BECOME A SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS SUPERHERO

TEN TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR IMAGE

1. **CREATE A RELATIONSHIP**: Don't presume it's the reporter's responsibility to curry a relationship with you. Get to know the person writing about your district or board. That will allow your perspective to come through.

2. **IDENTIFY A DISTRICT/BOARD SPOKESPERSON**: For districts, often the superintendent; for boards, usually the chairman. This doesn't mean others cannot talk to a reporter, but having one person take the lead helps keep your message consistent.

3. **YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN "NO COMMENT."** Here's an example: "We can't discuss that because it's a personnel matter, but we are working to resolve this situation as quickly as we can while we focus on our core goal of providing a first-rate education."

4. **DON'T PANIC**: When a reporter calls, say you need some time to research the issue. Then consult with others, gather your facts and jot down some reminder notes before calling back.

5. **GET SPECIFICS**: Ask the reporter precisely what the story is about. What prompted it? Is he or she talking to others? The more you know the better you can respond.

6. **CONFUSED REPORTER?** Email data or an explanation of complicated issues. Find district personnel who can explain. Ask the reporter what he or she heard you say to ensure that quotes are accurate.

7. **OFF THE RECORD?** Reporters have a cardinal rule: Everything you say is on the record unless you state and he or she agrees otherwise. Assume that every word you say will appear in print.

8. **DON'T NITPICK**: If a story is factually inaccurate, of course you should bring that to the reporter's attention. But if a word is missing or a nuance was missed, just let it go.

9. **PROBLEM REPORTER?** Keep a precise record of inaccurate or unfair coverage. Meet with the reporter first, and if that does not resolve the problem, take your specific examples to the editor.

10. **BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP**: This is the extension of Tip 1. Offer story ideas. Meet the reporter over coffee. Provide constructive feedback. Consider writing an op/ed piece or suggesting an editorial.

FIVE LOADED LANGUAGE PITFALLS

- **BE PRECISE**: The public latches onto details in communication, so descriptive words need to reflect your intent.
- **LEGAL ISSUES**: When dealing with potential crimes, make sure narrowly defined legal terms fit the situation.
- **SENSITIVITY**: Be aware of language considerations around sensitive issues, such as sex, age, abilities and mental health.
- **POLITICAL LANGUAGE**: Most issues can be described using phrases that are oppositional, supportive or neutral. Choose carefully.
- **AVOID SLANG AND IDIOMS**, which are often misused, misunderstood and inappropriate.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS YOUR NOT-SO-SECRET WEAPON

- **USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO**: Highlight successful programs, celebrate academic achievement, showcase students’ aspirations and tell stories.
- **FACEBOOK IS KING**: The platform boasts 2.2 billion users.
- **REMEMBER**, 69 percent of Americans use at least one social media platform (Pew Research Center, 2018).