

Shooting Great Interviews I: Preparing Your Subject

The Process for Directors & Producers

By John W. Coleman

Twin Oaks Communications www.twinoaks.tv

In general you need to work with your guest/subject (not just the lights.) Spend some time chatting—but don't rehearse the questions and answers. Better to talk about the weather.

Develop a rapport with your subject but don't get too intimate—they'll put their guard up and it will stay up. You want their guard down. Getting them to focus on you and away from the camera will help. Don't remind them there are thousands watching. Speak in the first person; "Tell me..." not, "Tell us..."

Your goal is to make the subject relaxed enough to be themselves and answer honestly and reveal their passion. To do that they must feel comfortable and safe in your presence.

Before the camera rolls it is a good idea to **walk your subjects through what is about to take place** – in a very general manner. This assumes a friendly interview—not a 60 Minutes investigation.

Once they are seated in front of the camera **don't begin the interview immediately** –introduce the crew, Ask if they are comfortable, need water, etc...chat and warm them up.

Tell them **you want to have a conversation** –not a Q&A. In fact, not everything is a question—you just want them to address the subject! This assumes a producer type interview.

Remind them **there are no right and wrong answers** –you want their opinion, perspective and knowledge (why else would you be interviewing THEM? You could always use an announcer.)

Remind them you can always **edit out anything that doesn't make sense**. Most people want to know you'll make them look good no matter what they say! This is an important trust-builder.

Tell them **you may ask them to repeat something** or clarify something occasionally –it's part of the normal process—and not because they said it badly or anything of that sort.

Explain the procedure of **answering in full sentences**.

I usually give an example: "If I ask you, 'where do you live?' and you simply say 'Main Street' that won't make sense when we take out my question. People will just hear 'Main Street' out of any context. So you'll need to rephrase my question or repeat the subject as part of your answer."

When you are ready to roll don't yell "Action" or "Roll Tape" etc.

Work out and **use simple signals to start quietly**.

Have them slate themselves and spell everything as well as give an audio release. Make your first question sound like you haven't really started! **Ease into the interview!**