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Actions to Strengthen your Media Skills

1. Watch television-frequently and analytically. You can learn how effective communication techniques can be by watching television interviews with a more critical eye. Tune in frequently to locally produced news programs in your own locality in addition to network broadcast offerings such as "CBS Morning News," "Today," "Good Morning America" on weekdays or the Sunday newsmaker shows like "Meet the Press" or "Face the Nation."

2. Analyze these programs from the standpoint of eye contact, steering, bottom-line answers, presence or absence of "must air" points, etc. Watching the triumphs and errors of others - analytically - is one of the best ways of refining communication skills.

3. Review local newspaper headlines. Check the headlines in both the general and business news sections to see if those stories could lead to a question for your organization or business. Ask yourself, "If I had an interview today, could lead to a question for me? If so, what is the question and what is my answer?" Secondly, "Is there any way I could use one of those current stories as a lead-in to one of my "must air" points?" And, scan other relevant publications such as the Wall Street Journal or trade publications. Make this a daily habit to refine your perception of the news interviewer's interests. It doesn't take much time and will produce big dividends.

4. Practice, practice. An occasional question-and-answer session with a member of the staff or a run through of a speech with a tape recorder can keep you fresh and "up to speed." Record the interview Q&A also, and take time to listen to the playback and evaluate your work.

5. Make special preparations for special challenges. A major speech or public appearance deserves extra work on your part. Give it the time required to be at your best.

6. Observe others. Borrow from their strengths and weaknesses. Even the best communicator can learn from others.

7. Take the communications aspect of your work seriously. In today's society the best communicator has a significant advantage over those who do not hone their communications skills. Don't feel that you have accomplished all that you can or all that you need to. The best communicators never stop working at it. And, they never stop reading the dividends of their efforts.