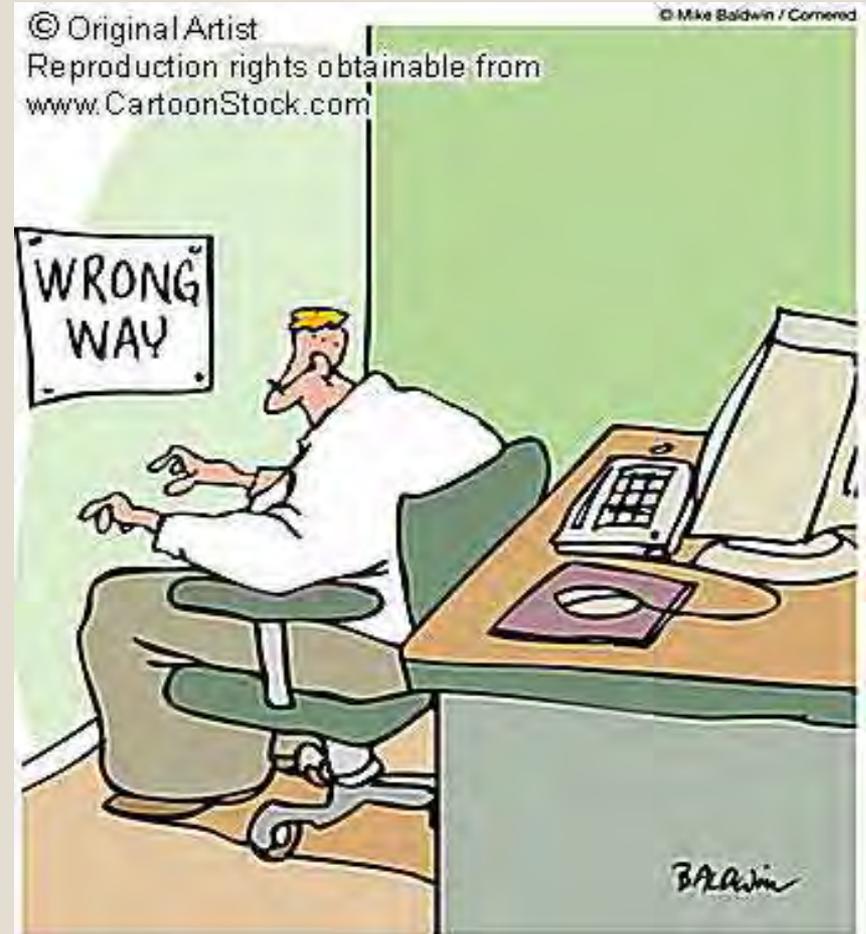
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- What do you do with all the stuff you find?
- Why is archiving important?
- Formats: Clippings vs. Website Prints
- What about the stuff you send out?
- Media Book

STARTING YOUR DAY

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- What do you do when they get it wrong?
- Chose your battles wisely!
- Corrections to submitted releases vs. Corrections to negative stories
- Who do you contact first?



ACCESSIBILITY

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- This is where the commitment gets real!
- Screen, check around, return calls in a timely manner
- What happens when you're out of the office?
- Remember to set YOUR boundaries
- While it is easy to play favorites, fairness is the key to getting regular coverage

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

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- When to email, when to call, and when to do both
- Setting up Contact Groups
- Using your agency's website to post releases
- Emergency Messages
- Public speaking engagements
- Talking directly to those that matter most...your citizens!

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

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- What do you do when nobody picks up your release?



GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

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- Become a “Media Superman”...all it takes is adding more time and responsibility to your already overloaded day!

GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

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- Take every possible opportunity to write and speak on behalf of your agency and profession!
- Write a regular newspaper column
- Write for Professional Journals
- Write for your agency's website
- Write political correspondence
- Coordinate and/or speak to citizen groups

AVOIDING THE PITFALLS

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AVOIDING THE PITFALLS

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- When to write, speak, and shut-up
- Ambushes and Show-Ups
- “Green” Stories
- “Off the record”...
- “No Comment”
- Commenting on the actions of another fire service agency

AVOIDING THE PITFALLS

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- Keep in touch with your Investigators and speak to them FIRST before commenting on an active case
- Keep in touch with your IAD folks and speak to them FIRST before commenting on an internal investigation
- If your agency is involved with a Task Force, speak with them FIRST before discussing any developments
- **MOST IMPORTANTLY...ALWAYS KEEP YOUR BOSS IN THE LOOP AND ASK FOR APPROVAL AND REVIEW BEFORE DISCUSSING “SENSITIVE ISSUES.”**

PREPARING A PRESS RELEASE

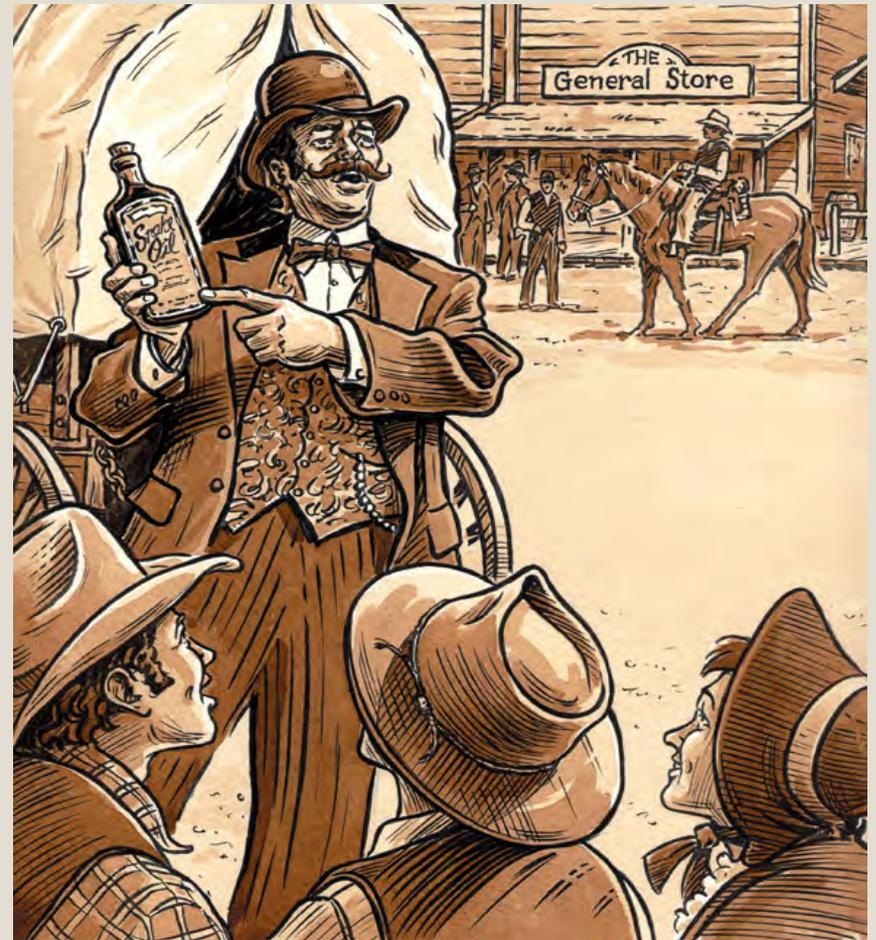
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**“ So, you got into the
fire service to be a
writer?”**

WELCOME TO SALES!

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- Take every opportunity to promote your agency
- Be there for the good times...and the bad
- Always “manage” the message
- Be interesting and empathetic in your writing and interviews
- Leave no doubt in the readers mind about what your agency views as important



WELCOME TO SALES!

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WHAT DO I WRITE ABOUT?

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- Unusual responses
- Interesting or unusual arson arrests
- Good investigative work
- Fire/Community events
- Innovation
- Training initiatives that have community benefit
- Crime Alerts
- Awareness
- New technology and equipment
- New programs
- Major investigations
- Internal investigations
- Big mistakes
- Firefighter recognition
- Proactive preparations (storm season, holiday safety, etc.)

THE HEADLINE

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- The Headline is arguably the most critical component of a press release
- Be creative and captivating
- The Headline and first paragraph should convey the story and force the reader to continue

WHAT IS MORE INTERESTING?

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- “Fire Marshal Arrest Arsonist”
- “Fire Fighter Receives Award”
- “Boy Scouts Visit City Hall”
- “Active Week for Fire Department”
- “Arson Investigator Captures fire-bug”
- “Honored; Brave Firefighter Awarded”
- “Firefighters, Police Team Up to Train Scouts”
- “Busy Week of Fighting Fire for City’s Finest”

CONTENT

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- Try to keep your release at one page whenever possible
- Write for your target audience
- Use quotes that substantiate or add to the information that you're conveying
- Present factual information and be prepared to back it up
- Remember that the release may be a catalyst for a feature

CONTENT

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- **Choose your words carefully.**
- **Avoid “I”**
- **Use strong verbs**
- **Make each word count. Space is at a premium.**
- **Follow agency policy and state law when releasing names of suspects and/or arrested parties.**

CONTENT

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PIO 2 Arrested Early Morning Veh Burglaries 11-1-10 [Compatibility Mode] - Microsoft Word

Home Insert Page Layout References Mailings Review View

Clipboard Font Paragraph Styles

Emphasis Heading 1 Normal Strong Subtitle Title No Spacing Subtle Em... Intense Em... Quote Intense Qu... Change Styles... Find... Replace... Select... Editing



Shenandoah Police Department
Public Information / Media Relations
Information for Immediate Release, 11/01/10

Lieutenant A. Bryan Carlisle
Public Information Officer
bcarlisle@shenandoahtx.com

Direct: (832) 585-8126
Main: (281) 367-8952
Cell: (832) 928-9077

Two Arrested After Early Morning Vehicle Burglaries

Just before 3:00 am on Saturday morning, October 30th, Shenandoah Police Officer Mark Brockhoeff noticed a suspicious Buick La Sabre pull onto the service road from the Red Lobster restaurant parking lot. As Officer Brockhoeff followed the vehicle, Shenandoah Police Sergeant Danny Nabors was able to locate two vehicles which had been broken into in the Comfort Suites parking lot which backs up to the Red Lobster restaurant.

Officer Brockhoeff stopped the vehicle and, as he approached the occupants, it was clearly evident that the two suspects had been up to no good. Personally engraved golf clubs, cell phones, radar detectors, and head phones were strewn about the interior of the vehicle. Not having a good story and even worse criminal records, the two suspects from Houston were identified as 45 year old Patrick Dixon and 32 year old Felix Williams. Williams had been previously convicted of vehicle burglary and, after the more than \$6,000 worth of property in their possession was confirmed by Sergeant Nabors to be stolen from victim's staying at the Comfort Suites hotel, both Williams and Dixon were placed into custody for Burglary of a Motor Vehicle. Williams faces a State Jail Felony while Dixon has been charged with a Class A Misdemeanor.

These arrests fall on the heels of the September 30th arrest of three suspects involved in a rash of daytime vehicle burglaries of restaurants in Shenandoah and Harris County. After a short pursuit and assistance with the apprehension of a second vehicle by Montgomery County Sheriff's Deputies, Shenandoah Police Officer Cody Harmon took three suspects into custody for burglary, netting hundreds of dollars in stolen electronics, marijuana, and two stolen handguns.

Shenandoah Chief of Police commends the department on these recent arrests, "We know that our location makes us a prime target for vehicle burglaries, but the teamwork and dedication that our

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100%

CONTENT

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- **General rule of thumb regarding information legal to release:**
 1. **Arrested Parties**
 2. **Suspect(s) named in search warrants**
 3. **Identified Suspects who have not been arrested or have not had warrants issued for their arrest that constitute an ARTICULABLE danger to the public and/or a particular person**
 4. **Suspect descriptions**
 5. **“Person(s) of Interest”**

THE WRAP-UP

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- What is the purpose of the release?
- Is it a call to action?
- Is it to solicit help?
- Is it to inform?
- Is it to praise?
- **ATTACH PHOTOS AND VIDEOS WHENEVER YOU CAN!**



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- www.assignmenteditor.com
- www.technorati.com
- www.poynter.org
- www.journalism.org
- www.pionetwork.org
- www.thinkexist.com
- www.yahoo.com

- Professional Writing Courses
- Contacts from this conference!

“THIS DOESN'T LOOK LIKE MY PRESS RELEASE!”

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IMPORTANT NOTES

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- Always have someone other than yourself “proof” your press release **PRIOR** to distribution
- Make sure that key players within your organization and government structure receive a copy of the release...preferably before it is distributed
- Always keep a copy of your release in front of you when speaking to the media by phone or email. This will keep you from “freelancing” too much!
- Always maintain copies of your press releases

INTERVIEWS AND PRESS CONFERENCES

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**Just when you thought you
had enough stress in your life!**

INTERVIEW FORMATS

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- **Newspapers**
 - Email
 - Telephone
 - In Person
- **Television**
 - Telephone
 - In Person
 - Live
 - Recorded
- **Radio**
 - Telephone
 - Email
 - Live
 - Recorded



CONTROLLING YOUR AGENCY'S MESSAGE

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- Understand the game. Develop strategies to get your message out...not theirs.
- Preparation is the key to success.
- Don't repeat inaccurate statements...correct them!
- Think..."if I have only one shot at it, what must get said?"
- Let people know and see that you care
- Be Professional, Composed, and Confident.

CONTROLLING YOUR AGENCY'S MESSAGE

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CONTROLLING THE ENVIRONMENT

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- You have the **RIGHT** to select your interview or press conference location...choose wisely.
- If the media is coming to you, give careful thought to where **YOU** want to put **THEM**.



CONTROLLING THE ENVIRONMENT



PREPARE!

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“Ad hoc one-to-one press briefings may give rise to problems, particularly in the early stages. Premature comment before all the facts are known may lead to conflict and confusion. Moreover, they are time consuming and may lead to complaints of partiality towards a section of the media”

(Payne 1994, 31)

A LOOK AT THE CRAFT

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PREPARE!

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“They say that, while viewers will often forget the content of your message, they will remember your style: how you looked, your manner, and the quality of your voice”

(Auf der Heide, 1987, Chapter 10, p. 25)

A LOOK AT THE CRAFT

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PREPARE!

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“It is generally accepted that the best policy is to be as forthcoming and helpful as possible in dealing with the media. In particular, the aim should be to provide the media with as much factual information about incidents as possible, provided disclosure would not compromise judicial process; the information is not confidential; it will not hamper operations; there is no invasion of privacy”

(Payne 1994, 29)

A LOOK AT THE CRAFT

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PREPARE!

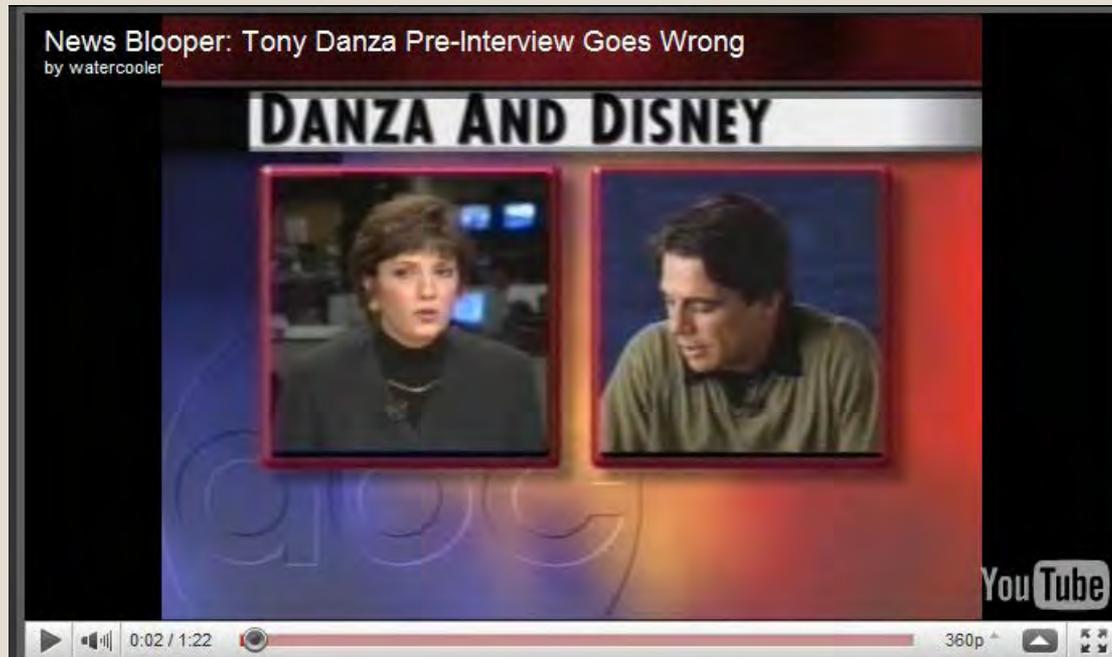
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“The great lesson is, **ALWAYS** assume your mike is open, even when you’re not on camera.”

(Ray Carter)

A LOOK AT THE CRAFT

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DEALING WITH THE STRESS

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DEALING WITH THE STRESS

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- Rehearse, but don't over prepare
- Take a quick walk around the building, squat in place, shadow box...
- Breath!
- Remember that you're a Firefighter and this is cake...comparatively speaking
- Be Yourself
- People are expecting confidence, so speak with confidence
- When not in uniform, wear the suit and tie that you know you look good in!

ONE LAST THOUGHT...

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