

# Dealing with journalists (and their foibles)



**Philip Dine**

**U**sing the media is key to getting our message out to the public and their representatives in Congress—but, in doing so you have to, well, deal with journalists.

That, in turn, sometimes requires maintaining your sense of humor, and, occasionally, keeping your temper in check.

To help you navigate this as smoothly as possible by anticipating and planning in advance, here are some of the types you may encounter:

**The adults**—Most commonly found on a newspaper's editorial page, where you turn to get a letter to the editor or a commentary in the paper; less frequently on the news side among reporters or news editors. These folks are calm, businesslike and interested in providing readers with varying perspectives. You'll know right away if you're dealing with one of these. If so, consider yourself lucky. You're in for an instructive, probably fruitful, experience.

**The debaters**—More often reporters or news editors. They may be tiresome, but they're also interested in the issues, which helps us. Just remember, you don't have to out-argue them or prove they're wrong; you just have to show that there's another perspective out there that's worth being published or aired.

**The ideologues**—Given who we are, these will tend to be on the right, whether print reporters, TV producers or radio hosts. Avoid their ideological battlefield and show instead why many conservatives strongly support the Postal Service—based in the Constitution, critical for rural communities and for small businesses, no taxpayer money, biggest civilian employer of military veterans, key role in neighborhood and national security, centerpiece of mailing industry that employs 7.5 million Americans in the private sector. Showing them they can keep their political views and still support the USPS just may cause them to reconsider.

**The defensive/sensitive ones**—These are the most irksome to deal with. They know very little about postal issues, but they know it all. They have much to learn but nothing to learn. Moreover, they're highly sensitive when it comes to No. 1. If their opinions or their reporting are questioned, they deny and evade and do anything to avoid acknowledging a mistake or a gap in knowledge. When faced with one of these, try reasoning once or twice—then ask for their supervisor. Or call me.

**The incompetents**—Explain things carefully, slowly and often—and they may surprise you by getting it right. And if they don't, they still may surprise you by their willingness to fix it—so long as they don't also cross into the category above. In that case, speak to their boss.

Keep in mind that every media outlet has some competent, well-meaning journalists seeking stories or commentaries that will surprise readers, viewers or listeners; are on topics that are important to people; can readily be localized; and may spur people to action.

In other words, our stories. And remember, by doing this work, you're educating the public, informing lawmakers, bolstering our employer, protecting your jobs and serving the public. That's worth dealing with some odd folks every now and then.

And even if you do encounter a "journalistic character," you'll probably end up more amused than annoyed—especially if you've been forewarned.

## Now, briefly, some recent successes.

President Rolando, for the second time in just over a month, schooled an ideologue masquerading as a columnist in the conservative *Washington Times*. Why the opportunity? Because the paper's editorial page editor, a leading figure in conservative circles, is an adult who believes in informed discussion of important topics. NALC's president explained both Postal Service operating profits and the bedrock values and principles that USPS represents.

Much recent coverage reflected the topic of last month's column—that we communicate by actions as well as words. Numerous media outlets continued to write about our national heroes; the coverage also included the service or good deeds of others. Grand Rapids, MI Branch 56 letter carrier Tom Nauta was featured in a TV report, for example, while newspapers wrote about Canton, OH Branch 238 letter carrier Ray Bourquin and about Kinston, NC Merged Branch 1044 members Mitch Hamilton and Terry Moten.

Keep it up, and let me know if you run into some colorful characters along the way!

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