



Media Relationships

Media relations can be an important part of a public information and education strategy to relieve a potential negative reaction and present the facts about all star cheerleading and dance. Media relations can be thought of as fostering professional relationships with journalists and other media personnel. These relationships are very beneficial when seeking to inform the public about an upcoming event and the ongoing benefits of an all star cheerleading and dance program. Local media, such as newspapers and news stations, increase the visibility and positive actions of a gym or program in it's community. The media are very important and accepted lines of communication to the public. Reaching out to journalists and educating them at the start may result in factual and enlightened reporting in the event of an unpopular national story.

Public Information and Education

Cheerleading has consumed public attention due to it's significant reputation and potential harm to young people who are performing and/or practicing irresponsibly. Because of these unwanted risks many citizens perceive cheerleading as being "bad" or "unsafe". In view of the fact that we as all star gyms are best practice programs with safety in progression and preparation, a public information and education strategy is needed to inform the public about the benefits of all star cheerleading and dance as well as the strategy for safe progressions and injury prevention.

Public information and education regarding all star cheerleading and dance is a form of risk communication. Research in the area of risk communication has shown that people often hold unrealistic perspectives and demonstrate unreasonable behaviors toward hazards. Individual opposition to cheerleading and dance could occur due to the rational or irrational perception of the risks involved.

Peter Sandman (1993) has developed the idea that "Risk = Hazard + Outrage." An outraged public tends to focus primarily on the sensational side of an issue, therefore the facts of a potentially hazardous situation are not processed clearly. Sandman has discovered that the public pays more attention to outrage than hazard, even when they know the difference, and that outraged people do not pay much attention to data providing the facts.

In order to reduce outrage in this case, management professionals should truthfully acknowledge possible risks that could occur. Sandman (1993) states, "The only way to build credibility is to acknowledge problems dramatically enough that you catch the public's attention." The author advises that public concerns should be brought out into the open. The author reports that it is the concerns that stakeholders are not voicing that cause the most problems for management.

The media is a powerful ally to get the facts out about all star cheerleading and dance.

Before attempting to build these relationships, it is best to create a media relations plan. Steps in a media relations plan include:

1. Determine your overall media goals
2. Determine the tone and content of the message(s) to be sent
3. Determining the groups of people you want to reach through the media. For example; If you are educating benefits is your target community of parents? If you are educating about an event or service project is your target the community at large?

Once you have an idea of your organization's identity and what information you want your public to understand, it is time to contact the appropriate media.

To identify those journalists and others who might have an interest in your story, read the newspapers, listen to your radio stations, and browse through locally published magazines and newsletters.

Once you have identified probable contacts, the best way to communicate with these individuals is through face-to-face meetings. Media press releases and media (press) kits should follow. Be persistent, yet considerate in your contact. Even if they are unable to use your story immediately, suggest using it in the future.

When the media contacts you...

You are an expert in your field, be honored and happy to speak to the press. But be sure to be prepared. Take information about the article or broadcast and set a time to get back to them. This will allow you proper preparation.

This should be logged on the initial call:

- 1.) Reporters *name* and *contact*
- 2.) The *media outlet* that is publishing the story
- 3.) The *story* information and goals
- 4.) If the reporter is contacting *other sources* and who they are
- 5.) What the *deadline* is for the story
- 6.) Time (and date if not that day) to *call back*
- 7.) Probable *duration* of the interview

Media Kit:

When in interaction with the media, it is protocol to have a “media kit” or “press kit” which is a collection of relevant supporting materials usually presented in a folder. A media kit will help the press identify good stories and correct information, as well as establish a professional and good relationship.

Each “kit” should include:

- *Cover* page or letter
- *Company information sheet*
- Any relevant *Press Releases*
- A *fact sheet* or possible *questions*
- Proper *contact* information to the direct press contact

Preparation:

When you have recorded what the story will be about, take time to sit down and collect your thoughts and data. Write down a few answers to these questions to get you started.

- 1) What are MY goals of this article/interview?
- 2) What information and facts do I have to back these points out?
- 3) What are possible nasty questions the reporter may ask me and how will I handle them?
- 4) What are possible diversion methods the reporter might use to get me to say something I don't want to?
- 5) What are questions I will not or cannot answer and who are the people I can send them to if I don't have an answer?

Be ready emotionally for an interview. Take a moment to calm and collect and remember that you are an expert in your field.

Interview:

- Open and keep the conversation with a friendly and positive tone. By making a positive relationship with the reporter you gain a good chance of a good story and give them a good perception of you
- Speak in terms that an average person will understand. Avoid using “cheer and dance vocabulary”
- Illustrate with personal examples or analogies that will help support your key points
- Be honest and direct, if you do not know and answer it is okay to direct them to the person who may. Only answer questions that pertain directly to you and our gym. Do not attempt to answer for the industry.
- Be brief and concise, state your point first and begin to talk in statements. Resist the urge to fill “dead space” if you have stated your point you can stop talking
- Beware of the reporter using “buzz words” or “what if's”. Keep your cool and take control of the situation by knowing what your key points are and not veering off that path.
- Record or log the conversation.