

Top Tips for Television Interviews

By Marisa DVari

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Media Case Study from the Today Show
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"Heidi Fleiss is back!" yelled a gossipy acquaintance at my gym, seeing the former Hollywood Madame interviewed by the Today Show's Matt Lauer on TV.

Savvy readers of my column can already guess this case study is about preparing yourself for Effective TV media interviews.

TV hosts have their own agenda ... they feel no obligation to "play nice" to a TV guest even if pressured by the program's producer or publicist to conduct the interview.

Apart from the hard news stories, morning television is also "happy TV." Interviews are mostly "nice" and soft edged, mainly with authors and Hollywood stars pitching upcoming films.

It's easy for guests to "relax" and assume they will get the usual encouraging nods, smiles, and friendly handshake from the host.

But if your topic is controversial, watch out! Hosts value their own reputation and do not want to offend their core audience by appearing to be in alliance with guests whose morality may be in question.

When Heidi Fleiss was interviewed by Matt Lauer last

week, she was media savvy enough to:

#1 Prepare Key Message Points in Advance

#2 Answer Honestly

#3 Remember to Mention Her Book's Title

#4 Include Personal Anecdotes for Color

Lauer played the role of the objective journalist well, but it seemed subjectively clear he did not share her philosophy.

For the most part, the interview went well. Heidi's fatal mistake occurred just before the close, when she thanked Lauer -- and extended her hand to him.

Why a mistake? Lauer did not shake it.

Lauer's move may have been accidental -- he might have been short on time and had to wrap up quickly before the break, but for the millions of viewers watching Heidi with her arm outstretched and ignored, the perceived message was that Lauer did not endorse Heidi or her book.

TV audiences have a fierce alliance to their on-camera hosts. Hosts appear in their bedroom and living room, and appear to be almost friends, not just friendly faces. What a host "appears" to think or feel about a guest makes a huge impact on what the audience thinks about a guest.

How does this apply to you? When you are on a TV show, ask the producer or host ****before the show**** about handshake protocol. Also, wait and be ready for the host to shake your hand first!

Other tips for media interviews?

#1 Keep your answers short -- no longer than 15 -- 30 seconds (practice with a stop watch and tape recorder).

#2 Create and practice several transitional sentences, such as “Great Question! Here’s an example from my book that best illustrates that ...”

3 Use the host’s first name. The viewers already regard the host as their friend ... you will ally yourself with them by treating the host as your friend as well.

Good luck!

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