

THE Perfect Pitch

THE
ULTIMATE
GUIDE TO
DELIVERING
POWERFUL
INTERVIEWS

AYODELE ADIO

adio
STRATEGY & COMMUNICATIONS



Table of Contents

Managing the interview process	3
Never take an interview without a strategy	4
Sound bites and punch lines	6
Keep the Audience in Mind	8
Bait and Switch	10
What points to make	12
Win over the Interviewer (compliments)	14
Relatability (let the audience relate with you)	16
Use data and comparative analysis	18
Study your interviewer (troubleshoot possible..... questions)	19
Control the Narrative	20

Managing the interview process

From my experience, most media executives, politicians, and activists, believe they know enough of their subject to deliver a brilliant interview on television or radio.

Unfortunately, many have had to learn the hard way when the cameras start rolling.

They embarrass themselves on television or struggle to stay on message.

The reason many struggle to come out shinning after important interviews is because they focus so much on the knowledge that they have and very little, if any at all, on specific techniques in managing high level interviews. Many soon realize that their knowledge or experience, however rich, is barely enough to come across as knowledgeable and assured during an interview. To fix this, I have identified 10 proven steps to deliver great interviews and win over your audiences.



Never take an interview without strategy

Strategy as originally used by generals in the military, are plans for manoeuvring forces with the goal of defeating an enemy army. In other words, it is a set of plans and process that confers an advantage to achieve an identified set of objectives. It is also about a plan for controlling and utilizing resources to secure an individual or organizational interest. It is about competing and mobilizing one's resources or capabilities to gain advantage over a competitor.

As you know, most interviews are about a competition of ideas. It is about making the argument for a better product or service, opposing a policy position, criticizing a view or position, advancing a narrative, or simply challenging a set of beliefs.

Whatever the case may be, the interviewee seeks to convince an audience to adopt his position or persuade them against a previously held one. Therefore, to achieve this aim, the interviewee must develop a strategy to achieve his aim of persuading his audience. Here are a few considerations to bear in mind;

1. What is the purpose of this interview? He/she must be clear about the purpose and what they seek to achieve from the said interview. Is it about addressing a misconception about a product or is it about ensuring that a particular piece of legislation is defeated in the legislature?
2. Secondly the interviewee must identify his strengths and the resources available to him to ensure a successful outcome. This could be a reputation, a major achievement or success in the past, a new study that supports your position, public sentiments, personal charm, and any other thing that confers an advantage. Equally, the interviewee must also identify his weaknesses and seek ways of mitigating them.



Never take an interview without strategy



3. Decide on a cause of action given the purpose of the interview and the resources available at your disposal. Ultimately, this will mean deciding if pursuing an aggressive posture will serve the purpose much better than a calm and gentle demeanour. It means deciding what questions to tackle and the ones to evade, about what will make the most impression on the audience and what is likely to rattle your competitor.

4. After deciding on a cause of action, the interviewee must develop the discipline to follow through and implement. Once there is a lack of discipline to follow through, your thoughts become distorted and incoherent, then everything falls apart.

Sound Bites and Punchlines

There is a difference between putting up a good or interesting interview and putting up a memorable interview. If you are taking an interview to influence people in a certain direction then your appearance has to go beyond being just good to being memorable. And that is a huge distinguishing factor between exceptional commentators and ordinary ones. Think of the famous football commentator, Martin Tyler, who runs commentary for Sky Sports. Most football watchers adore Martin Tyler not just because he is a good football commentator, there are many good commentators, but because he gives most fans something to talk about after every game. He does this by using punch lines that are used as soundbites over and over again.

Hence, to make your interviews memorable, you must repeat a few punchlines that make an impression on people and something they can hardly forget. This could be a powerful quote, an idiomatic expression, a word play, a proverb, or a research data; you have to leave something with the audience that they can remember you for and maybe they will be willing to take action.

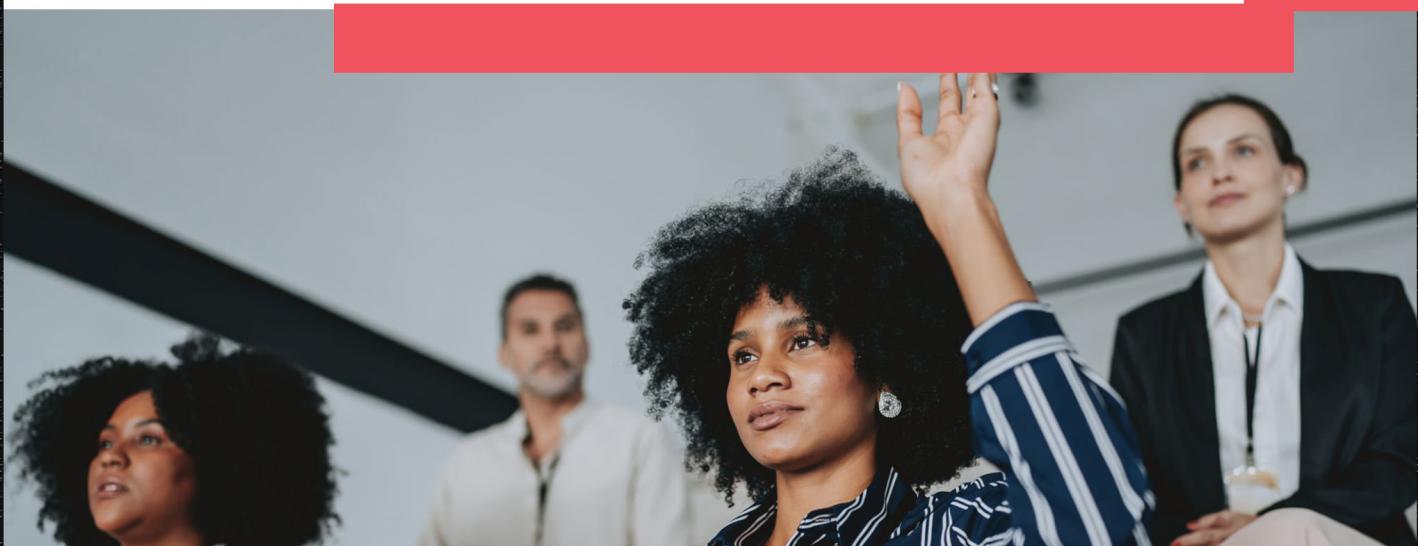
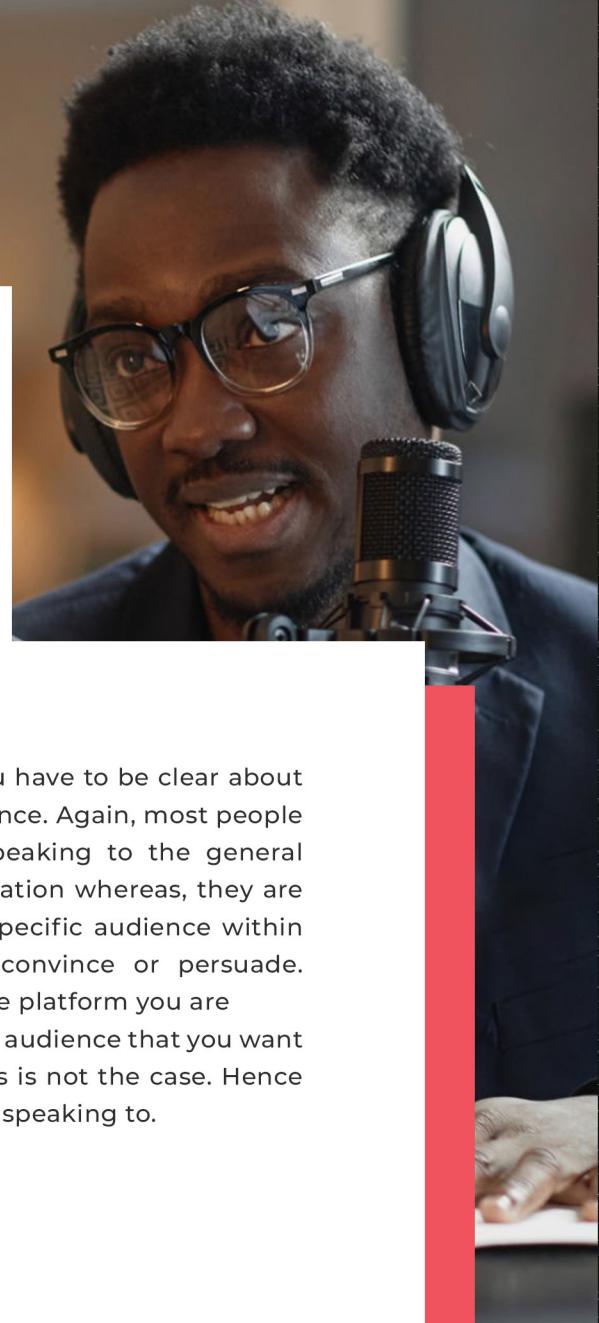
Sound Bites and Punchlines



As I will repeat all through this course, most people now have a short attention span because there too many things competing for their attention. Whether it is social media notifications, emails, or news, people will struggle to remember what they read or listen to within 24 hours if nothing in that information sticks. Hence, what you must look for as an interviewee is stickability. What can you say or what is it about how you say it or appear that will stick in the minds of your audience? This is why I always advise to use powerful repeated punchlines during your interview that will stick in the minds of people. An example is the typical talking point used by the NRA when pressed about gun violence. Guns don't kill people, it is bad people that kill.

Keep the Audience in mind

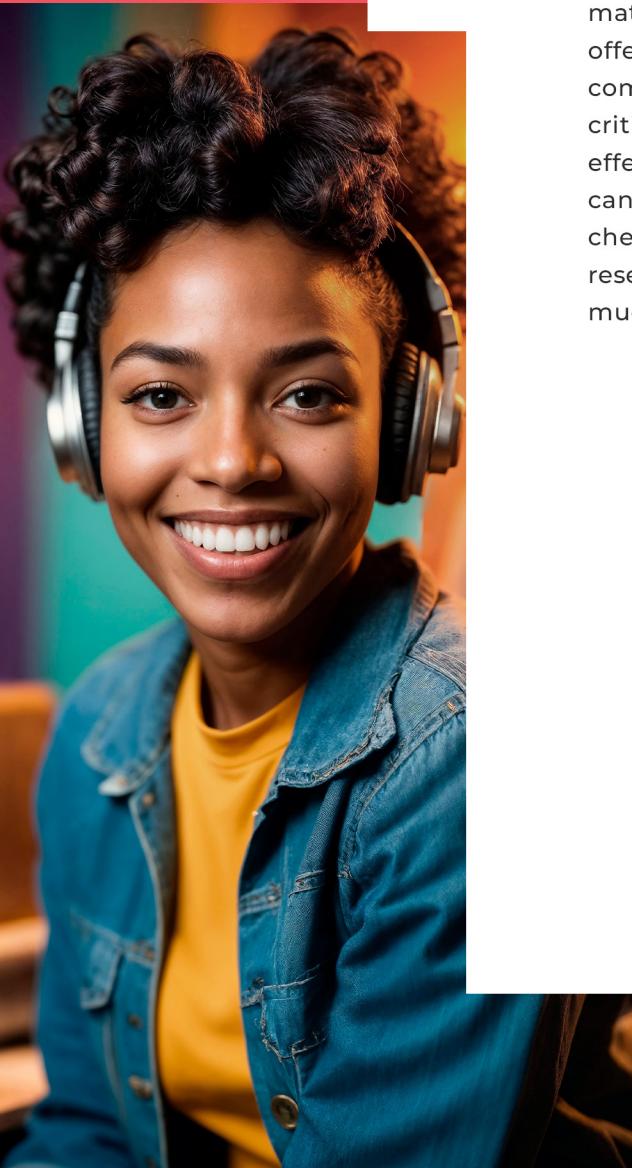
In every interview that you grant, you have to be clear about who you are speaking to – your audience. Again, most people make the mistake that they are speaking to the general audience of the television or radio station whereas, they are supposed to be connecting with a specific audience within that audience that they want to convince or persuade. Sometimes, you may be lucky that the platform you are granted an interview on has the exact audience that you want to speak to. However, most times this is not the case. Hence you must be clear about who you are speaking to.



Keep the Audience in mind

You will have to do an audience audit, that gives you an insight into who your audience is, their cultural beliefs, their worldview, level of exposure, basically the things that make them who they are. It is with this information that you will build your talking points and punchlines around. Imagine you are a presidential candidate who is invited to a radio station in Kano to speak about the nation's economy. For you to deliver an interview that connects you must first understand the people of Kano, their world view and their reality.

That means you'd have to refer to markets that they are familiar with, trades that they engage in and challenges that they are confronted with. For instance, you will lose your audience the moment you refer to raring pigs as a viable business opportunity that can create jobs. It doesn't matter if you have the facts right, your example would have offended the sensibilities of your audience and you'd have completely lost them. This is why audience research is very critical when taking on interviews. How can you speak effectively if you do not know who you are talking to? How can you connect if you do not know what your audience cherishes or deeply cares about? Always take the time to research your audience and your interview will resonate much better.





Bait & Switch

This is a technique that is best suited for politicians who are granting an interview or for executives who are managing a crisis situation. The cardinal principle here is to substitute a direct question from the interviewer that may embarrass you or put you in a difficult position with a different question you come up with and give an answer to your question. To do this effectively, you must be clear about the things you do not want to speak about and be clear about the information you want to leave with your audience. For example, an interviewer might want to box you into admitting nepotism or cronyism by asking you, why did you appoint your in-law into a cabinet position? This question can lead you into a rabbit hole that may dent your reputation or make you appear incompetent; hence you have to seek ways of either completely avoiding the question or limiting the damage that can be done. The question then is how do you do this? As I said earlier, you will substitute the question asked with an alternative that you are more comfortable answering. In this case you can substitute why did you appoint your in-law with how much jobs the ministry your in-law heads has created?

But the way and manner you substitute the question is equally important. You have to use clever transitions that disarms the interviewer and draws the audience in.

Using the same example above, when asked why you appointed an in-law, the best way to switch the question is to say, for instance, I understand a lot of people are concerned about this and I share those concerns, but I think the most important question that people should be asking now is how many jobs has been created in the last six months? And then you can proceed to answer that question by saying, "in the last 6 months, 500 jobs have been created which has lifted over 300 families out of poverty. This is what should matter more in the grand scheme of things.

Bait & Switch

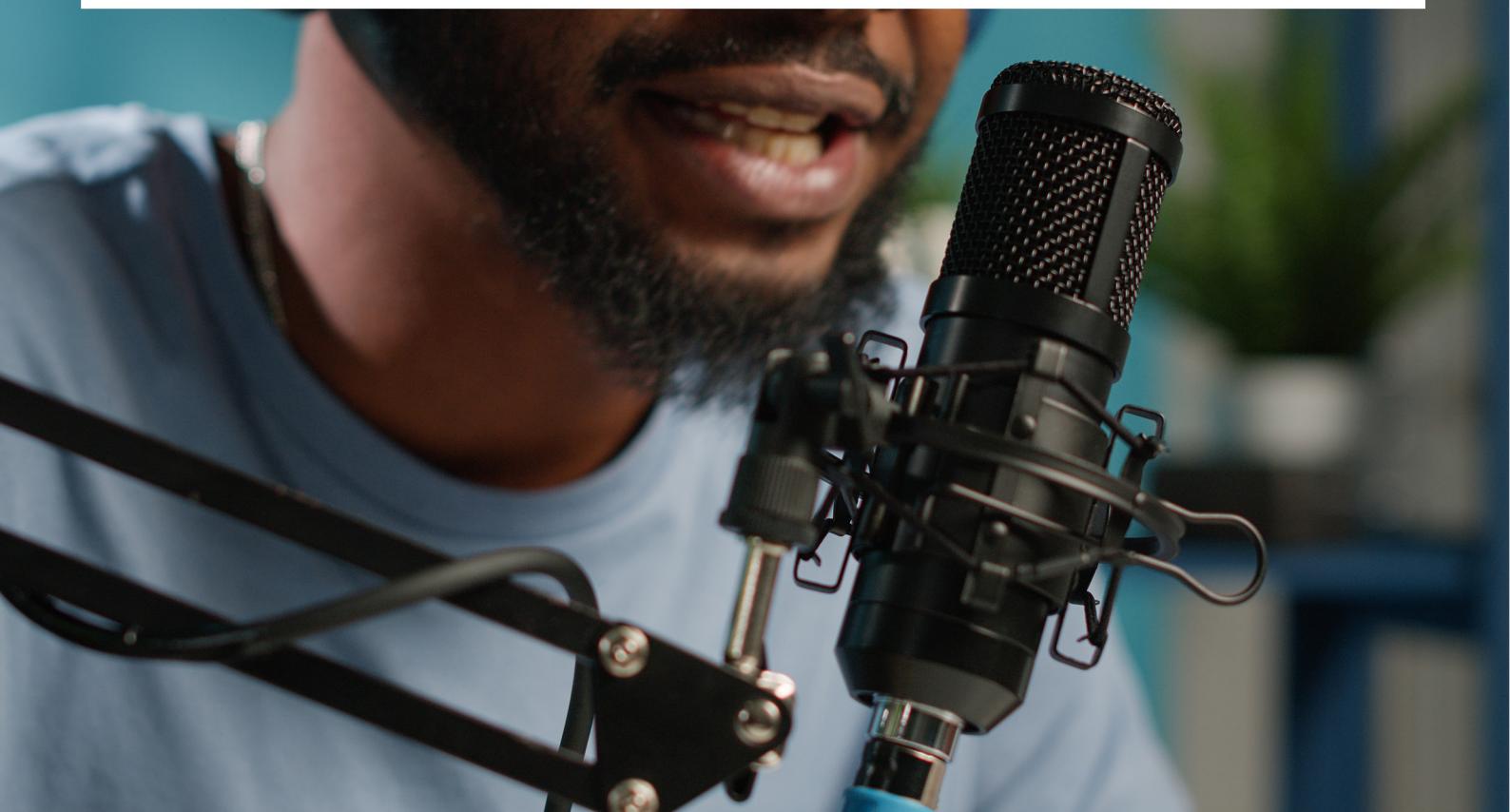
Bait and switch is only as effective as how quick you are on your feet, how elegant your transitions are and how relevant to the larger discuss your chosen answers are.

Therefore, it is important to have an arsenal of transitions that you can deploy at any given time. Some you can use are;

1. That's a brilliant question but before we get to that, I think it is important to...
2. I love how you framed this issue, but I think you're missing an important nuance here...
3. I understand this is an issue but there is an even bigger issue with...
4. I have listened to that well intentioned argument severally, but there is an equally important argument to make which is...

You can go on to build as many as you would need depending on the amount of interviews you have coming up.

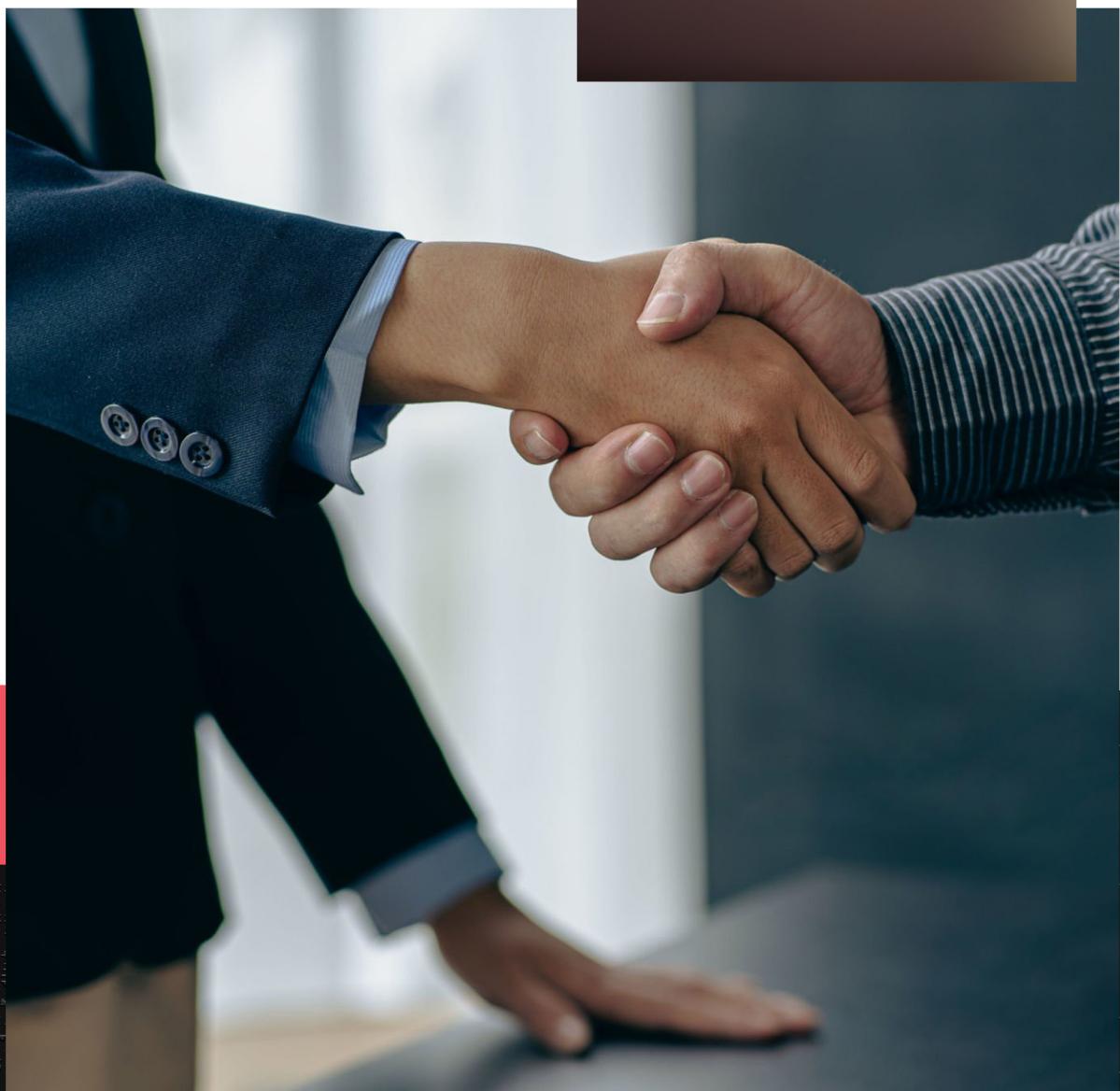
The last point was about the relevance of the answer you switched to in the larger discuss. It is important not to take the conversation completely out of what is being discussed but away from a narrative that could embarrass you. Using the same example, you cannot switch the question from; "Why did you hire your in-law as an economic adviser" to "the opposition has been trying to sabotage this administration by sponsoring all kinds of rumours". When you use this kind of tactic, people can see through it and will then believe the worst from you and your administration.



Win over the Interviewer (Compliments)

Compliment them before and during the interview. Tell them you enjoy listening to them on the radio or watching them on television and how good they are at their job. During the interview, when asked a question, you can preface your answer by saying, "That was a very brilliant question," "Glad someone finally gets to ask such an important question," "It good to see that you care about the issues most people would like to ignore."

Such compliments subconsciously nudge the anchor to want to help you deliver a great interview.



Win over the Interviewer (compliments)

The best interviews are conducted in a friendly and relaxing atmosphere. If the presenter or anchor feels good about you, then there is a very good chance that you'd have a great interview. However, if there is tension between the both of you, it means the interview will be conducted in a hostile atmosphere that could greatly affect how you come across to the audience.

So, you have one simple job: be likeable. Create a calm and friendly environment that makes everyone in the studio enjoy having you around. There are a few things you can do to make this happen:

Be a few minutes early for every interview. When you're late, you put the presenter in a very difficult and uncomfortable position that creates an unfriendly atmosphere for the interview. Avoid being late as much as you can.

If you can, bring something small but thoughtful for the anchor. It could be a book, a magazine, a souvenir: just something that shows you value their work.



What point to make



Another example was that of an entrepreneur who was on air to talk about her start-up hair product. Unfortunately, she spent all of her time talking about how she started (which isn't a problem because a good story helps you connect with the audience), the challenges she has to overcome and what she expects the government to do and very little about the what problem her product was solving, who needs her product, why they need the product, why her products are better than the alternatives and testimonials from customers. I felt really bad because I was gripped by her story but there was nothing more to make her product memorable or at least make me curious. The mistake she made, and that most people make is that they dwell so much on the less important part of why they are on air and open the door for the presenter to latch onto some other thing they find interesting which could entirely derail the conversation.

To avoid this, always make a short list of the most important points to make, make sure that they reinforce each other and practice to ensure that you can make those points within 10 minutes.

What point to make



A typical interview would last between 10 and 20 minutes, except it is a special feature that could run for 30 minutes and over. The point, however, is that you will always be limited by time during any interview. Therefore, if time is the enemy, you must organize your thoughts into a brief set of compelling points that you'd endeavour to pass across during the interview.

I will share two examples.

I was listening to a radio program recently where an opposition politician was invited to speak about the ban on motorcycles – a policy he had vehemently criticized on social media. During the interview which lasted about 15 minutes, he was asked why he was vehemently opposed to the incumbent's decision, to which he replied "It is wicked and insensitive. How will they survive without something to earn a living?" I thought his opening was strong and passionate but after answering the first question, he almost had nothing else to say during the interview. As the presenters pressed him further on the veracity of his claims and if he had any insight to counter the government's reasons for taking the decision, he had almost nothing else to say other than they are wicked.

What many do not realize is that most people do not tune in to interviews at the same time. Averagely, people tune in three to five minutes after an interview has commenced. This means that if the only meaningful thing you had to say was in your opening, then you'd come across as completely ignorant or incompetent to people who tune in afterwards.

That is why you must identify and organize the points that you need to make during an interview and to make sure that each of those points is reinforcing each other. In the example I gave above, I pointed out that the opening was strong but faltered afterwards. He could have had a few more reinforcing points like, for example: "the government claims it is banning motorcycles because of insecurity, but the greatest source of insecurity is not people riding motorcycles but unemployment and poverty. If you ban motorcycles, these same criminals would seek alternative means to commit these crimes. Hence, this decision by the government will increase crime, rather than reduce it."

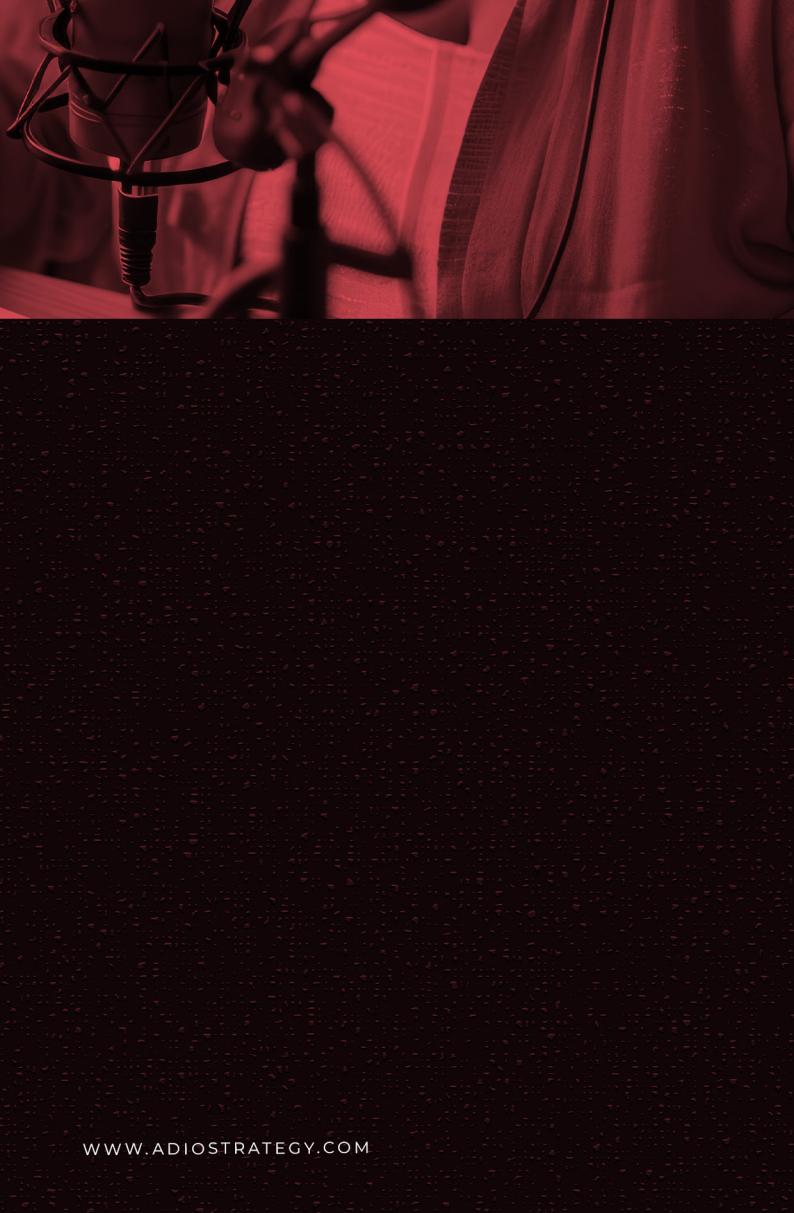
Relatability (Let the audience relate with you)

To persuade any audience, you must first come across as relatable. One of the greatest sins to commit on air is to be perceived as condescending. It is impossible to persuade people who feel you're talking down on them or speaking from a point of privilege. And so, you must be careful not to use words or tone that portray you as such.

A lot of politicians are guilty of this grave sin. I cannot count the number of times I have heard opposition politicians in an interview say things like "If they don't vote for me it is them who would suffer the consequence, I have enough wealth to take care of my family for a lifetime." I am sure that many of them do not realize the import of statements like this and how it turns public perception against you. That is why statements like this backfire 9 times out of 10, because the people listening feel humiliated and robbed of their dignity. Instead of talking about the fact that losing an election won't cost you anything, you are much better off demonstrating your commitment to the people whether you win or lose and will never stop fighting for them even if it means using your wealth and connections.

The same goes when managing a crisis and you have to take an interview on air. I have noticed a common trend with senior executives who think they could never be wrong and they criticism the brand or person which is either sponsored or completely unwarranted. They carry this thinking into the studio, strap into combat mode and spend the entire time debating their viewpoint. They forget the simple rule that they are on air to persuade the audience to retain trust in their brand and credibility and not to win a debate competition. So instead of acknowledging how people might have been wronged they argue that people are illogical. Instead of apologizing, they sometimes threaten a lawsuit. Instead of winning hearts and minds, they end up performing for their management.

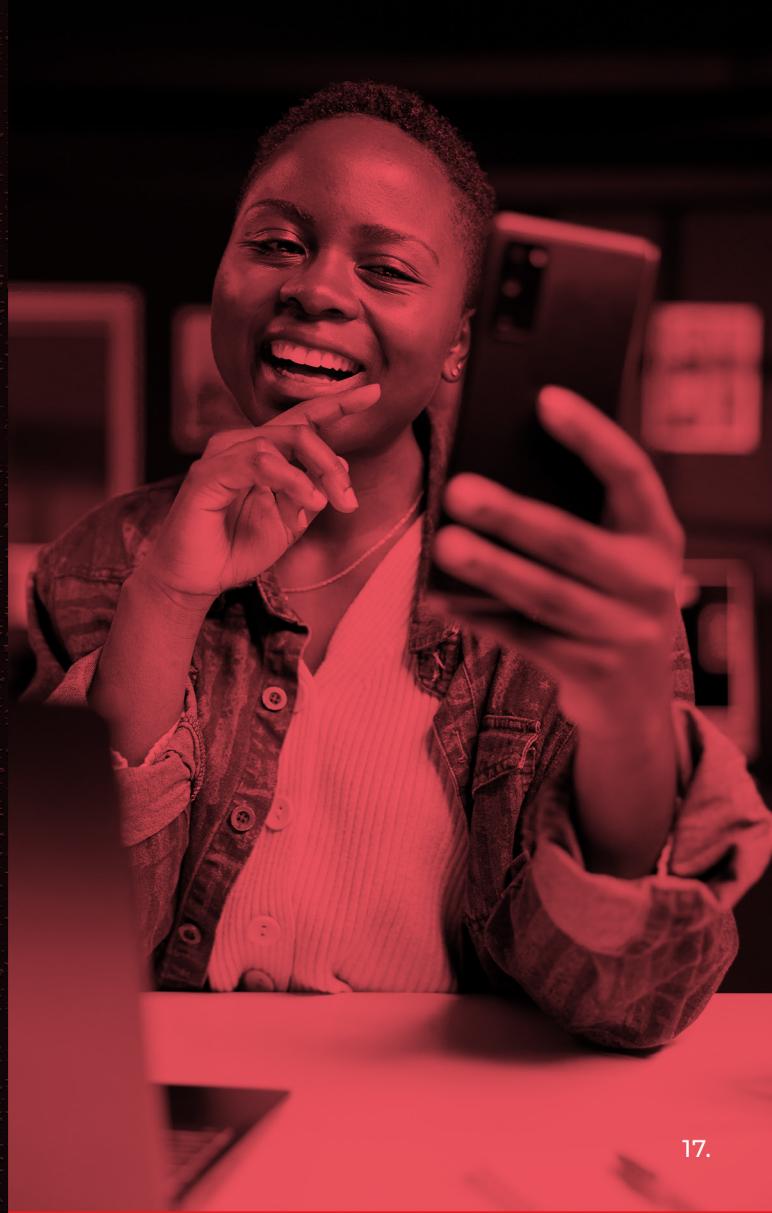




Relatability (let the audience relate with you)

Always know when to apologize and take responsibility for your actions, it doesn't diminish you – in fact it improves your stature. When President Kennedy was heavily criticized for the failure of Bay of Pigs, he took full responsibility saying victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan. His approval ratings shot up by more than 5 points because the American public respected and appreciated the fact that the president took ownership of his failure and was humble enough to apologize.

Other tips to come across as relatable is to use stories that are personal to your audience. Use proverbs or idioms from their native language, highlight an important part of their culture or value system and communicate as clearly as possible.



Use data and comparative analysis

The use of data and comparative analysis during interviews, especially interviews focused on policy, business, and politics, can project the interviewee as knowledgeable and highly competent. It shows that you've done your homework, read far and wide, and have a good grasp of what you are speaking about. It is one of the easiest ways to shape public perception in your favour and I often wonder why people shy away from it. The next time you are taking an interview, ask yourself:

What data can I use to grab the attention of the audience? For example, a labour activist saying, "Nigerian workers earn the lowest wages in the world."

What data can I use to effectively convey the urgency of importance of my message? An example can be a pastor or marriage counselor saying "80% of couples that cohabit end up divorcing within the first 3 years of their marriage."

What comparative analysis can I make to strengthen my argument? For example, "Indonesia discovered oil about the same time as Nigeria. Yet, forty years after, Indonesia's income per capita is three times that of Nigeria."

Use this template to research as many data points as possible to make your interview richer and to strengthen your arguments. Most importantly, influence how competently your audience will judge you by dishing out quality data that will leave an impression and make you sought after.



Study your interviewer (troubleshoot possible questions)

Every interviewer or news anchor has a questioning style and there is a pattern to how they conduct their interviews. It is your job to identify this pattern and use it to your advantage. Thankfully, it doesn't take much to identify the pattern: watch between 5 to 10 of his/her interviews and it will be right there in your face. From watching their previous interviews, you can tell the issues they care deeply about, you can tell what irritates them, what lightens them up, and more importantly, how knowledgeable they are. You can tell if they are the kind of anchor that does their homework, or they are very lazy at what they do. You can tell if their questioning style is aggressive or subtle. You can tell if they like "got ya" moments or if they truly care about the facts.

Taking time to study the interviewer arms you with the right amount of information to prepare your strategy for the interview. If you already know you'd be engaging an anchor that is thorough, it means you will have to put in more work to prepare for the interview. If it's a lazy journalist, you already know that a clever use of data and comparative analysis will simply get them gushing at every one of your responses.

Put in the work required to study the anchor and you'd always deliver a much better interview than previously imagined.



Control the Narrative

If you do not control the narrative, the anchor will do it for you. It is your role to determine what is important and what the audience needs to hear and make concerted efforts to constantly guide the conversation towards that direction. I remember watching one interview where the anchor began by asking a presidential candidate about an article he wrote in high school. You could tell that the candidate had done his homework because he refused to take the bait. He said *"That was years ago and a lot of my opinions have changed in that time. However, I do not think the people care so much about what I did I wrote in secondary school, they want to know my plans for the economy, for healthcare and the other things that truly matter and this is what I think the interview should be about."*

That was a masterful way of regaining control of the narrative because he could easily have put himself in a position where he'd be defending what he wrote in high school instead of using his limited time to speak about what kind of leadership he wanted to provide. Of course, some anchors are persistent and will constantly try to pull you into their arena – don't fall for it. Make sure to always control the narrative to suit your objective.

Controlling the narrative could also be about framing the issues and determining what the audience should care about. In this case, for every question you are asked and for every point you seek to make, you must ensure that tie it back to what you think truly matters and the narrative you want the audience to run with. One of the most brilliant attempts at shaping narratives was the removal of petrol subsidy. The administration shifted the narrative away from the higher pump prices that Nigerians would have to pay to making it about *"the poor subsidizing the rich."* And not long after, many low income Nigerians saw no reason why they should continue subsidizing the rich and prices should generally go higher since the rich was consuming more.

It doesn't matter whether you agree with the policy or not, that is not what this is about. It is about a clever attempt to seize the narrative, using the media, to move the conversation away from the impact of subsidy removal to a war against the rich in favour of the poor. There is overwhelming evidence that this narrative stuck because public opinion moved so much in favour of petrol subsidy removal in the months leading up to its complete removal.

Remind yourself constantly what your mission is and guard your narrative with every fight or trick in you. Because the truth is, if you are not advancing your narrative, you will be a star performer in some other person's narrative.



Ayo Adio

ADIO STRATEGY AND
COMMUNICATION
www.adiostrategy.com



Stay Connected

CLICK BELOW ↓

Subscribe to our newsletter: [Get Noticed](#)

Book a strategy session: [Selar](#)