



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

MEDIA RELATIONS

March 30, 2026





THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY.

NEWS BLOOPERS



BLOOPER REEL TAKEAWAYS



Check your equipment before any on-air demonstration. Remember, safety comes first!

When you're on-air, everything is recorded, and the audience may include those you least expect.

Be clear and avoid misleading information.



MEDIA LANDSCAPE

- INFLUENCERS / SOCIAL MEDIA
- PODCASTS (AUDIO and/or VIDEO)
- PRINT OR TEXT (WEBSITES, NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES)
- RADIO (LIVE or RECORDED)
- TELEVISION (LIVE or RECORDED)



DIFFERENT APPROACHES AND STANDARDS

NONTRADITIONAL NEWS

TRADITIONAL NEWS

PROVIDE QUESTIONS IN ADVANCE?



FOLLOW PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM STANDARDS?



ALLOW PREVIEW OR REVIEW OF FINAL PRODUCT?



**TV BROADCAST, PRINT, DIGITAL AND
RADIO**

What are some
benefits of
engaging with the
media?



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS



WHY

WHY NOT

Promote your Local's brand

Reach your community members and elected officials

Advertise your Local's messaging and issues

Establish yourselves as experts, trusted professionals

Fundraise

Fear of being misquoted

Unfavorable story

You're afraid to say something or uninformed

Not newsworthy

"Just doing our job"



POTENTIAL STORIES FOR YOUR LOCAL



FEATURE STORY/LIGHT NEWS: Utah fire fighters hang up Christmas lights after woman falls



NEWS SPECIALISTS



USING THE MEDIA CAN BE EFFECTIVE!



Immediate recognition and credibility.

Visibility on social media and can provide your Local with content to cross-post.

Can lead to impressive opportunities.

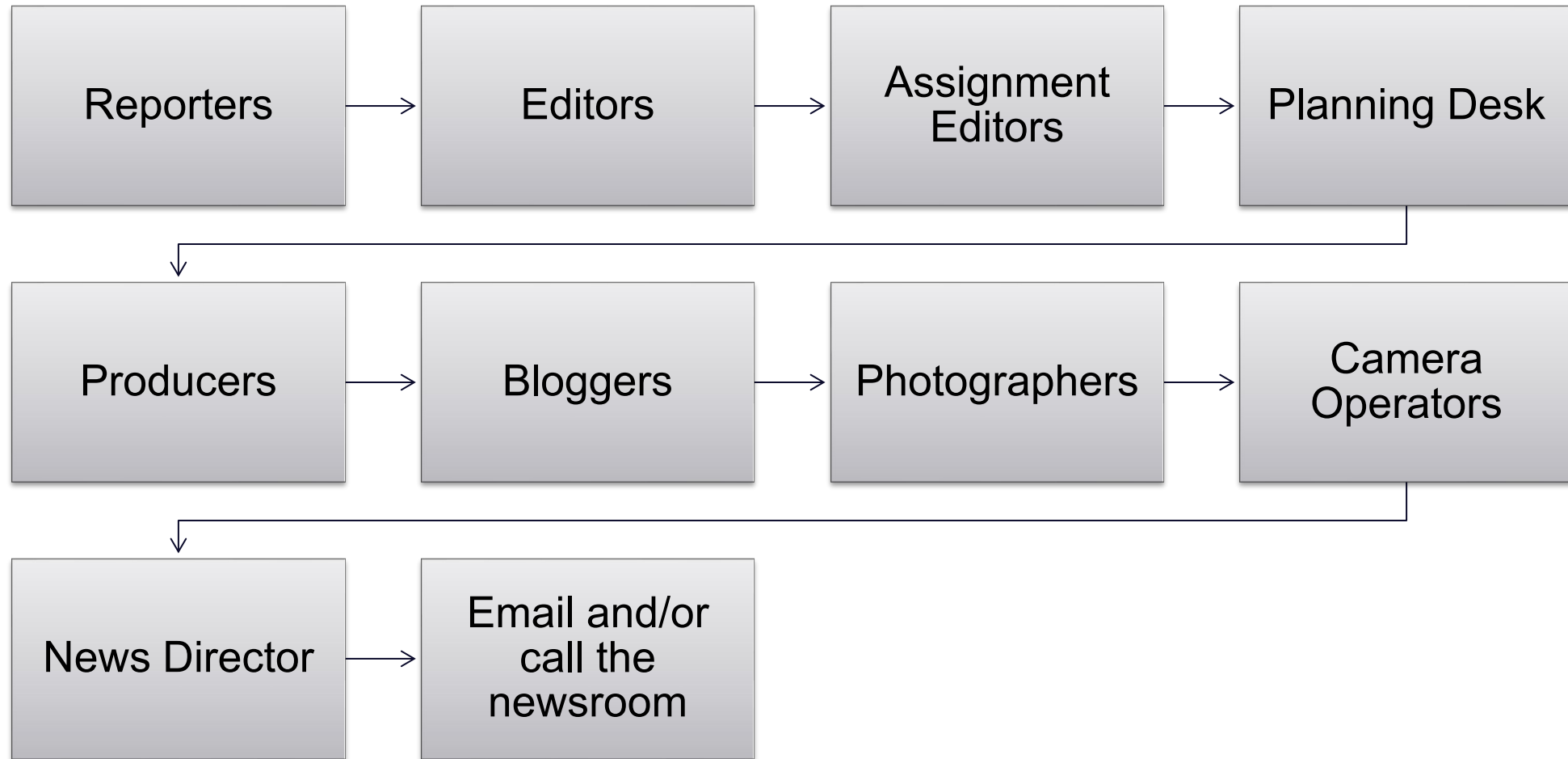
**Broad reach
and a diverse
audience.**



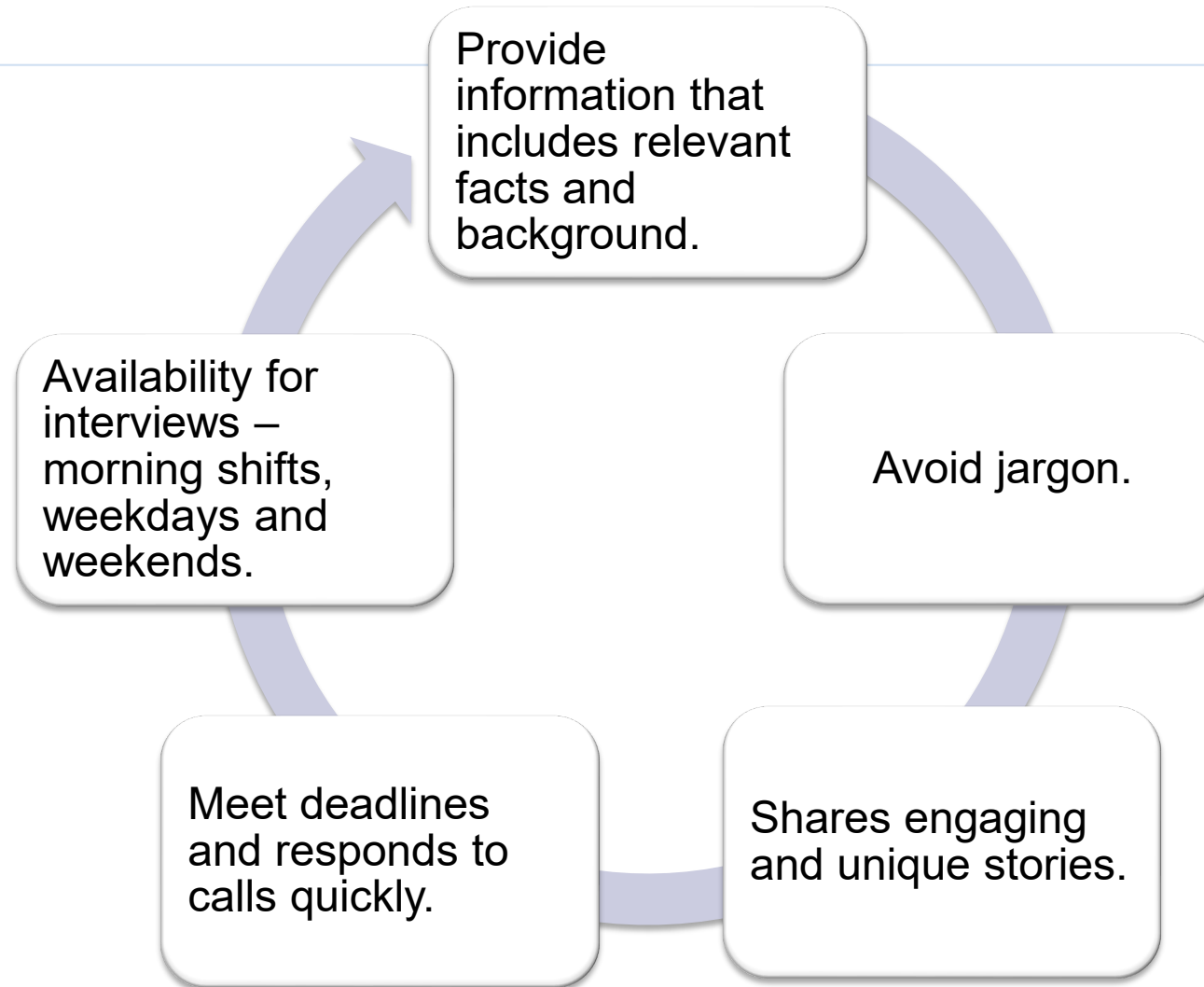
QUESTION:

**HOW DO YOU BUILD
RELATIONSHIPS WITH
YOUR LOCAL MEDIA?**

BUILD CONTACTS INSIDE THE NEWSROOM



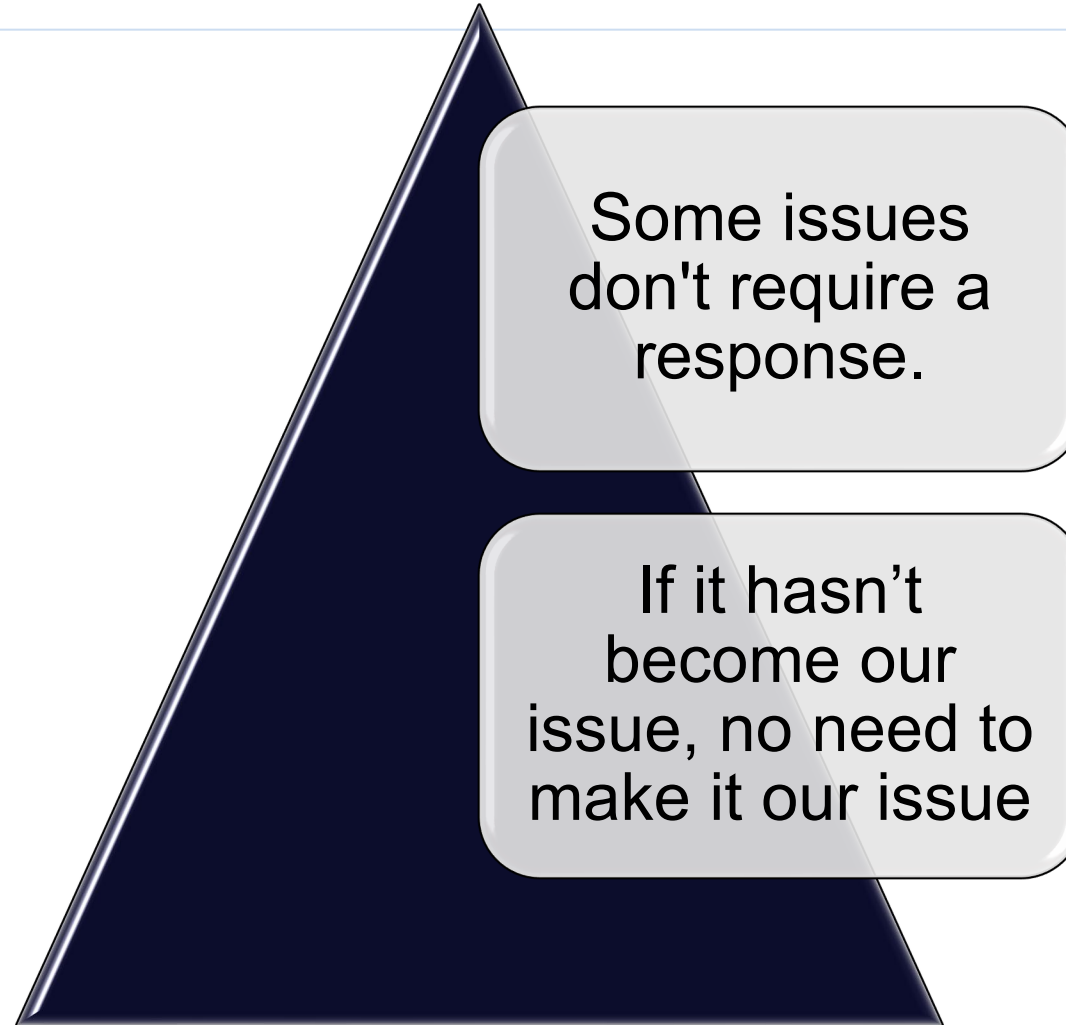
REPORTER WISH LIST



CRAFTING THE MESSAGE



KNOW WHEN TO SAY NOTHING



TYPES OF MEDIA INQUIRIES

Routine

General questions that arise in day-to-day operations.

Handled by Union PIO, often Local president.

Negative Press

Negative comments or local issues that reflect poorly on union.

Handled by Union or Dept. PIO

Full-Blown Crisis

Serious incident impacting reputation or function of union or its members.

Handled by high-level Union leadership with help from legal counsel or PR firms in some cases.



DISTRIBUTE EFFECTIVELY



Ensure all media outlets are cued up and send your statement via email promptly. This avoids a statement from the media saying:



"We reached out to the union, but they did not return our calls."



OP/ED OPPORTUNITIES

An op-ed is beneficial to your cause because it allows you to present your message in a clear, controlled, and persuasive manner directly to the public, without being filtered or reshaped by journalists.

PRESS CONFERENCES

A press conference draws multiple media outlets in one place, maximizing exposure and ensuring your message reaches a broad audience quickly. This helps create momentum and drive news coverage around your position.



FOLLOW-UP/ONGOING COVERAGE: Families of fallen Newark fire fighters "disturbed" by testimony from former fire chief



THE PRESS RELEASE



PRESS RELEASE FORMAT

A compelling headline

A lead paragraph summarizing the key information

Background details about the news

Quotes from relevant individuals

Contact information for further inquiries

Include location, date, and time for events.



PRESS RELEASE EXAMPLE



PRESS RELEASE EXAMPLE



THE INTERVIEW



WHO MAKES A "GOOD TALKER"?

AUTHENTICITY AND EXPERTISE

CONVEYS INFORMATION CLEARLY, WITHOUT JARGON

UNDERSTANDS WHAT A REPORTER NEEDS AND HOW THEY WORK

DOESN'T RAMBLE, PROVIDES DIRECT BUT PITHY/QUOTABLE ANSWERS

KNOWS THE AUDIENCE



PUTTING YOUR BEST SELF FORWARD

- LEAD WITH EMPATHY
- KNOW THE MESSAGE MAP! PRACTICE UNTIL THE MESSAGES ARE SECOND NATURE
- PRACTICE = MORE RELAXED = BETTER INTERVIEW
- KEEP ANSWERS SIMPLE AND SHORT (THIS WILL CHANGE DEPENDING ON THE MEDIA OUTLET)
- AIM FOR 15 TO 30 SECONDS FOR EACH ANSWER. (SHORTER FOR TV INTERVIEWS)
- NO JARGON
- DON'T ANSWER HYPOTHETICALS
- POSITIVE ANALOGIES AND STORIES ARE GREAT WAYS TO CONVEY POINTS
- KEEP YOUR COOL!
- IT'S NOT JUST MEMORIZATION (AND DON'T RELY ON NOTES!)



On-air interviews

Stay focused

Before an in-person interview, ask the reporter, "What questions will you ask me?" This will help you avoid getting sidetracked.

Stick to the point

Don't ramble or over-explain. Rambling can create confusion and generate more questions, which may harm your position.

Pivot if needed

If your current strategy isn't working, be prepared to change course quickly.



MEDIA TERMS

On the record: Everything you say can be used and attributed directly to you in a story. Assume every conversation with a reporter is on the record unless otherwise specified and agreed to.

Off the record: Nothing the reporter hears can be used in a story

On background: Reporter can use the information but can not attribute it directly to you. Uses title like, “Union official”

Deep background: Reporter can use the information but not any quotes. Helps fill in back story.



TIPS AND TRICKS



All mics are live. No jokes, no small talk.

Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."

Use pauses to collect your thoughts.

Maintain eye contact.

Ensure that your backdrop is appropriate for the message you are delivering.



LENGTH OF A NEWS STORY

• Less than 30 seconds (43%)

- Quicker stories called VOSOTS – one soundbite around 10 –15 seconds and b-roll. (video) ANCHOR usually reads on air.

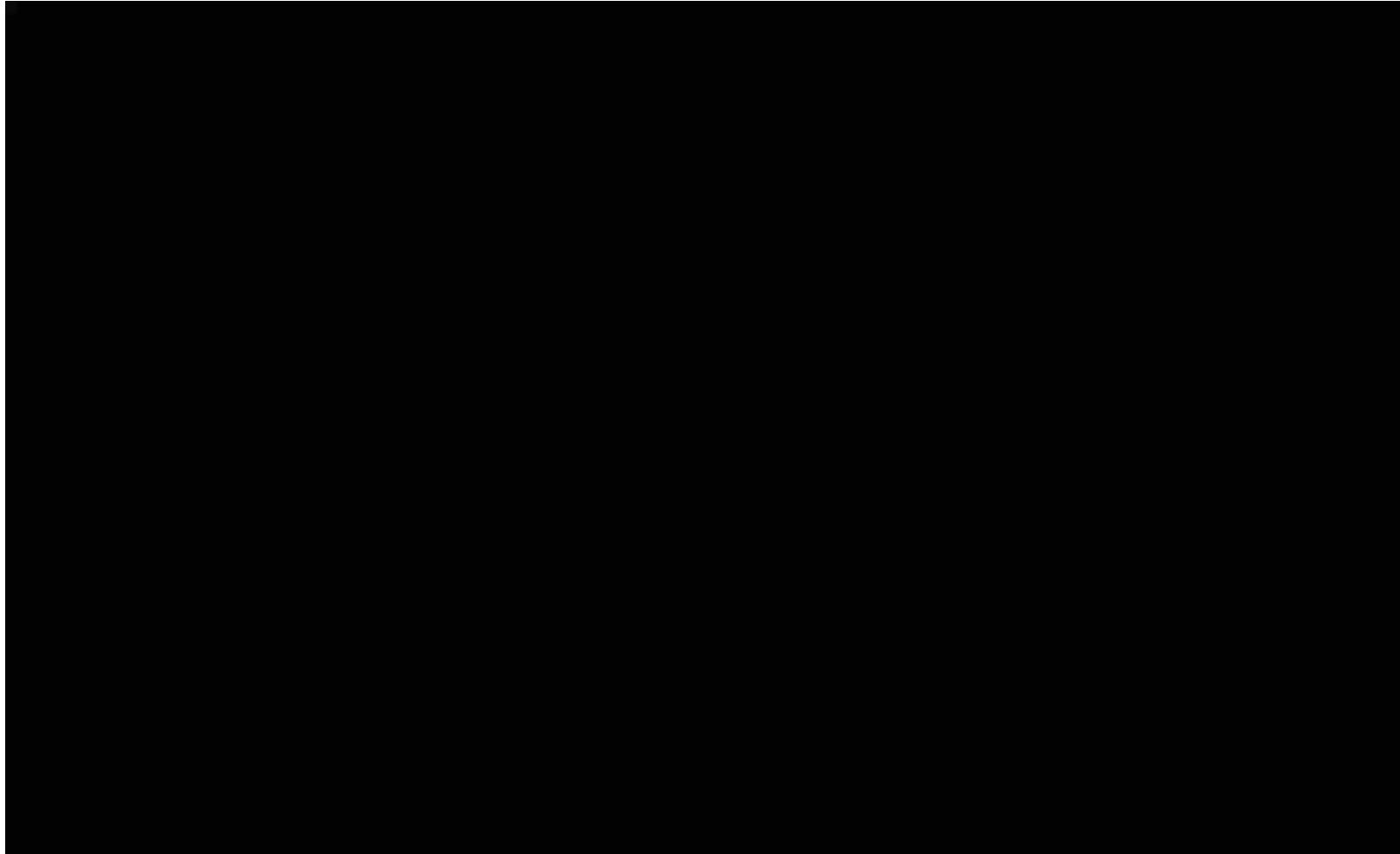
• More than 120 seconds (16%)

- Most stories are around 1 min 30 sec max with multiple soundbites (SOTS)

• Reporter may ask for a LIVE interview or social media LIVE interview. They're supposed to announce first.



SPOT NEWS/ON-SCENE INTERVIEW



DELTA CEO: CLEAR, DIRECT, ON MESSAGE

CBS NEWS WASHINGTON



ATLANTA



EXCLUSIVE

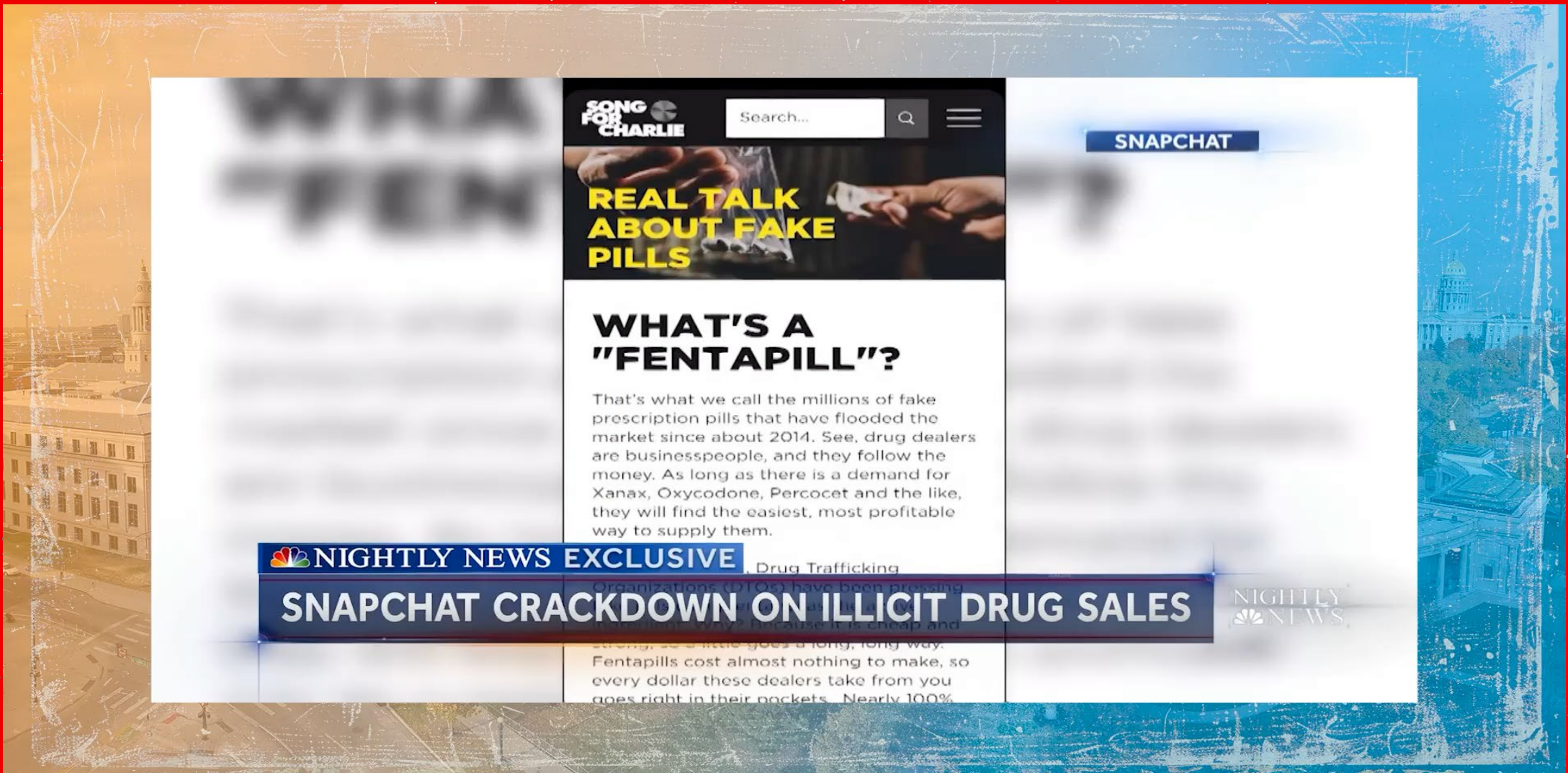
CBS
MORNINGS

DELTA AIR LINES CEO LIVE

ED BASTIAN REACTS TO TORONTO PLANE CRASH & TALKS INVESTIGATION LATEST



AUTHENTICITY = KNOWING THE MESSAGE



PREPARE! PREPARE! PREPARE!



REPORTER “TRICKS”



THE “FLOW”: MOST INTERVIEWS WILL START WITH LIGHTER QUESTIONS AND GET TOUGHER AS THE INTERVIEW PROGRESSES



REPORTERS WANT TO KNOCK YOU OFF MESSAGE BECAUSE THIS IS WHERE NEWS IS MADE



USING SILENCE



THE “RULE OF THREE”



SILENCE AND THE RULE OF THREE

“I've done thousands of interviews in the past three decades and have noticed a pattern to people's responses. They nearly always answer a question three times. First, they tell you the answer they want you to hear. Second, they explain their answer. Third, they blurt out a soundbite—if you wait a beat before jumping in with the follow-up question. Let the silence grow. Silence makes people uncomfortable. They suspect you still don't understand their answer. That's when they put their thoughts into sharp focus.”

BOB DOTSON - Former NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT



THE RULE OF THREE

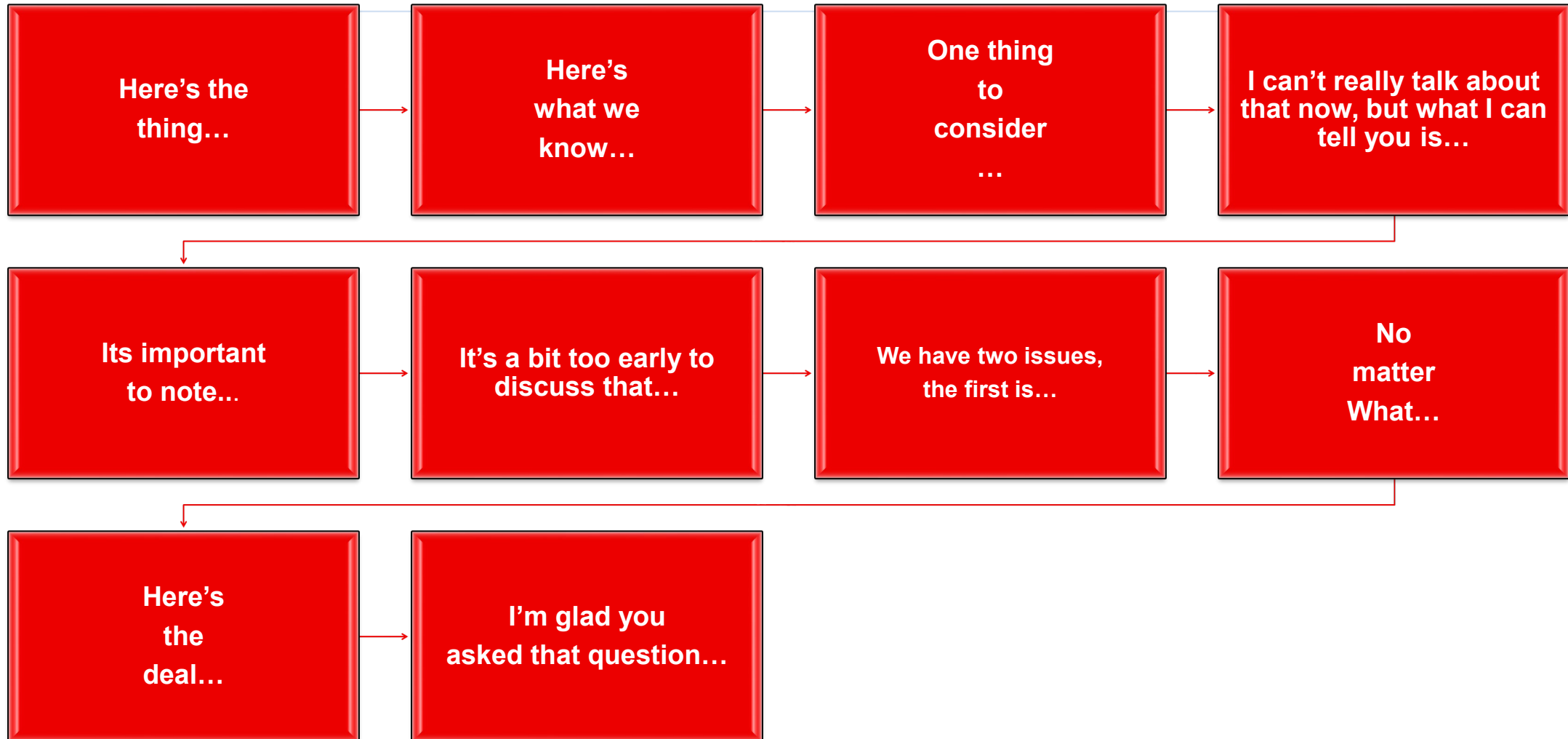


TURN THE TABLES

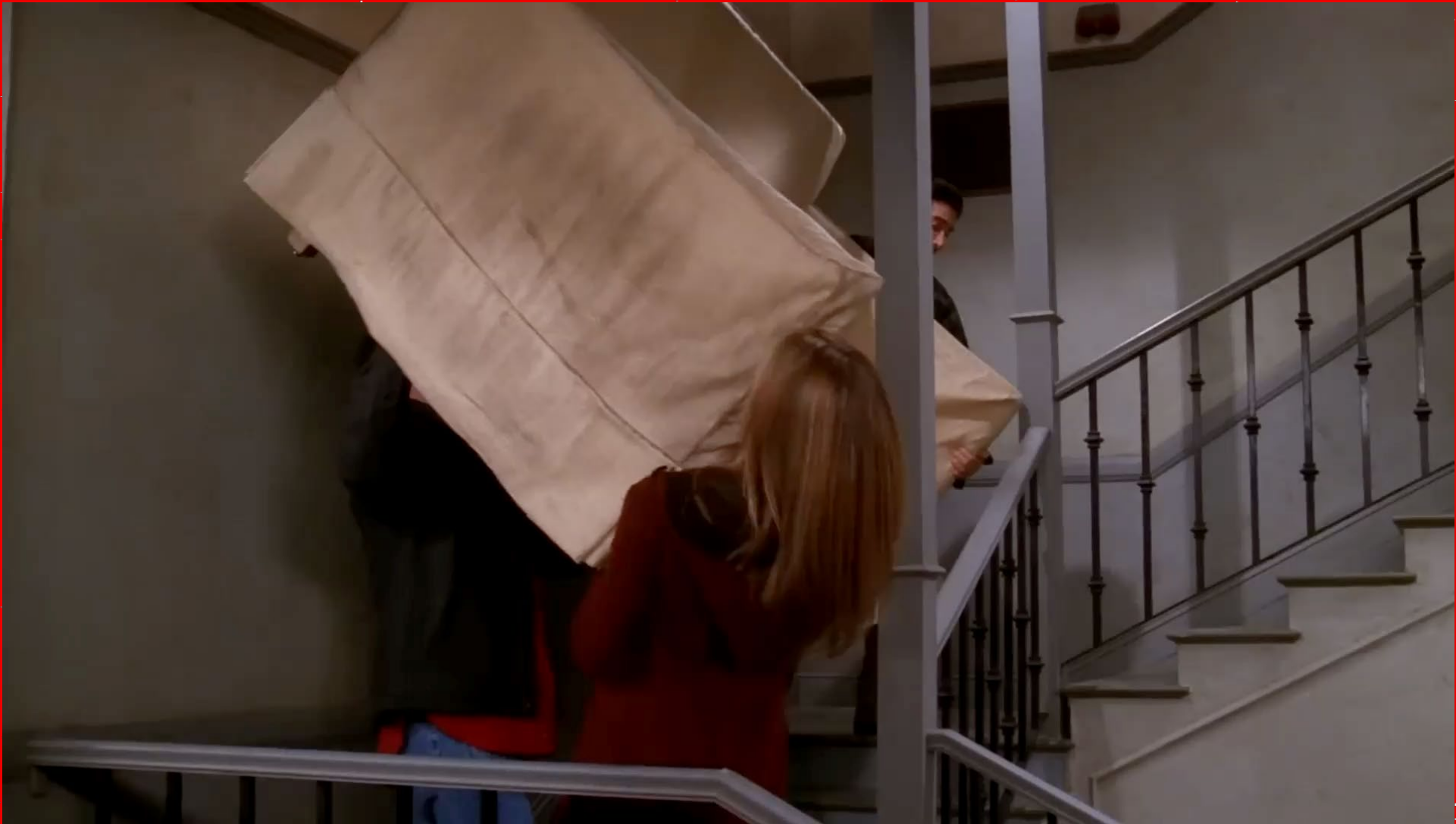
- ANTICIPATE THE RULE OF THREE
- TEE UP A THIRD ANSWER
- USE SILENCE
- SIGNAL THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT YOU'RE ABOUT TO SAY (“HERE’S THE BOTTOM LINE...”)
- CHANGE YOUR CADENCE



AVOID “NO COMMENT”, AND PIVOT



PIVOT! PIVOT! PIVOT!



BRIDGING / PIVOTING

A-B-C

- ACKNOWLEDGE THE QUESTION - “THAT’S AN INTERESTING QUESTION...”
- BUILD A BRIDGE TO YOUR KEY MESSAGE - “THE REAL ISSUE HERE...” “ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT IT...” “LET ME ANSWER IT THIS WAY...”
- CONFIDENTLY - PIVOT BACK TO DELIVERING YOUR KEY MESSAGES

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A-B-C

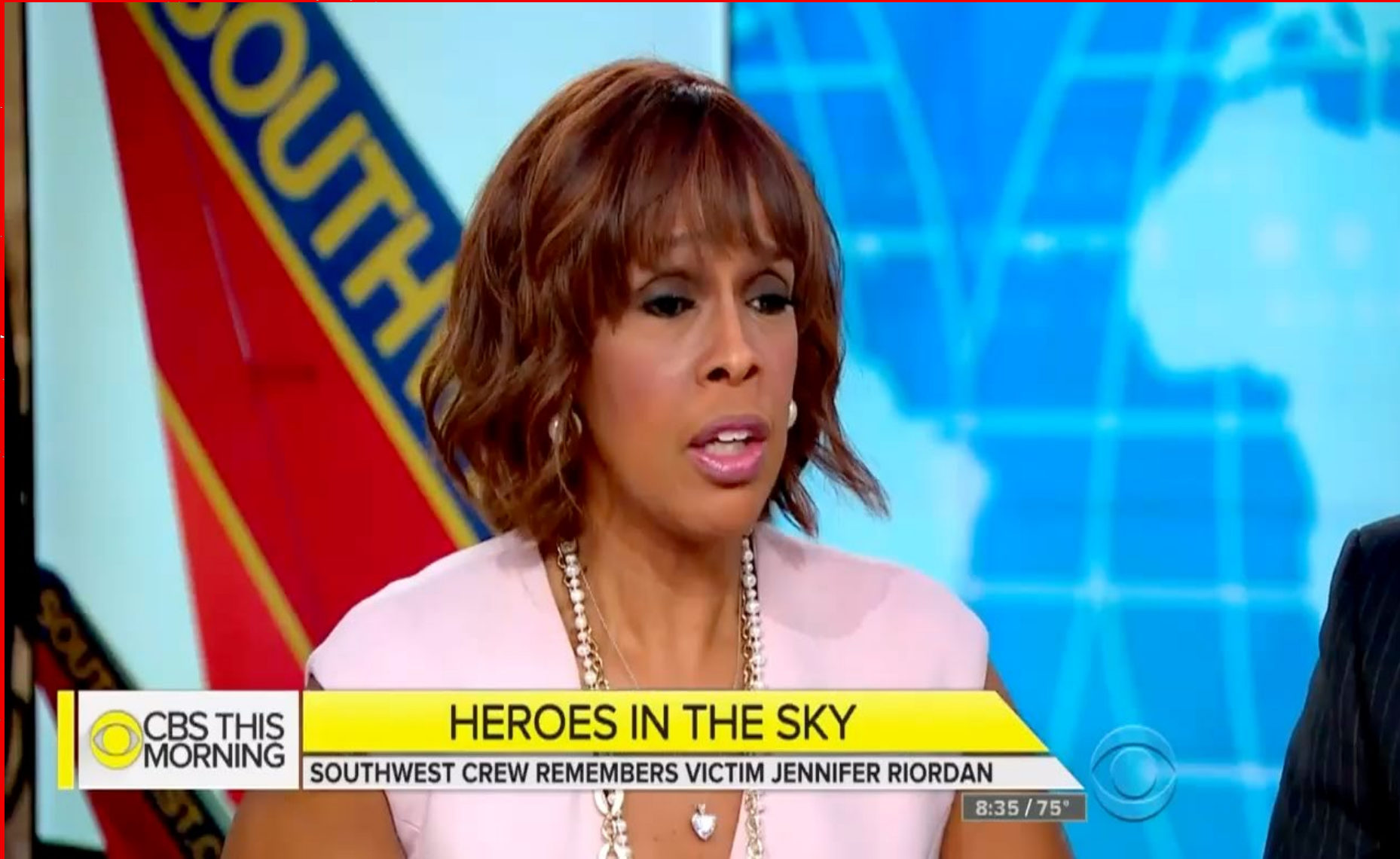
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PIVOTING: CONTROL THE MESSAGE



PIVOTING & REDIRECTING



BEST PRACTICES

Don't wait until a crisis to post good news. Maintain a strong social media presence to highlight your union's positive role in the community.

Preparing for interviews: Be "TV Ready." Appearance matters.

Hold One Unified Interview: At a scene, if multiple media outlets are involved, conduct one interview for all reporters to avoid contradictions in your statement(s).

Review and Critique: Watch old interviews and review past statements to see what worked and what didn't.



BEST PRACTICES

Unpredictable Crisis: While some challenges, like collective bargaining disputes or political campaigns, can be anticipated, others are unpredictable. Having a prepared media strategy for both foreseeable and unforeseen crises is essential. At the very least have a person or persons on your executive board that are capable and at the ready.

Be prepared, be concise, and always stay focused on the message that supports your members and acknowledges public concerns.

Conclusion: Effective media communications are critical for all unions, whether you're addressing routine matters or navigating a crisis.





THANK YOU!
ANY QUESTIONS?



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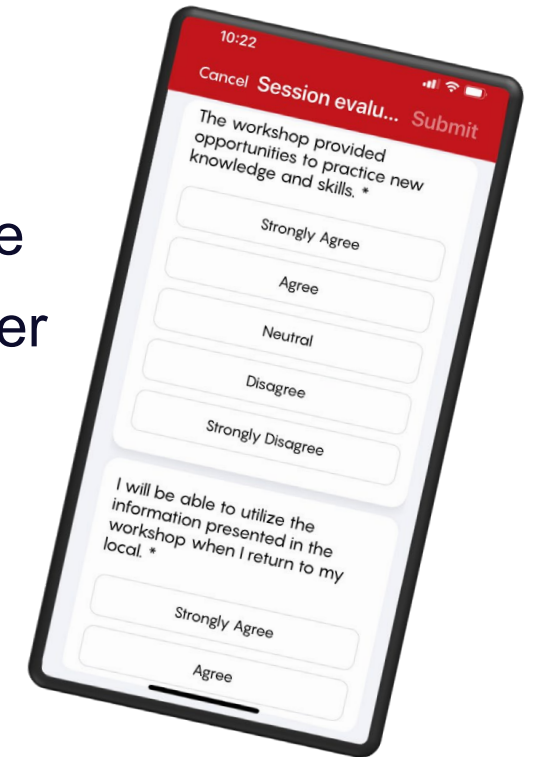


KENT GROSSE

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EVALUATION AND WIN AN IPAD!

- **Submit your workshop and overall evaluations to be automatically entered in two drawings for a new iPad!**
- **Complete your evaluations using the IAFF app:**
 1. Download the IAFF app and sign in with your iaff.org username
 2. Tap the 2026 Strive for Excellence Summit event image to enter the event's dashboard
 3. Tap "Sessions" and tap on the workshops you attended
 4. Tap "Evaluation" and complete the evaluation
 5. Tap "Submit"



For the event's overall evaluation, follow steps 1 and 2, then tap "Event Evaluation" located in the event's Dashboard.

