

How to Win a Reporter's Heart

By Rusty Cawley

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Like all other humans, reporters are subject to the Law of Reciprocity. When they receive cooperation, they will give cooperation. When they receive loyalty, they will give loyalty. When they receive gifts, they will give gifts.

This is a very human norm that is rooted in our collective past, when reciprocity was a tool of survival.

And this is why most media outlets forbid their reporters from accepting gifts from the public, especially from news sources. The majority of media ban gifts that are valued over a certain limit, generally \$25 or so. Almost all news media forbid travel junkets as well.

Editors and producers want no questions to arise concerning any reporter's fairness and accuracy. Thus, the ban on gifts.

But there remains one gift that reporters will gladly accept and the Boss will gladly encourage.

That gift is "the scoop."

The scoop is an exclusive, important story. It is a news item that the reporter to beat the competition. It can be anything from a tip that the city council may change the town charter to a document that shows a local CEO is engaged in illegal insider trading.

Any tidbit of information that leads to a scoop is always welcome in a newsroom. Indeed, providing a steady supply of scoops is the only way to win a reporter's heart.

Scoops are what allow reporters to move up in the ranks. Scoops are what allow newspaper editors and TV producers to keep their jobs. Scoops are what allow newspapers to attract more readers, TV stations to attract more viewers, radio stations to attract more listeners and Web sites to attract more hits.

The PR Rainmaker knows: Scoops allow us to bypass the media's ban on gifts and to tap into the reporter's natural desire to observe the Law of Reciprocity.

Become a valuable source, provide access to a steady stream of scoops, and you will receive more favorable coverage. It's human nature.

Reporters will succumb to the Law of Reciprocity. They will turn to you more often for expert

commentary. They will look more favorably upon your story proposals.

In addition, reporters will succumb to the Law of Self-Interest. If you are providing scoops on a regular basis, a reporter is going to resist doing anything that might cause you to turn off the tap.

How frequent is a "steady" stream? One good tip per month is plenty.

If you are at all plugged into your industry or profession or community, you will hear plenty of good information to send along to the reporter.

Get in the habit of passing news along to the reporter just as soon as you hear it. Also, take the reporter to lunch once a month to exchange information. Always take along plenty of potential scoops, even if they are nothing more than tidbits or rumors that you have heard.

Every reporter wants an inside source, a "Deep Throat." It's all part of the romantic image that most reporters have about their jobs.

Two cautions about reporters and reciprocation:

1. Never expect immediate quid pro quo. Understand that your relationship with a reporter will grow over time. Don't rush the process. Accept that you will always put more into the relationship than you will get out. If the reporter suspects that you think he owes you something, your relationship will sour fast.

2. Reciprocation only goes so far. If you're a valuable source, and the reporter has the story that your company is a front for the Mob, don't expect a pass. It won't happen. Because of your relationship, you'll probably receive more courtesy than will the usual subject of a tough story. But that's all.

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Rusty Cawley is a 20-year veteran journalist who now coaches executives, entrepreneurs and PR professionals on using the news media to attract customers and to advance ideas. For your free copy of the ebook "PR Rainmaker," visit www.prrainmaker.com .

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