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A Qualitative Analysis of Trust Issues in the Journalist/ Government Communicator Relationship: An Exploratory Study

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A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRUST ISSUES IN THE
JOURNALIST/GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATOR RELATIONSHIP:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

DAVINA YETTER GOULD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
School of Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
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ABSTRACT

At a glance, journalists and public relations practitioners appear to have a dysfunctional relationship, despite having many professional similarities. Both groups use comparable skill sets in their jobs, including writing, information gathering, and making decisions based on news values. Both groups often work with each other in their professional positions; journalists look to public relations practitioners for sources and news tips, while public relations practitioners look to journalists to help send organizational messages to publics.

To better understand the issues of trust in this unique working relationship, ten journalists and ten government public information officers from the Tampa Bay, Florida area were interviewed about their perceptions of the integrity, dependability, and competence of their professional counterparts. Using a coorientational lens, themes derived from the comments of both groups were compared for accuracy and agreement.

The results indicated that both journalists and public relations practitioners were slow to generalize positive or negative experiences to other individuals or organizations, and that they mostly understood the professional ethics and motivation of the other occupation. However, once an established trust was broken in a relationship, participants universally described that it could not be regained. By comparing themes between the two groups, the data indicated that there were more issues of true consensus than any other situation. Both journalists and government communicators indicated a mutual respect for their professional counterparts and a shared appreciation for the principle of open government, though the data suggested that the two sides were unaware of this agreement. This exploratory qualitative analysis uncovered several interesting trust-related issues in this unique working relationship, many of which are worthy of additional research and exploration.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

At a glance, journalists and public relations practitioners appear to have a dysfunctional relationship, despite having many professional similarities. Both groups use comparable skill sets in their jobs, including writing, information gathering, and making decisions based on news values. Both groups often work with each other in their professional positions; journalists look to public relations practitioners for sources and news tips, while public relations practitioners look to journalists to help send organizational messages to publics. In fact, many public relations practitioners *are* former journalists, and some enter journalism as a stepping-stone to a public relations career (“Careers in public relations,” 2002).

However, these shared experiences have not resulted in positive perceptions between the two professions. Journalists consider public relations practitioners to be “flacks” or “spinmeisters” (Mundy, 1992), while some practitioners consider journalists to be more interested in controversy than truth (Wiesendanger, 1994). This tension between the two professions can yield negative practical consequences for both sides. Cynical journalists may miss out on potential story tips and useful assistance from ethical practitioners (Strentz, 1989), and practitioners who are insensitive to journalists’ concerns risk losing a major means for communicating their message to external publics.

In few places do these professional strains take a higher profile than in government. The American political system consists of elected offices and complex bureaucracies at national, state, and local levels, all of which exist with the expectation of transparency by taxpayers and journalists (Brown, 1976). Government public relations practitioners often have ongoing relationships with members of the news media to not only advocate for their officials to the news media, but also to advocate to their officials on the news media's behalf (Cook, 1989). Government communicators depend on the news media to establish and keep their officials' issues and viewpoints on the public agenda, and reporters depend on practitioners to improve their access to government. As the news media's role in American society has become increasingly important, so too has the role of the public information position in government organizations, with nearly three-quarters of communities surveyed by the International City Management Association in 1990 employing a public information officer (Lee, 2001).

A study of the relationship dynamics in the journalist/government communicator relationship can provide unique insight into public relations practice as a whole. First, despite the various titles held by government communicators, including public information officer, press secretary, community relations coordinator, etc., most of these professionals are primarily responsible for media relations and other public relations tasks. The public information officer label, used by many government communicators, resembles the historic "public information" model of public relations, in which public relations practitioners act

as “journalists-in-residence” reporting accurate information about the employing organization (J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). However, many government communicators also strive to integrate more interactive communication techniques into their practice (Lillquist, 2002), much like the two-way asymmetric and symmetric models of public relations (J.E. Grunig & L.A. Grunig, 1991).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the issue of trust is perceived in the journalist/practitioner relationship among journalists and government public information officers in Tampa Bay, Florida. Because this is one of the first studies to research the reflections of these two groups about their working relationships with each other, an active interview qualitative research methodology was applied as a means of exploring how trust is manifested in these relationships.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

The journalist/public relations practitioner relationship.

The negative reputation of public relations practitioners, especially among journalists, has been well documented. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Foundation found in a 1999 telephone survey that American adults ranked public relations specialists 42nd out of 44 professionals for credibility, ranking just higher than famous entertainers and radio/television talk show hosts (“National Credibility Index,” 1999). Journalists have similarly ranked public relations practitioners low in terms of professional prestige (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984). Practitioners have recognized their role in the formation of these beliefs and have attributed negative perceptions to a few “bad apples” that made poor decisions due to incompetence or lack of ethics (Ryan & Martinson, 1998).

Practitioners have not only lacked credibility with journalists, but they have also been largely misunderstood. Content analyses of print and broadcast news media have shown that the definitions used for public relations do not reflect the same ideas of relationship management that are used in the field and that descriptions of the profession are largely negative (Meza, 2001; Henderson, 1998; Keenan, 1996; Spicer, 1993). When asked to list how practitioners rank

news values, journalists have consistently ranked public relations priorities nearly opposite from their own, when in reality they were nearly identical to journalists' news values (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984; Stegall & Sanders, 1986). Journalists and practitioners also have held similar views of lying, though this agreement has not been found to translate into trust (Ryan & Martinson, 1994). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) attributed this gap in understanding to the false assumption by journalists that public relations tactics involve only persuasive communication, rather than other meaningful goals.

Issues of source bias and objectivity have also generated tension between the two groups. Journalists have thought that practitioners have lower professional ethics because practitioners represent the specific interest of their employers or clients instead of the broader public interest. Journalists partially exempted practitioners in government or nonprofit organizations from this criticism, due to the public nature of these sectors (Brody, 1984). Practitioners, even former journalists, have been perceived as "selling out" to the interests of their employers. However, a contradiction for journalists can arise from this argument. While reporters have advocated that they are objective in their coverage, in practice they too must tread carefully between the economic and journalistic interests of the news organizations that have employed them (Curtin, 1999). The pressure of deadlines, the need to outperform competing news organizations through ratings or "scoops," and limited financial resources force journalists to make decisions that may limit the objectivity of their coverage.

Other studies have examined the roots of this disdain for public relations practitioners felt by journalists. A historical analysis of journalists' writings from the late 1800s through the 1950s by Fedler and DeLorme (2002) revealed that the origins of journalist hostility toward public relations include hunger for publicity (manifested through stunts), the situational context of the profession's origins, the methods of early practitioners (including bribes, gifts, and stunts), early journalist criticism of free advertising and obstruction of legitimate reporting, and the tough working conditions for journalists. Cline (1982) found that these negative attitudes are perpetuated in journalism texts, suggesting education as a cause for the anti-public relations sentiment that is deeply integrated into journalistic culture. Even some refereed literature has made the assumption that the public relations profession exists to manipulate the news media (Tankard & Sumpter, 1993; Turow, 1989).

Despite these negative findings, some good news for public relations has been discovered over the years. Journalists have indicated that practitioners more accurately represent their organizations' interests than they, themselves, do, and traditional journalist perceptions of lower quality work generated by practitioners have diminished (Brody, 1984). Also, journalists who have taken a college public relations course have described a less negative view of practitioners than those who have not (Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield, & Cropp, 1993), suggesting that education can perhaps help neutralize the hostility between the professions. The same study also found that the strength of negative journalist attitudes was weaker than in earlier studies, suggesting "the

beginning of a fundamental transformation in the journalist-public relations working relationship” (p. 41).

Some qualitative research has revealed that cultivating strong relationships can yield positive results for practitioners. Journalists have expected to hold the control in the relationship and to be wooed by practitioners for coverage. As long as the power dynamic favored the journalist, personal relationships led to more favorable attitudes. The control issue has been a sensitive one for reporters, as one bad experience with a public relations practitioner could sour future relationships (Curtin, 1999). Ledingham and Bruning (2001) also found that journalists had higher regard for individual practitioners they knew, in terms of both credibility and work quality.

Media relations issues in government.

The news media have been described as an unofficial “fourth branch” of the American political system as they serve as a critical link in communicating government actions to the voting public. It is somewhat ironic that the origins of the “beat” system of routines used in today’s news coverage evolved from the early government public relations infrastructure in the 1900s. These networks of colleagues and news routines were established not solely to streamline assistance to the news media, but also as a means for officials to use the media to inform their constituencies and establish the public debate (Cook, 1998). This perceived power over public opinion eventually led to the 1913 law banning use of federal funds to pay for “publicity experts” without being specifically earmarked

and approved, an act that dispersed the public relations function to various other job titles throughout the numerous bureaucracies of government.

Despite this early backlash against government communicators, their role has evolved to become generally accepted. Because the American democratic process calls for officials to be accountable to their constituents, it has been argued that it is not only helpful for politicians to maintain a media relations function, but it is their responsibility to use it to communicate with the public. Even though the news media and officials each have submitted that their job priorities lie in the public interest, their relationships have been complicated by a working environment that “has shifted from the traditional adversarial model to one of cynicism,” with an assumption by journalists of “automatic negativity” against politicians (Lee, 1999, p. 454).

This skepticism did not always exist; previous studies have indicated that journalists and legislators shared an adversarial, yet respectful, relationship. One case study of a smaller daily newspaper revealed that most local news originated from government sources, emanating from a beat system that upheld the incumbent power structure (Soloski, 1989). One reporter in the study noted that he avoided antagonizing his official sources to preserve the daily relationship and access to information. Dyer and Nayman (1977) found that officials and journalists held identical news values, though only journalists acknowledged this commonality. Journalists also identified closely with the legislators they covered and sought status by associating with these high-profile sources.

Additional studies have acknowledged this mutual dependence of legislators and reporters, finding that not only do reporters seek legislators for information, but that legislators reach out to the news media to share their messages nearly as often. Many public administrators realized the role that the news media played in setting the public agenda, and the more that agenda-setting power was recognized, the more officials tried to influence the news media (Kanervo & Kanervo, 1989). The news media, through their reporting, also provided an informal research function for gauging public opinion to officials (Kaniss, 1991).

The existence of political bias in the news media has long been a hotly debated issue, and one that can also affect the relationship between reporter and government communicator. Despite the deep regard that journalists hold for objectivity in reporting, the volume of potential news stories requires reporters and editors to make conscious decisions of what to cover and what to leave out. Cook (1998) reflected on the ongoing negotiation between official sources and journalists as one that indicated a bias for larger political values:

The production values of the news directs them—and us—toward particular political values and politics: not so much pushing politics either consistently left or right as toward officialdom and toward standards of good stories that do not make for equally good political outcomes. (p. 91)

He argued that instead of indicating a systematic liberal or conservative bias, American journalists tend to balance the broad societal values of democracy, capitalism, and individualism with news values such as conflict and impact.

Florida's "Government in the Sunshine" laws, widely recognized as the most liberal open government laws in the United States, have been known to

create additional complexities in the journalist/government official relationship (Roberts, 1997). These laws generally require that any meeting between two or more public officials, elected or appointed, in which policy decisions are discussed be open to the public, and any record generated by any state or local government agency is also a public record ("Government in the sunshine," 2003). However, there are nearly 800 statutory exemptions to these laws, especially in the areas of law enforcement investigation, agencies dealing with children, medical records, and citizen social security, banking, and credit card numbers. The state's "Government in the Sunshine" manual detailing the law indicated "the Sunshine Law should be liberally construed to give effect to its public purpose while exemptions should be narrowly construed" (p. 75). Originally passed in 1967 after years of controversy and secrecy involving seat reapportionment in the state legislature, these laws have been consistently upheld by Florida's court system as a comprehensive means of maintaining a high level of public accountability among government officials (Kaney, 2002).

Measuring relationships in public relations.

A new emphasis on relationship management and measurement has emerged in public relations theory. Recent public relations literature has endorsed relationship theory as a breakthrough concept for moving public relations practice from craft-driven tactics to the strategic management function that the profession has advocated for decades (J.E. Grunig & Hon, 1991; J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Ledingham, 2001). This developing paradigm for public

relations has been derived from concepts in the fields of interpersonal communication, interorganizational studies, psychotherapy, and systems theory. It provides a framework for researching antecedent and consequential factors influencing organization-public relationships (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000).

Coombs (2001) observed that the theoretical ideas of interpersonal communication and relationship are closely intertwined. Coombs compared the two concepts, citing the definition of interpersonal communication as mutual influence or influencing another's behaviors beyond one's normal actions, and the definition of relationship as the interdependence between two or more people who are associated by some moral, economic, social, emotional, geographic, or cultural link. Existence of a relationship suggests a mutual connection developed over time, where both parties communicate with each other and benefit in some way from the interaction.

Public relations excellence theory has centered on the concept of mutually beneficial relationships, though the theory has not been directly applied to the interpersonal level. J.E. Grunig and White (1991) outlined the concepts of asymmetrical and symmetrical worldviews, presenting the symmetrical view as a superior model endorsing the values of interdependence, equity, autonomy, innovation, and responsibility, among others. The idea of mixed motives in the symmetrical worldview has been considered a more realistic version of the symmetrical model, as it acknowledges the role of self-interest in organizational communication. This emphasis on developing symmetrical relationships with

publics has introduced the concepts of reciprocity, trust, and two-way communication into public relations theory.

Hon and J.E. Grunig (1999) have offered guidelines useful in measuring various relational factors in an organization-public relationship. These factors include trust, which includes dimensions of integrity, dependability, and competence; control mutuality, defined as the power of one side to influence the other; exchange relationship, or *quid pro quo* nature of the interaction; satisfaction; commitment; and communal relationship, defined as the selfless support of the other partner in the relationship. Ledingham and Bruning (1998b) offered a similar set of relationship dimensions: trust, openness, involvement, investment (time and energy), and commitment.

The concept of trust links much of the literature and theory on relationships, both from an interpersonal and organizational perspective. Trust has been defined as a learned emotional skill that creates the freedom to make and take responsibility for promises in a relationship (Solomon & Flores, 2001). In public relations literature, trust has been recognized as the foundational characteristic that allows organizations to exist (J.E. Grunig & Huang, 2000). In describing the process by which organizations and publics reach compromise on contentious issues, Dozier, L.A. Grunig, and J.E. Grunig (1995) observed that “they do not trust each other, nor do they believe everything communicated by the other side; however, they trust each other enough to believe that each will abide by any agreement reached” (p.48).

Coorientational analysis offers a unique framework for comparing perceptions of two groups. McLeod and Chaffee (1973) were among the first theorists to apply coorientational analysis to communication research. This analysis, originally applied by Newcomb (1953) to interpersonal relationships, compares how two individuals (A and B) orient their positions on a specific issue (X). Coorientational research examines three levels of communication: (1) the direct perspective of what A and B each think about X, (2) the metaperspective of what A thinks B thinks about X and vice versa, and (3) the meta-metaperspective that analyzes the metaperspectives of each side (Thomlison, 2000).

The comparison of these separate perspectives leads to three measurements of understanding among those in the relationship being studied: the level of *agreement* on issue X, the *perceived agreement* of whether the other individual agrees about issue X, and the *accuracy* of this perceived agreement. This evaluation leads to the following relationship states: true consensus, where the two groups share the same view about X and know it; dissensus, where the two groups disagree about X and know it; false consensus, when the two sides disagree but don't know it; and false dissensus, when the two sides agree but don't realize it (Dozier & Ehling, 1991).

Culbertson, Jeffers, Stone, and Terrell (1993) elaborated on the coorientation model by introducing the concepts of ethnocentrism/egocentrism and polarization as potential results of poor prediction of the other's actions. When one realizes that another individual has different views that cannot be easily predicted, one can either follow those contrasting views (high

followership), or ignore them (high autonomy). High autonomy or high followership can lead to the extremes of arrogance or losing touch with individuals with contrasting views.

Taken a step further, coorientational analysis has been linked to cognitive dissonance theory, which argues that the recognition of a difference in opinion between two individuals, such as in the case of dissensus or false dissensus, will lead to either an opinion change or a revised opinion of the other person (McQuail & Windahl, 1993).

Many of the studies that have analyzed journalist-practitioner and journalist-legislator relationships have used coorientational analysis as a framework for comparing the two viewpoints (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998a; Stegall & Sanders, 1986; Dyer & Nayman, 1977). Most of this research discovered false dissensus on the side of journalists, who did not realize that their perceptions of news values closely resembled those of their counterparts. However, more study is required to reveal the roots of these misperceptions and ways of overcoming them.

Chapter Three

METHOD

Unlike other cororientational analyses researched between journalists and public relations practitioners that have examined viewpoints on professional status, work quality, and news values, this thesis explored each group's perception on the relationship itself. The journalist/practitioner relationship literature has suggested that issues of trust dominate perceptions of each group. In addition to these aspects, other relationship dimensions, such as control and exchange, will be considered in the analysis.

This research focused on the relationship between local government public information officers, also referred to as government communicators, and the journalists whom they have worked with on a regular basis. The government communicator/journalist relationship offers a distinct environment for study, because the situation requires both sets of professionals to work with each other on an ongoing, sometimes intense, basis. Because the American news media have an unofficial obligation to report on government activities, many government communicators do not have to "court" media coverage in the same way that many private or nonprofit organizations often do. Also, the "beat system," a system used by many news organizations in which reporters are permanently

assigned to cover specific institutions, allows for ongoing relationships between individual reporters, editors, and the government communicators for the areas on which they report. These combined factors represent a unique opportunity to explore media relations between professionals who likely have well-established relationships and well-defined opinions of their counterparts.

This thesis explored the following research questions:

- RQ1a) How do journalists perceive issues of trust in their working relationships with government communicators?
- RQ1b) How do government communicators perceive issues of trust in their working relationships with journalists?
- RQ2a) How well do journalists understand how government communicators perceive their working relationships?
- RQ2b) How well do government communicators understand how journalists perceive their working relationships?

In order to reach an in-depth understanding of these complex and personal issues, an “active interview” methodology was used to research the journalist/government communicator relationship. This constructivist approach to qualitative interviewing, outlined by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), recognizes that interviews are not free from subjectivity and that the researcher plays an integral role in creating meaning through a loosely structured narrative with the participant. The researcher guides the conversation according to the research agenda, and the questions presented are intended to provoke responses that address these interests. This approach allowed for flexibility in the research process, allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions that explore the

research questions in further detail than a formal, structured interview methodology.

J.E. Grunig (2002) specifically recommended qualitative methods for gaining deeper, more candid responses with research participants than quantitative research can assess, especially for groups such as journalists or government officials who may not respond to a survey. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews have also been suggested for advancing the researcher's ability to understand what the interviewee really thinks about an issue, allowing for introspection and detailed answers (Stacks, 2002). Also, the act of interviewing the participants face-to-face in their own environment was intended to increase the comfort level of the interviewee, and therefore increase the open flow of communication on the sensitive issue of trust within interpersonal workplace relationships.

Interviewees were drawn from a purposive sample of journalists and the primary media relations personnel from local government organizations in the Tampa Bay, Florida, area. The Tampa Bay area offers a competitive media environment as the 13th-ranked Nielsen broadcast media market that includes the cities of Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater, with several competing local network and cable television news outlets, news radio stations, and daily newspapers ("Nielsen Media Research," 2002).

Ten journalists and ten government communicators were chosen from the professional contacts of the researcher and from information listed online by news organizations, city and county government agencies, and the Public

Relations Society of America (PRSA) Tampa Bay Chapter member directory. To round out the sample, three of the individuals were drawn from the suggestions of other interviewees. A purposive sample was selected to include participants across a variety of agencies, media, news organizations, and positions. Because the public information officer role was not always formally designated in every level and agency of city, county or state government, these communicators were chosen based on their frequency of contact with the news media, rather than limiting the sample to a specific branch or type of agency.

The sample of journalists included three television reporters, a television assignment editor, a wire reporter, two newspaper reporters, two radio reporters, and a newspaper city editor. The government communicator sample included a law enforcement public information officer, a county communications director, a regional public information officer for a federal agency, a regional communications director for a state agency, two city public information officers, two county-level organization public information officers, a city department public information officer, and one government communications consultant. Though it was not a specific goal of the researcher to interview specific government communicators and the reporters who cover the same organizations, the sample did include a few such corresponding “pairs.” In order to allow interviewees to speak freely, the confidentiality of the participants’ identities was protected not only from outside identification, but also among members of the sample.

The participants in the government communicator sample had between seven and 25 years of communications experience, and the journalist sample

ranged between 10 and 27 years of experience. Everyone in the sample had at least some college, and 18 of the 20 people interviewed had some formal journalism training or education. Only two journalists had taken some sort of public relations course, though several indicated that they had participated in news media workshops or panel discussions designed to benefit public information officers or public relations practitioners. Seven of the journalists interviewed were male, and five of the government communicators were male. Nineteen of the 20 people interviewed appeared to be Caucasian. The sample is described in further detail in Tables 1 and 2 in the Findings section of this thesis.

The initial questions were adapted from suggestions offered by J.E. Grunig (2002) for qualitative research measures for organization/public relationships. Since J.E. Grunig's suggestions were made to observe the public relations context between organizations and publics, rather than individual practitioners and journalists, the initial questions were tailored to examine the relationship aspects from an interpersonal, rather than an interorganizational perspective. In addition to an initial broad question, participants were asked to specifically reflect on issues of integrity, dependability, and competence of their professional counterparts, and to predict how their own profession was perceived in return (see Appendices A.1 and A.2 for an outline of questions asked). This line of questioning allowed for self-reflection on the interviewee's own vocation, as well as a framework for applying the lens of coorientational analysis to compare themes found between the journalist and practitioner groups.

Participants were also asked for simple demographic data that described their professional backgrounds.

This sample may have been biased toward journalists and practitioners who were more enthusiastic about sharing their opinions, since several of the individuals who were initially asked to participate in the study did not respond. Seven government communicators did not respond, including three law enforcement public information officers, two city public information officers, and two county-organization public information officers. Three newspaper reporters also did not respond. At least two voice mail messages were left with each of the non-respondents before they were excluded from the sample. There is not a clear reason why these individuals chose not to respond to their messages. Since accessibility was one of the characteristics discussed in the interview data, this reduced response may have created a substantive bias in the sample, especially among public information officers.

All interviews were conducted in February 2003, in person at a location chosen by each interviewee, typically at individual offices or in private conference rooms. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, and was audiotaped and later transcribed for analysis. The interviews of the two types of respondents were conducted simultaneously; journalists were not systematically interviewed before government communicators, or vice versa.

Most of the data were transcribed verbatim; however, a few conversations that significantly diverged from the relationship issues were briefly summarized instead. Following the transcription, the data were organized according to the

research questions they answered, and were coded for Hon and J.E. Grunig's (1999) three components of trust (integrity, dependability, and competence). They were also coded according to specific subtopics and themes.

While this study is intended to reach a rich understanding of media relationships in the Tampa Bay, Florida area, this specific research focus has several limitations. This methodology was clearly not designed to determine a causal relationship between relationship perceptions and measurable effects. Due to the use of a non-probability sample, the results of this thesis should not be generalized to a larger population. The subsequent analysis of the research considers a collection of self-reported, anecdotal evidence that should be weighed accordingly.

Due to the subjective nature of qualitative research, it has been recommended that the researcher's personal experience be recognized prior to such analysis (Morse & Richards, 2002). Accordingly, it should be noted that the primary researcher in this study was a graduate mass communications student specializing in public relations management, with journalism experience as a former freelance reporter and college newspaper editor and public relations experience as a university communications professional and a government public information intern. While the researcher's background favored a public relations perspective, her limited journalism and government experience allowed some distance in observing and analyzing the study data about the journalist/government communicator relationship. The researcher was working full-time in a non-government public relations position while conducting this research.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

“I think that they [journalists] have a job to do, and I think that public information officers have a job to do. It’s a mutual understanding that we all can’t get what we want all the time.”

--Consumer affairs manager, city department

The interviews yielded a range of detailed answers that addressed the research questions. The responses were grouped according to the research questions, and were subdivided further into examples that illustrated the three dimensions of trust: integrity, dependability, and competence. The research questions that addressed the accuracy of understanding between the two groups were evaluated according to the levels of consensus and dissensus, and further analysis of these questions are detailed in the Discussion section of this thesis. This Findings chapter also includes a section about issues of public accountability, which were extensively discussed among the data. A breakdown of responses according to the demographic characteristics of the sample is also included.

The themes and ideas drawn from the data are supported by excerpted verbatim responses the interview subjects in Appendix B for journalists and Appendix C for government communicators. Identifying information was

redacted from the verbatim responses in order to preserve the anonymity of the interview subjects.

How do journalists perceive issues of trust in their working relationships with government communicators?

One of the dominant themes reiterated throughout the journalist interview data was the absence of attributing specific experiences to all government communicators. Most journalists described having a wide range of positive and negative relationships with public information officers, and were slow to generalize a bad experience as typical behavior for their counterparts. One radio reporter/producer used the metaphor of a tapestry to illustrate these professional differences: “Every thread is a different color, every pattern unique, and each agency is different, and it is also dependent upon the individual.”

In measuring the *integrity* dimension of trust, journalists referred to the issues of honesty, favoritism, and “spin” in their working relationships with government communicators.

Several journalists pointed out the need for public information officers to be honest and forthright, especially in negative situations. A senior television reporter praised a local public information officer “who clearly got it,” who would acknowledge his department’s mistakes to the media and still maintain his loyalty to his employer.

Most of the reporters detailed isolated examples of lying by public information officers, and these instances permanently damaged the individual’s personal credibility by those who felt deceived. “It doesn’t take twice in my book,”

said an investigative reporter. “It’s one thing when somebody makes a mistake, because sometimes we’re given information that later is not proven to be accurate—but there’s no sense of malice.”

Such a breach of trust could have several negative consequences beyond severed ties; journalists described taking actions ranging from simple avoidance, to using more skeptical language in their news coverage, to investigative reporting searching for signs of a larger cover-up that could snowball into pack journalism. A wire bureau reporter explained:

If reporters get the sense they’ve been lied to, out-and-out lied to, to them that says that this is an organization that has something to hide, and I’m going to find out what it is. ... It gets your watchdog sense going, and ... you work extra hard to find out what it is. ... Once the press corps gets a sense that there is something going on that they want to hide, then you’ve got five or six reporters trying to find out what it is.

The intense competition in the Tampa Bay market was reflected in several comments concerning favoritism for certain media outlets or reporters. One radio reporter inferred from video footage of a major federal arrest that a television photographer was tipped off in advance of the arrest. The effects of intermedia rivalry were noted as the unique deadline and content demands of print, radio, and television formats created competition for the attention and information resources from public information officers. A newspaper reporter observed that public information officers occasionally construed the detail required by print journalists to paint their stories as “nit-picking”. A radio reporter also suggested that some government communicators base their decisions on how they release information based on the deadlines and technical requirements of television.

A few journalists also expressed concerns about public information officers sharing story ideas among competitors. One television bureau reporter became frustrated after his original idea of requesting video footage of a police shooting was transformed into a news conference to all media. A newspaper city editor also suspected that a public information officer had shared a pending investigative story with a competitor, though he added that this suspicion had never been confirmed.

The trust dimension of *dependability* was described in the context of issues such as “off-the-record” information and the accessibility of the government practitioner. One radio reporter stated that government communicators were reliable because they knew the value of their long-term relationships with the news media, and “because they know reporters have long memories.”

A newspaper city editor referenced the important role that law enforcement public information officers play as a dependable news source. “Those guys, if our relationship is broken, we’ve got a big problem because there’s so much that goes on in any one day...there’s no way for us to know everything.” However, the editor also pointed out that the government communicator is only one piece of the puzzle, as reporters are expected to go beyond the official report in their government coverage.

A few journalists mentioned appreciating the value of off-the-record comments that not only gave them more accurate perspectives on their stories, but also strengthened the government communicator’s credibility in establishing

a mutual trust. Two broadcast journalists used similar examples of law enforcement public information officers advising when their stations would want to send someone to a crime scene, but without giving specific details or permission to broadcast the information. In contrast, the same journalists expressed frustration at other law enforcement departments that waited several hours or days before announcing that a crime took place.¹

Accessibility was a government communicator trait that was commended by several journalists. “In general, if I need to know something, can I pick up a phone and get that information in a matter of minutes? Chances are, yes,” said a television assignment editor. Public information officers who provided their home phone, cellular phone, and page numbers were praised across the board for making themselves readily available in the event of breaking news.

Journalists characterized the *competence* dimension of trust among public information officers through the expectation of strong communication skills, an understanding of journalistic needs, and a thorough knowledge of their own government organizations.

Several journalists recognized that as communicators in a competitive media market, most public information officers have to be competent professionals in order to handle the workload generated by such a rich media environment. “Most of them are smart enough to know that if they make a promise, they’re only going to make it if they can deliver on it,” described a senior television reporter. A wire bureau reporter echoed this sentiment by

¹ It is possible that such delays in official information were beyond the government communicator’s control, due to Sunshine law exemptions for ongoing criminal investigations.

acknowledging that complicated information requests are not always under the public information officer's control.

Most of the journalists expected that government communicators should understand their needs in terms of deadlines, technical requirements, and accessibility. One broadcast journalist cited an ongoing example of combined incompetence and dishonesty, in which a public information officer had neglected to arrange the audio needs for broadcast journalists in a major county facility, yet publicly argued that the audio arrangements were made.

It is interesting to note that several journalists volunteered the same names of government communicators in the examples given for positive and negative relationships, and that they largely agreed in their assessments (though not all of the reporters were willing to list specific names for bad examples). In cases where practitioners were considered untrustworthy or unreliable, journalists said that such behavior typically led them to question not only the individual's personal ethics, but also the ethics of the employing agency and its leadership.

How do government communicators perceive issues of trust in their working relationships with journalists?

The government communicators interviewed represented a wide range of government agencies, purposes, and levels. While this variety yielded a diverse set of data, one unexpected finding was the consistent "customer-service" tone to most of the interviews. Most of the public information officers addressed each of the topics by describing less about their impressions about journalists as a group,

and more about how they, in their professional capacities, tried to better serve the news media (as their “customer”). Also, virtually all of the public information officers in the sample had some sort of journalism experience.

Overall, the public information officers described a generally positive relationship. “I have found that there are some of the most professional and thorough journalists than any other part of the state,” said a regional communications director for a state agency, who explained that the Tampa Bay media market is more mainstream, less sensational, and a “springboard” for journalists to launch their careers into the nation’s top markets.

In considering the trust dimension of *integrity*, public information officers largely respected the role of journalists, but indicated concerns of objectivity and completeness in coverage. “I have a lot of trust in them, and I think that they are honorable in what they do,” said a city public information officer.

A county communications director noted that because of the expectation of transparency in government, negative news coverage should not be considered unfair, but rather, appreciated. “My philosophy is that we should always let people know the good projects that we do, but we should pay special attention when we don’t do something well, let people know that we didn’t do it well, and we’re going to fix it.”

Some public information officers indicated that due to the limitations of each media format, the more detailed coverage reported by print journalists allowed for more accuracy and complete coverage. “I think your print media is a lot more accurate, maybe because they’ve got more time that they can devote to

a story than electronic media,” explained a law enforcement public information officer, who added that broadcast media also tend to cover a story with a preconceived idea of the final coverage.

However, despite the in-depth coverage given in print, other government communicators were able to build more positive working relationships with electronic media. Because of their limited resources of time and information, one city communications director said that broadcast journalists used the city’s services more often to coordinate interviews and solicit story ideas.

Journalist objectivity was a concern for some communicators. One city public information officer assumed that most news coverage favors the side that originally brings the story to the reporter’s attention. “If a reporter gets their story from an outside source, they have gotten 90 percent of their story already, and our job is to balance that 10 percent of that to the facts,” he said. To counter that preference, the public information officer said that it is up to the government to volunteer stories, whether they are negative or positive, so that their side receives 90 percent of the attention.

A government communications consultant stated that career ambition could also lead to a lack of objectivity in reporting, because for young reporters, “the way you get noticed in a large metropolitan paper is to find malfeasance.” He added that such ambitious reporters are usually less interested in reporting the ongoing activities of government and more interested in “finding where the bodies are buried.”

Other government communicators indicated that some journalists occasionally use devious behavior in order to get the information they need. One county organization public information officer offered the example of an investigative reporter who was “an outright liar,” who would “cut ethical corners in the name of the public interest, or more likely, ratings.”

A few public information officers linked the integrity of individual reporters to the integrity of their employing news organizations. A county organization public information officer heralded one independently owned newspaper for establishing ethical policies. A negative example was provided by three government communicators who criticized a television station for having consistently sensational news coverage in an effort to improve its ratings.

A few government communicators provided examples of journalists who expected preferential treatment due to their news organizations’ perceived dominance in the market. Such examples included reporters who would want their calls returned faster, or information provided first, to their news outlets before others. “They only think of their story, their station—I have to look at the much bigger picture because I work with them all,” said one county organization public information officer.

The issue of *dependability* yielded responses that significantly differed from those of journalists. Because government communicators indicated that they cannot, and should not try, to control the news media, they also did not voice many expectations of reliability with journalists. While most of the public information officers sent news releases and announcements to the news media

regularly, they depended more heavily on using multiple methods of communication to share their messages with citizens.

Exceptions to this rule were indicated by a few public information officers who had success in coordinating with broadcast news outlets to announce time-sensitive messages to the public about accidents, traffic advisories, and other critical messages.

Government communicators held differing opinions regarding whether reporters could be depended on to keep “off-the-record”² comments confidential. The phrase, “there’s no such thing as off-the-record” was repeated by three communicators. However, a few others viewed that when carefully considered, providing “background” or other unattributed information could be used as a sign of trust for reporters and a method for gaining more accurate coverage. “There are some of us who will go off-the-record and say, hey, look, you’re going off on a tangent, you’re going the wrong way, and you need to head back this way,” said a state agency communications director for the region. The communications director added that in instances when information could not be provided, reporters could be pointed to other sources who were allowed to release the information requested.

The main indicators of journalist *competence* by government communicators were accuracy and knowledge of the government institution they covered. Several government communicators indicated that part of their job is to

² Participants described that unattributed information traditionally falls under three categories: background, which could be attributed to “specific department officials;” deep background, which could be attributed only to “officials;” and off-the-record, which could not be printed, published, or discussed beyond the reporter and his/her editor.

build competence by educating some journalists about their services, policies, and procedures. Broadcast general-assignment reporters, journalists from outside the Tampa Bay area, and new beat reporters would often require assistance from public information officers in knowing who the important decision-makers were and what issues affected the stories they were covering. One federal public information officer said, “When I can’t give information, I give education,” and that such actions were typically well received. The federal public information officer noted that issues of federal jurisdiction and laws protecting the secrecy of certain information frequently require explanation for reporters. Lack of journalism experience, combined with the frequent turnover rate in certain newsrooms, can also contribute to competence concerns according to a government communications consultant.

Two government communicators felt confident that incompetent journalists did not last long in the competitive Tampa Bay market. One communications director said she would joke with colleagues and journalists about sending inaccurate journalists “an undergraduate catalog from USF’s journalism department, because it is obvious that they need to go back to school and hone some of their skills.” A county communications director also described having little fear of inaccurate journalists:

“Once in a while there will be a reporter who did not get the facts right, and was not forthcoming about correcting it ... but usually they don’t last too long, especially in this market. ... If there is a reporter who I feel is stretching the truth or stretching their side in order to make the story better for them, or more sensationalistic, I don’t mind noting that, but quite frankly they’re free to do what they want. I always tell them to take their best shot.”

A few public information officers alluded to encounters with journalists who were unprofessional and unfriendly in their conduct, though such incidents were admittedly rare. A state agency communications director described one time when a reporter nearly assaulted her by invading her personal space and pointing in her face, leading to a verbal shouting match on camera that was never broadcasted to the public. A federal district public information officer said that he was more prompt in returning calls from reporters whom he knew were polite, fair, and not “going to be screaming and yelling.”

How well do journalists understand how government communicators perceive their working relationships?

Most journalists accurately predicted that government communicators shared a mutual respect for reporters, and that they probably had relationships that ranged from good to bad, and were determined by direct experiences, rather than predetermined stereotypes. There was general consensus by public information officers that most journalists were professional, and that incompetence was the exception, not the norm.

Journalists also correctly predicted that government communicators would have a “varied” view of reporters, acknowledging that some of their colleagues are not always accurate in their coverage. “We reporters take the power that we have to affect people’s lives...and forget that you can really hurt people by not getting it right,” said an investigative television reporter. “But it’s your responsibility.”

“They [government communicators] probably feel that we’re nosy, we’re short tempered, we’re impatient, which is all pretty much accurate representations of what kind of people we normally are,” said a television assignment editor. “If we report accurately, so we’re not going to take a story and make it sound worse than it actually is, I think that [government communicators] have a mutual respect for us as well.” This idea accurately predicted the sentiment of a federal public information officer, who trains his colleagues to understand that it is deadlines, competition, and the chaotic nature of reporting that make journalists impatient and crazy, but that these are also reasons to “give them a little bit of a break.”

Not all reporters believed that their counterparts’ perceptions were positive. “It was a very adversarial relationship, and on the surface of course, it’s nicey, nicey, most of the time. But no, it’s us and them,” said a newspaper reporter with previous experience as a government public information officer. However, while almost all of the government communicators shared a few negative experiences with reporters and ongoing issues, their relationships did not need to be contentious. “Everybody seems to think it’s all adversarial, but the bottom line is we’re all professionals...and we’re all human,” said a city department public information officer. “Everybody wants to be right all the time, and everybody wants things their way, but the reality is ... if it’s not worth fighting to the death, you can probably let it go.”

How well do government communicators understand how journalists perceive their working relationships?

Overall, government communicators accurately predicted that journalists looked at them with mutual respect, despite the differences that they may have on specific issues. Several public information officers indicated that they have built credibility with the news media over the long-term by being open, accessible, and honest. Like the journalist predictions of government communicator perceptions, mutual respect was also a commonly recurring theme among public information officers' predictions of their professional counterparts.

A federal public information officer expected that new reporters may anticipate a bad relationship based on previous experiences elsewhere. "What I tell reporters is that if you've had somebody that didn't treat you right, don't assume that all public relations people are bad. Just like if I've had an obnoxious reporter, I'm not going to say that all reporters are obnoxious." While this assumption was supported by the literature (Curtin, 1999), most of the journalists already agreed that public information officers needed to be judged on a case-by-case basis. "[Public information officers] are all over the board," said a television bureau reporter. This misconception, though not held by all of the government communicators in the sample, was one example of false dissensus in the relationship.

"I don't think the media has a problem with the way they're treated; they think they're very well treated and equally treated," said a law enforcement public information officer. "Our motto is, if one gets it, they all get it. ... As far as fairness, sometimes I think they complain because we're too fair." Most of the

journalists agreed that public information officers did work to treat them equally, though due to the intense competition of the market, there appeared to be some contradictions in journalists' definitions of what constituted fair. Several reporters appreciated getting tips and off-the-record information for themselves, yet they also criticized the idea of favoritism by public information officers, as in the example of the television photographers who were apparently "tipped off" about a federal arrest.

A few public information officers accurately acknowledged that broadcast journalists tended to appreciate their services more than print. "Broadcast tends to like us better—they are more reliant on us, they depend on us, they have a compressed deadline," said a county organization public information officer. He contrasted this to print reporters, who tend to have less dependence because they have a more specialized knowledge of his agency's issues, their own set of sources that they have cultivated, and deadlines that fall later in the day than broadcast. This assessment was supported by journalist responses, as the three newspaper reporters indicated a preference for "going around" public information offices and directly to sources. In contrast, two television journalists praised the services of good government communication departments, who can help expedite the production process through arranging interviews and informing general assignment reporters about their activities.

Other government communicators thought that they were perceived by journalists as spin doctors, a conclusion that was accurate among some of the journalists interviewed. "They feel like going through someone else is filtering

information, and they feel like they're only going to get the public relations version of the story," said a city communications director. A government communications consultant affirmed this comment, predicting that journalists view public information officers as impediments to getting information, and that they perceive that public information officers seek only to make everything look good. This was a largely accurate depiction for several journalists in the sample, particularly for newspaper and radio reporters who seek detailed information directly from experts in government.

The debate over public accountability.

There are two kinds [of public information officers], the ones that see themselves as a conduit, and the kind that see themselves as a roadblock. And the roadblocks, I do what most people do: you go around them. ...And the conduits, I make good use of them, and quite frankly, those are the folks that get the judgment calls.

—Investigative television reporter

Throughout the data gathering process for this research study, one topic that nearly overshadowed all others was the role of public accountability between journalists and government communicators. This debate manifested itself in many forms, and was a consistent bone of contention with both groups.

Four journalists made specific note of the fact that government communicators should first be loyal to the citizens and taxpayers, whom journalists declare to represent. One senior television reporter explained:

It's an interesting balancing act because you develop relationships with these people, but you also hold these people accountable as servants of the public, they work for you and me the taxpayers, and they have a responsibility to be forthcoming with information and property that belongs to the taxpayer.

Three public information officers actively voiced support for the role the media plays in applying public accountability to government. “They should question us, no matter what. They should question what we say to them; they should never take what we say as religion,” said a state agency communications director.

Journalists tended to criticize much of the government-initiated communications, including news conferences, news releases, and event announcements. A television bureau reporter characterized news conferences as “dog-and-pony shows,” and a television assignment editor similarly portrayed government news releases as “just public relations...not news.” One radio reporter observed that while some government outlets were beginning to rely on their own government cable television channels to broadcast their messages directly to constituents, such forms of direct government communications do not carry the same level of legitimacy as traditional news media due to the lack of independent editorial scrutiny.

Many of the journalists and government communicators voiced varying interpretations of Florida’s “Government in the Sunshine” Laws, one the most sets of open public records and meetings laws in the United States (Chance, 2003). Even though most everyone interviewed supported the spirit of the laws, there did not appear to be a consensus of understanding between the two groups about exemptions. “They [journalists] believe in strict First Amendment, but that’s not the only amendment to the constitution,” said a county organization public information officer. “We have to follow due process for our employees, and [protect] the privacy rights of children.” One city public information officer

cited an example of one such disagreement that led to litigation between the city and a news organization regarding records that surrounded an open investigation. The public information officer argued that the disagreement sparked increased coverage of the debated topic, in order to “keep the story alive” until the records were allowed to be released.

The control of information by government communicators sparked two distinct sets of answers between the sample groups, indicating an issue of true dissensus. Several practitioners considered it part of their job description to be informed of or to be the first point of contact for all media contacts, while journalists considered such policies to be obstacles that threatened their independent research. All three newspaper journalists expressed disdain for policies that required reporters to go through the public information officer, thus restricting direct, unfiltered access to other sources within the government agency. One newspaper reporter gave the example of a high-ranking source with whom he had developed a relationship over a few years, whom he was later blocked from interviewing directly without first going through the public information officer. According to the reporter, the public information officer asserted that it was his [the public information officer’s] job to know what would be in the newspaper, and from that point on, the public information officer not only routed the reporter’s calls to the high-ranking source, but also personally observed any in-person interviews. “I think it’s really troubling if you cannot get to the people who actually do the work and are knowledgeable, or they don’t feel

free to speak,” said another newspaper reporter. “You’re giving a filtered version that may or may not be anywhere near the truth.”

Not all of the public information officers interviewed voiced an expectation for journalists to work through them exclusively. A county communications director described his role as a facilitator, rather than a spokesperson. “We provide hundreds of services, as I like to say, from aging to zoning, from A to Z. No one could be an expert on everything.” A federal public information officer also expected journalists to contact other sources: “You have to understand that the media is going to go around you; they’re not going to just go with what you give them. ... And what I say, is I’ll give you what I can give you, and good luck getting the rest.”

A few government communicators indicated that some journalists resented the existence of the public information officer position, but that the volume of media inquiries mandates and validates the role. “We get between 150-250 calls a month, which would be burdensome without three people, including our secretary, to handle them,” said a county organization public information officer. A city public information officer, whose municipality established the media relations position less than two years ago, mentioned that “some people have less respect for the position than others.” A state agency communications director pointed out that most public information officers are forced to balance the interests of their employers and their agency’s stakeholders, in addition to the needs of the news media and citizens.

However, despite journalists' criticisms of government-controlled information, many of those interviewed recognized their own responsibility in obtaining the facts they need. "I think that all too often, and I'm guilty of this, we have relied way too much on the public information officer or public affairs officer as a conduit, and not gone someplace else," said a senior television reporter. Other participants from newspaper, radio, and wire services reiterated this sentiment, indicating that it is the journalist's own fault if one settles for limited government information without doing more detailed research.

Demographic analysis of findings.

A few themes appeared to be more dominant with particular demographic groups among the sample than others. Tables 1 and 2 show a demographic breakdown of the sample, along with a few of the major concerns of each interview subject. Verbatim responses from the respondents, edited to protect their identities, are reported in Appendix B and Appendix C.

The government communicator interviews revealed a wide range of experiences, job expectations, and beliefs, though a few repetitive themes were suggested among the sample. The two public information officers with formal public relations training and little journalism experience described a more collaborative relationship with reporters, with the city department consumer affairs manager noting, "the media needs us as much as we need them." Three of the government communicators worked in organizations that frequently involved statutory exemptions to Florida's open government laws, and as a

result, were regularly required to explain these exemptions to reporters in order to avoid or reduce conflict. Four of the government communicators compared the working differences between print and broadcast media with the quality of their relationships, noting that while print journalists paid more attention to detail and wanted to work independently from the public information office, broadcast reporters tended to appreciate their services more. Four of the government communicators with journalism backgrounds described situations when they would give background or off-the-record information to reporters, and two of the government communicators without journalism backgrounds were opposed to off-the-record conversation.

Several ideas also emerged from the demographic breakdown of the journalist data. Five of the most experienced journalists interviewed, ranging from 16 to 27 years of reporting experience, observed that it is the reporter's responsibility to gather information, and journalists should not rely solely on public information officers to provide information. Three of the journalists who helped decide what news their organizations covered (the television assignment editor, newspaper city editor, and the radio reporter) recognized that public information officers for first-response agencies played an important role in alerting the media to emergency situations and major crimes. Two television reporters who did investigative journalism both described instances of law enforcement public information officers who were dishonest, and harbored a long-standing resentment against those specific government communicators. The three newspaper journalists each expressed frustration with government

policies that required them to first contact public information officers instead of directly contacting sources, a sentiment that was not echoed by broadcast journalists.

Table 1. Demographic breakdown of major points made by government communicators

Title/organization type	Years in position/ in public relations	Training	Major themes
Public information officer, federal organization	2/20	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Countering negative stereotypes of public information officers Is frequently required to keep information secret Educates journalists about process, why information is sealed Educates colleagues-what makes journalists demanding Availability is an important value for PIO position
Communications director, county organization	16/16	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitates connecting media with appropriate departments Operates office like media to establish high credibility Does not classify news as good or bad, just gives information Government is a glass house and should be open Helps reporters learn about organization
Public information officer, law enforcement	17/17		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Print media is more accurate than broadcast because of detail Believe that not all journalists care enough about accuracy Does not use off-the-record comments or trust reporters Office is "too fair," if one reporter gets information, they all do Availability is important value for PIO position
Communications consultant, city government	2/8	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bureau reporters are often inexperienced and ambitious; care more about finding malfeasance than covering issues PIOs don't expect to be treated fairly Off-the-record can be used with care, but promise is easily broken by journalists PIOs don't always know competence of journalists Believes reporters view PIOs as impediments
Communications director, city government	4/24	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadcast media relied more on PIO office than print Better relationship with broadcast than print; newspaper reporters view as spin doctors or filters News media was helpful in issuing traffic advisories Believes some journalists will be devious to get information they want, to increase viewers or readers
Public information officer, county district	7/22	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competitive media market creates significant PIO workload Print reporters develop their own sources, broadcast depends more on PIO office Some news organizations have high ethics, others lie Will go on background with trusted reporters Has had conflict with journalists about Sunshine exemptions
Regional director of communications, state agency	2/7	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidentiality/Sunshine exemption conflicts are common Believes Tampa Bay area journalists are more professional and thorough than those in other areas in the state Believes some journalists "paint" stories with less accuracy Most PIOs are viewed as spin doctors, liars by journalists, must build credibility and reporters to counter this perception
Public information officer, smaller city government	2/8	Nonprofit administration, some journalism courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Print media more challenging than broadcast media, as print devotes more time to covering municipality Generally good relationships with media, but has continuing conflict with one reporter City should be forthcoming with good and bad information to limit impact of negative coverage for withholding information Will release advance information to trusted reporters to accommodate media deadlines
Public information officer, county organization	3/25	Public relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization has strong editorial board relationships due to its unique purpose and independent political position Official has more direct media relationships, PIO facilitates Relies on reporters to give credit to organization or protect off-the-record information when appropriate
Consumer affairs manager, city department	2/18	Public relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media needs PIOs as much as PIOs need reporters Mutual understanding that neither side always gets everything they want Everyone is professional, and if either side feels mistreated, they can go to supervisors Choose battles: adversarial relationship not necessary

Table 2. Demographic breakdown of major points made by journalists

Title/media type	Years in position/ in journalism	Training	Major themes
General assignment bureau reporter, television	4/13	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some PIOs are helpful, others are impediments • Law enforcement PIOs are more accustomed to media interest, less consistent competency among city or county government • Conflict with one law enforcement PIO, no longer trusts PIO • Every profession has bad practitioners, inc. PIOs and journalists • Resents that some PIOs are “grantors” of public information
Law enforcement beat reporter, newspaper	4/10	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most PIOs are accessible, know reporter needs, professional • Not all PIOs recognize need for detailed information in print • Government PIOs not as professional as corporate ones • Does not like going through PIO to access established sources
Wire reporter	2/18	Journalism with a public relations course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good PIOs understand nature of journalists’ job • Some PIOs take tough questions personally--attack on their boss • Believes some PIOs don’t like journalists, which look for scandal • Dishonest PIOs get a bad reputation and attract pack journalism • Reporter’s responsibility to find information, build relationships
City editor, newspaper	4/16	Journalism with a public relations course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law enforcement PIOs are crucial to news media • Reporters should not rely solely on PIOs—a sign of laziness • Prefers officials who make/implement public decisions; not PIOs • PIOs are professional, ethical, and well trained • Believes that PIOs prefer journalists to rely on official reports
Staff writer, newspaper	5/10+	Journalism and former PIO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not rely on PIOs, goes directly to official or expert • Does not like going through PIO to access sources, views this as trying to control information • PIO helps reporter access officials when they are hard to reach • State and federal government much more closed than local • Believes that not all PIOs know their organizations well enough • Believes that bureaucracies have “us vs. media” mentality
Reporter/ producer, radio	10+/23	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tampa Bay has improved public relations services over the years • Tapestry metaphor: each agency and individual is different • One PIO neglected technical broadcast needs and lied about it • PIO should not emphasize government station over traditional news outlets due to lack of external editorial scrutiny • Reporter’s responsibility to follow up to get information • Federal agencies limit information more than local
Reporter, radio	5/16	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some PIOs are excellent, some are not • Appreciates PIO accessibility, proactive information sharing • Not an adversarial relationship, but expects spin from PIOs • Believes some PIOs play favorites in giving information to media • Fear of lawsuits leads to PIOs restricting information • Knows that some reporters are sloppy or misquote PIOs
Senior reporter, television	12/22	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PIOs and officials are accountable as public servants, and owe information to journalists who represent the public • Some journalists rely too much on PIO as conduit of information • Some PIOs are incompetent and actively misleading, others are professional, honest and forthcoming • PIOs only make promises they can deliver on • Poor PIO conduct considered a reflection on agency and official
Assignment editor, television	5/19	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciates friendly communication, even if information is limited • Many law enforcement PIOs give off-the-record advice on whether a crime is newsworthy, even if they can’t release details • Has ongoing conflict with two law enforcement PIOs who do not release information quickly, goes above them to resolve issues • Good PIOs make editor’s job easier, faster, more effective
Investigative reporter, television	20/27	Journalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships range excellent to horrid, different ideas of job • Good PIOs are forthcoming with information and don’t spin it • Has had conflict with PIOs who gave incorrect information, now goes around them to get information • Depends on records, rather than sources/PIOs, for information • Good PIOs are conduits to information, bad ones are roadblocks

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION

The wide range of experiences, perceptions, and individual relationships described in the Findings section of this thesis validates the need for relationship theory in public relations to focus more attention on relationships at an interpersonal level. This exploratory study found an assorted range of reflections on the journalist/government communicator relationship, which diverged from quantitative research conclusions that suggested that most journalists hold a strong negative stereotype of public relations practitioners. One of the most consistent and prominent themes among this study's interview data was a resistance to generalizing stereotypes across either group, indicating that the quality of a interpersonal workplace relationship is determined on an individual basis. Likewise, studies that have focused on organization/public relationships without acknowledging the impact of individual, interpersonal interactions may have missed critical long-term influences on the overall relationship.

This study supported the existence of a link between the theoretical concepts of trust, openness, and credibility in relationships. Hon and Grunig (1999) defined trust as "one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party" (p. 3). Though the qualitative measures adapted from

Hon's and Grunig's suggested interview questions never explicitly mentioned "openness," this aspect of the definition was one of the pivotal, underlying issues that arose from the interview data in this research study. Because the journalist/government communicator relationship is based on the sharing of information, the issue of openness was described by interviewees as being central to establishing a positive professional rapport. Grunig and Huang (2000) explained that disclosure can create more symmetry in relationships, and that those who have the power to withhold information also carry the burden of proof that non-disclosure is in the best interests of others. This description closely identifies with the power dynamic in journalist/government communicator relationships, as journalists not only expected disclosure of government information from public information officers due to the Florida open government laws, but journalists also tended to equate the quality of their relationships with public information officers in terms of the level of information they were given. One radio reporter described his working relationships with public information officers almost exclusively in terms of the level of disclosure. The reporter defined positive examples of government communicators as those who were "proactive" in dispensing information, while negative examples included those who either blocked or delayed reporters in their information gathering tactics. Because conflicting interpretations about application of exemptions to the Sunshine laws existed between journalists and some public information officers, a common occurrence in both journalism and public relations practice,

conclusions about the quality of the working relationship based on the volume of information released could be problematic.

In coding the interview data, it became clear that real-life examples of trust (and lack thereof) were difficult to separate into the three dimensions of trust of integrity, dependability, or competence because interviewees from both sides offered illustrations that consistently reflected a combination of these traits. For example, a television assignment editor complained of a public information officer in another county whom he perceived as dishonest, unreliable, inaccessible, and uninformative, characteristics that could fall under any of the three categories of trust. Likewise, a county organization public information officer shared the example of a positive relationship between her organization's executive director and a newspaper editorial board. This relationship was one of mutual benefit and trust in which both sides shared the value of public accountability, and while the organization generally made itself accessible to the newspaper's reporters, the reporters also respected the organization's needs for occasional anonymity and credit.

One common-sense conclusion that could have been predicted was that an exploration of trust in the field of media relations would by definition yield data that largely centered on the needs of the news media. Both journalists and government communicators alike focused their answers on how journalists' needs were or were not met, with significantly less information provided regarding how public information officers were treated in return. While this result makes some sense, this lack of mutual interest for public information officers'

interest could provide a reason why the relationship could become contentious. Even though the government communicators did not expect a *quid pro quo* in their work with reporters, many did voice an expectation that journalists be accurate, honest, and balanced in their coverage. In situations when their agencies were being reported on, public information officers usually expected that they (or their supervisors) would be contacted by reporters to provide facts or respond to issues. In comparing this dynamic to the traditional two-way models of public relations, this relationship would likely be classified as an asymmetrical form of practice, where government communicators tend to invest significantly more time and energy in supporting the news media's needs, rather than a balanced give-and-take relationship of mutual benefit and concern.

The coorientational analysis revealed several areas of consensus, false consensus, false dissensus, and dissensus, as applied in research questions 2a and 2b, which weighed the accuracy of each side's understanding of the other. These areas are summarized in Table 3. Verbatim responses from the respondents, edited to protect their identities, are reported in Appendix B and Appendix C. There were more issues on which the two groups shared true consensus than any other perceived situation. This high level of consensus indicates that the two sides not only understood each other well, but that they also agreed more than they disagreed. The areas of false dissensus also present a potential opportunity for strengthening the working relationship, as these issues also indicate common ground between the two sides. The two groups showed only three areas of significant disagreement, in the forms of true

dissensus and false consensus, and the consequences of these differences are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Table 3. Levels of accuracy in journalist/government communicators perceptions

Consensus (both sides agree and are aware that they agree)	False Consensus (both sides disagree but are unaware that they disagree)	False Dissensus (both sides agree but are unaware that they agree)	Dissensus (both sides disagree and are aware that they disagree)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual expectation of honesty • PIO accessibility • Time-sensitive emergency messages • Off-the-record (mixed) • Friendly communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PIOs sharing with/withholding information from other news media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of open government • Mutual respect, lack of stereotypes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of PIO involvement (mixed) • Exceptions to Sunshine Laws regarding open records, meetings

Journalists and government communicators shared *true consensus* on the importance of being honest, forthright, accurate, and accessible. Both reporters and public information officers had a mutual expectation of honesty, and both sides cited examples of mutual trust that was built over time. However, once an established trust was breached through lying or dishonesty, participants universally described that it could not be regained.

Other issues of consensus included the need for public information officers to be accessible at all times, which closely relates to the reciprocal need for government communicators to be able to share time-sensitive emergency messages to the public. Both sides recognized the important role that the news media plays in communicating urgent information to citizens, and both sides also understood that in order for journalists to fulfill this role, public information officers needed to be accessible to provide the information. Both sides also agreed that their counterparts were usually dependable in doing their part, especially in emergency situations.

Journalists and government communicators agreed on the need for courteous, friendly communication with each other, and many also agreed that

“off-the-record” or background information could play a role in improving trust and understanding between the two sides. By providing unattributed background information, a few public information officers believed that they could help reporters better understand issues, thus leading to more accurate coverage. In return, journalists described off-the-record statements as both a sign of trust and a commitment to the truth by the public information officer. However, not all public information officers agreed with each other on this issue, and not all journalists expected off-the-record information.

There was a *false consensus* on the issue of fairness, with contradictions in the understanding of favoritism and equally sharing information among news outlets. Journalists and public information officers both voiced strong opposition to the idea of public information officers not sharing information equally among all of the news media outlets; however, journalists also appreciated getting personalized story ideas or tips from government communicators. The example of the television reporter who requested specific law enforcement video footage, which was released instead at a news conference, sheds light on a unique ethical dilemma for public information officers. While journalists expected that government communicators would not share their original story ideas or investigations with competing news organizations, public information officers indicated that if a piece of information is of wide public interest or concern, that information should be shared with all media, regardless of who made the original inquiry. The definition of what is fair and ethical behavior of public information

officers and journalists in a competitive environment is a topic that may warrant further research.

False dissensus existed on the issues of stereotypes and the mutually held value of open government. Most public information officers predicted that reporters viewed them as “spin doctors,” a stereotype with which many (but not all) journalists disagreed. Several journalists held the perception that some government communicators act as “roadblocks” to information, when in fact, most public information officers not only supported open government, but continually persuaded to their superiors of the need to volunteer information, regardless of whether it was positive or negative, to the news media. One city public information officer described this viewpoint, noting that he did not always succeed in releasing information, particularly when open records law exemptions were involved. The literature also referred to this government communicator-balancing act between journalists’ and government officials’ expectations (Cook, 1989), as government communicators are often expected to advocate their organizations to the media and simultaneously advocate for the news media to their organizations. Overall, the results of this study indicated that both journalists and public relations practitioners were slow to generalize positive or negative experiences to other individuals or organizations, and that they mostly understood the professional ethics and motivation of the other occupation.

True dissensus was clearly evident on public accountability issues. Even though the literature suggested that journalists attribute higher credibility to public relations practitioners in government (Curtin, 1999), in practice, government

communicators are held to a higher standard of disclosure due to the government's public purpose. Most journalists in this study, especially newspaper and radio reporters, did not support policies that required that all media contacts go through the public information officer. Journalists saw these policies as a "filter" between government officials and the public, thus reducing the level of accountability by officials. The issues of government information control and public accountability dominated the discussion, and it was clear that several journalists, and a few public information officers, had deeply held beliefs about the scope and limitations of Florida's "Government in the Sunshine" laws. Personal agendas on these issues may have overshadowed individual perceptions of trust in the participants' working relationships, which suggests a strong third variable for explaining the source of contention between journalists and government communicators.

While many of the ideas discussed by journalists in the sample were echoed by other journalists, the government communicator sample yielded comments that were quite diverse. This diversity of answers reflected the wide range of organizational purposes and public information officer roles within the organizations. As the literature indicated, Title 5, Section 3107 of the U.S. Code restricted the use of federal funds for "publicity experts," thus dispersing the role of government public relations practitioners to various titles and job descriptions among all levels of American bureaucracy. Unlike journalists, who perform relatively consistent job functions and fulfill similar roles in their news organizations, government communicators often have a range of

communications tasks and responsibilities in their organizations. The various government organizations themselves have a range of purposes, and many are more politically sensitive than others. As new leaders are elected or appointed to these organizations, the media relations function often changes with it. It is likely that if additional government communicators had been interviewed for the present study, that several new insights on the journalist/government communicator relationship would have resulted.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSIONS

This study provided an in-depth, qualitative analysis of the relationship between journalists and government communicators in Tampa Bay, Florida. The active interview methodology allowed for a rich, detailed examination of trust issues within this professional relationship. The interview format allowed for a more personal interaction between the researcher and study participants, which was critical in developing a rapport for the sensitive discussion of trust in workplace relationships. Because of the subjective, constructivist nature of this method, as well as the lack of a probability sample, the results of this research would be unreliable if generalized to a larger population. However, the intent of this study was not to quantitatively measure the relationship, but rather, to explore a deeper understanding of the issues and idiosyncrasies that affect relationships between public relations practitioners and the news media.

Upon analyzing the data, it was recognized that many of the government communicators' responses were more customer-service oriented,³ with responses containing descriptions of their own services for journalists rather

³ This customer-service focus could be explained by the "Reinventing government" paradigm of public management that became popular in the late 1990s, which led to many government organizations adopting a business-oriented, customer-service approach to services (Kearney, Feldman, & Scavo, 2000).

than reflections on the quality of the relationship. The researcher, due to her public relations background, accepted these answers without probing further for comments that considered the relationship itself, thus creating a systematic bias in the data collection. Also, due to the diversity of job functions and organizational purposes, the findings among government communicators were less thematic than the journalist data. To reduce the level of noise among this data set, future research could be conducted on a more focused sample of government communicators with similar job descriptions and agencies.

Because journalists are expected to cover government, it was anticipated that government public information officers would have more established relationships with journalists than public relations practitioners in the private sector. As a result, the journalists and public information officers who worked with government had more concrete observations about the relationship as expert participants. A purposive sample of journalists representing various media, beats, and news organizations were interviewed, as were government communicators from various levels and types of government organizations.

Suggestions for further research in the journalist/government communicator relationship include a quantitative analysis of trust issues using a larger, representative sample. Another research suggestion could involve comparing journalist perceptions of government communicators with journalist perceptions of the organizations or officials for which the government communicators worked, as several of the reporters in the sample implied a connection between the public information officers' attitudes and their employing

agencies' policies. It would also be interesting to examine the potential consequences of negative relationships, such as whether professional conflicts would result in systematically negative coverage. The debate over public records, as well as definitions of fairness between journalists and public information officers, are also topics worthy of additional exploration.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.1

Interview outline for journalists:

“Grand tour” questions

- Please describe your relationship with the government public information officers (public information officers) that you work with in the Tampa Bay area.

Trust

- Do you think that the government public information officers you work with treat journalists fairly? *Follow up: Why/why not?*
- Can the government public information officers you work with be relied on to keep their promises? *Follow up: Why/why not?*
- How confident are you that government public information officers have the ability to accomplish what they say they will do? *Follow up: Can you give me examples of why you feel that way?*
- How have your working experiences with individual public information officers affected your perceptions of their profession as a whole?

Perceived trust by public information officers

- Do you think that the government public information officers you work with believe that they are treated fairly by journalists? *Follow up: Why/why not?*
- Do the public information officers you work with rely on journalists to keep their promises? *Follow up: Why/why not?*
- Do you believe that public information officers believe that journalists have the ability to accomplish what they say they will do? *Follow up: Can you give me examples of why you feel that way?*

Professional demographic information

- What is your title and major job responsibilities?
- Who do you work for?
- How long have you worked in this position? For this organization?
- How many years of journalism experience do you have?
- Briefly describe your educational background? Have you ever taken a public relations course?
- How often do you interact with government public information officers?

APPENDIX A.2

Interview outline for government public information officers:

“Grand tour” question

- Please describe your relationship with the journalists that you work with in the Tampa Bay area.

Trust

- Do you think that the journalists you work with treat government public information officers fairly? *Follow up: Why/why not?*
- Can the journalists you work with be relied on to keep their promises? *Follow up: Why/why not?*
- How confident are you that journalists have the ability to accomplish what they say they will do? *Follow up: Can you give me examples of why you feel that way?*
- How have your working experiences with individual journalists affected your perceptions of the journalism profession as a whole?

Perceived trust by journalists

- Do you think that the journalists you work with believe that they are treated fairly by government public information officers? *Follow up: Why/why not?*
- Do the journalists you work with rely on government public information officers to keep their promises? *Follow up: Why/why not?*
- Do you believe that journalists believe that government public information officers have the ability to accomplish what they say they will do? *Follow up: Can you give me examples of why you feel that way?*

Professional demographic information

- What is your title and major job responsibilities?
- Who do you work for?
- How long have you worked in this position? For this organization?
- How many years of public relations experience do you have?
- Briefly describe your educational background? Have you ever taken a public relations course?
- How often do you interact with government public information officers?

APPENDIX B.1

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: Newspaper City Editor

Well, I know a number of them. Certainly the institutions that we deal with, most of them have a public information officer. To be honest with you, some institutions, the public information officer is really crucial to us. That is a person who gets us information, gives us a heads up on things that are coming up, lets us know vital things. I put sort of the police and sheriff's department PIOs in those categories. Those guys, if our relationship is broken, we've got a big problem because there's so much that goes on in any one day of a major police law enforcement department, there's no way for us to know everything. The days of just listening to the scanner to know what's going on are over. The scanner technology is different, they scramble signals, they go on different channels. We can't just listen to the scanner and know. Also, by the time that the report is filed, you know, we go and look at reports. We've always done that. Newspapers have always gone—my first job, I walked up to the city hall, or the police department I mean, and opened the big ledger book and you read through the hand-written police log. Well they're not handwritten anymore of course. But that's not enough because there's a delay between the time something happens and the time that reports are written, obviously. If we just relied on that, we'd miss out. And we don't have the staff to cruise the city to wait until we see an accident. So these PIOs are really crucial. They get us information and they let us know number one, if something big is going on, secondly, they're on the scene acting as an intermediary between the investigating officers and us, the media, who are representing the public to get information. Now it's important to note that we don't rely solely on the PIOs in any institution, including law enforcement. I think it's maybe a lazy journalist might try to do that, but it would never work here because if there's a homicide, we want to talk to the investigator, we want to talk to the family members, we want to talk to the people involved. The witnesses, etc. etc. So the PIO is only one piece of the puzzle. But it's a very crucial piece, because a lot of times, they are the first, early on the scene on a big accident or a big crime. They are the people who are getting us the information, because the investigators are busy. The investigators are investigating. They don't have time to take off and talk. So that is really important. The PIOs for the city halls and county government: less useful to us, frankly. You know, we need to talk to those policy makers, decision makers. And while PIOs certainly have some usefulness to us in terms of letting us know about upcoming events, or alerting us... Those things are useful. But when we're talking about governments that

Appendix B.1 (Continued)

make laws that affect people's lives, we talk to the elected officials and the appointed officials, who carry them out. We like the officials who make those decisions, and the officials who carry out those laws, PIOs don't fall into either category. (Laugh) So by and large, we bypass the PIO. So they're much less important to us, at least at ... our office, they're less important to us in terms of, or PIOs who work in government.

At times, we've had a suspicion, unconfirmed suspicion, that a couple of PIOs maybe tipped off the competition to something we were working on. And that's to me really dirty pool. No PIO should be telling the competing television or competing newspaper, 'hey, those guys over there are working on a story on such-and-such.' It's not their role; it's not what they should do. Now, I hasten to add, I don't have any proof that they ever did that. But circumstances sort of led us to believe that. But by and large, having said that, by and large, they're fair. They're professional. They're well trained. They're basically, ethical people, the ones we deal with. By and large, I don't believe that they treat us unfairly.

I mean, as I understand it, the job of the PIO is to get out information that the government believes should be out there, and if they were to consistently slight one media source to favor another media source, well they wouldn't be doing their job. And I wouldn't think the government would ultimately allow that to continue. But I don't have any example of, 'oh they messed us over in this case,' you know what I mean? They're fair, the, I guess, here's an example. ... *[Described specific example of investigative story, removed to protect identity]* ... These are things that we found out. PIOs had no role in really telling us about that kind of thing. The city commission did kind of an exhaustive study of what went wrong, and PIOs were helpful to the degree that they distributed them at the same time, everybody had a chance to get a copy of this big thick report, all together at the same time, there was a press conference that the PIOs organized so that we could all ask our questions, and so, that was an example where the PIO had a role, and did it fairly. But the bulk of our reporting over the course of that ... was not directly dictated or that was much assisted by PIOs. It was us figuring out the people who were there, from ... experts outside of the department, etc. etc., figuring out what was involved. We ended up doing our own story of what went wrong, which I think went far beyond the official report. So, we sort of transcended any role that the PIO may have had, in my opinion.

They're reliable, as far as doing what they say. I mean, a PIO is not going to call you up and say, 'Hey, I hear that there is a bunch of money missing from the state, from the tax receipt fund, and I think somebody's been stealing it and you ought to look into it.' A PIO is not going to tell you that. Now we need people to tell us that, and it's not going to be the PIO. So to that extent, they're not as useful as some other sources. But, on the other hand, the PIO is going to be the one to say, 'hey, this weekend there's going to be this big concert, and we need

Appendix B.1 (Continued)

to close off some roads.’ And as a public service, you know, people need to know this. And so yeah, to that extent, we can certainly trust them. We just can’t rely on them to be the primary source of information about any government. I think that would be a folly for a newspaper of any merit to rely on a PIO as a prime source of information about that government. A lot of times, not here, a lot of times I’ve seen PIOs essentially try to protect the officials, quote-unquote “protect” the officials from the media. And when they perform that role, they are a hindrance to what we do. They slow the process down. They’re trying to be a buffer between us and the newsmakers. The people that we need to talk to. The public officials, whose salaries are being paid by your taxes and my taxes. You know, they have an obligation to talk to the public, and the public has a right to know what they’re doing. And if a PIO is getting in the way that, then in my opinion, that PIO is not performing appropriately, yes. Now, do I have any examples of that here, locally? None that I can think of.

I think that the PIOs that we deal with here ... *location deleted*... understand that their role is to provide information in a fair and unbiased manner, and they act professionally.

Usually. I mean, I do get the impression at times that the PIOs wish that we would rely on them more, when our attitude is, ‘thanks for the information, I’ve got to talk to the city manager. Thanks for the information, I’ve got to talk to the chief or investigator.’ And so, you know, maybe they are less useful than they would hope to be. But I can’t get inside their minds.

I think that some PIOs feel like their departments or agencies don’t get a fair shake at times. And I’ve had PIOs tell me, ‘look, you’ve got this all wrong, you’re going overboard here, there’s not a big problem.’ Or, ‘why are you listening to those witnesses, that say they are witnesses, why don’t you just wait till the report is out?’ This is particularly true in police work. You know, police work is often, involves confrontation and conflict. It’s natural that, for the stories about police work, to contain very different points of view. PIOs, police agencies, I believe, would rather we rely on the department’s official reports more than we do. And rely on witnesses less than we do. But it doesn’t make any difference to me. You know, we’re going to go and get the story as best we can, as fairly and as completely as we can, regardless of what the PIOs think or wish.

I think I’m reflecting the attitudes of our newsroom, that by and large, PIOs are fair, and they’re competent and professional, to do what they do, but we often, usually, don’t stop at the PIO and often go around the PIO to get the information we need, because it’s more efficient, mainly. You know, why do we want to hear the information through the filter of the PIO, when we can go to the mayor, city manager, police chief, investigator, and get the information directly?

Appendix B.1 (Continued)

We want as much information as fast we can get it, with as little filter as we can. But, we sometimes need help. If the investigators are working the crime, then we need the PIO to find out stuff for us and tell us. We need help sometimes in understanding what happened in a day. We call a PIO or call the PIO's office and say, 'hey, how was the last shift? Have you heard anything?' We're expecting them to say, 'yeah, there was a homicide at 2 a.m., the guys are still working it, here's a preliminary report' or whatever.

APPENDIX B.2

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: Television Investigative Reporter

First of all, I've been working with them and around them, I guess you could say, for, *[more than 20 years]* in different capacities. ... When you've been here so long, you start to bump into the same institutions quite a bit. ... So I have a variety of public affairs, or public information officers I work around and through at various times. So my relationship primarily is as a reporter trying to get information on a daily basis, or on a particular, what I mostly do now, which is investigative reporting, getting public records and access to people when things are a little more difficult.

I think *[these relationships]* range from excellent to horrid, frankly. I think that different people who do the job have different ideas about what's required to do their job. Some people feel very protective of their institutions, and that their mission is to withhold information that is not good, and to spin information in a way that is not always accurate, to make it as favorable as possible to whoever it is they are representing. Other PIOs are more matter of fact, and just the facts, and understand, especially in the public realm—that's what you're talking about, government ones? — that really their role is to expedite information and not to somehow be editorial use of that information by twisting it or turning it some way or another. I'm thinking, you know, a lot of times, police, there are good and bad examples of that, but I think that the best police public information officers are the ones who just give you the access to the reports you ask for, and the people you want to talk to, and don't try to obscure or spin it. There are some who do exactly that. They are very honor bound and duty bound to their organization and I guess in a way I sort of respect that sense of loyalty, but from my perspective, the people they should be loyal to are the public, the citizens. And they are the same people I'm trying to help with information. So in that sense, I think we work for the same people, but there are times that I think some PIOs get confused as to who their boss is. They think it's the police chief. It's not the police chief, it's not the mayor, it's not the city manager, it's the public, it's the citizens of whatever entity they work for, whether it's the county or the city.

[Specific example of PIO dishonesty deleted to protect identity] ... So that left me with a very bitter taste about two PIOs that quite frankly, up to that point, I thought I had a good relationship with. *[One]* guy claimed later and was apologetic and claimed he really didn't know. The PIO said he didn't know when I asked him and found out later that was the case, and felt under no obligation to

Appendix B.2 (Continued)

set the record straight with me, even though he knew that I had asked very pointedly off the wagon with each other here and decided to disagree. Basically, I said shame on you for misleading me, and not correcting the record when you knew it to be false, and he was saying shame on me for saying the story that somehow hurt this man, and for making it sound like a coverup when it wasn't really a coverup. So we sort of left it that way.

Basically, I don't deal with that PIO on a regular basis, I avoid him at all, whenever possible. I might encounter him and ask him basic stuff about an event at that moment. Basically, I don't trust him. Anything that might have some negative implication for the police department I have zero trust for that particular person. I don't believe in, I don't believe him, he's got no credibility in that sense. Now, of course on run-of-the-mill stuff, but if I sense that this would have a political implication or somehow reflect on the department, I'm very guarded about what I accept. And often, in the course of business, I go around him. I avoid him. Personally and professionally, I just don't like dealing with the guy. I don't like that the government pays him to tell me the truth. When I can go around him I do go around him, and I basically just avoid him for the most part. It has seriously damaged the relationship. It doesn't take twice in my book. It's one thing when somebody makes a mistake. Because sometimes we're given information that later is not proven to be accurate, but there's no sense of malice or deliberate. Sometimes people don't know the information.

I'm trying to remember what his theory was—he was more concerned with berating me for suggesting there was a cover-up, which of course there was a cover-up, and he really wasn't making excuses. I guess he thought I should have called back a week later and said 'are you still sure about this' and that in his code of ethics he didn't have to set the record straight unless asked. But I thought there was an understanding, and if it were me, I use my own sense of ethics as sort of a guidepost. I mean, if I told somebody something that I believe to be true, and it's an important thing, and later I find out that the truth is a complete opposite, I would feel compelled to correct that statement as a sense of credibility and ethics and truth. No matter which, sometimes the truth hurts.

*[Specific example of investigation where PIO was helpful in providing public records, deleted to protect identity] ... I truly believe, was and is an extraordinarily honest, forthright, honorable man. In fact, he ... had a real sense of honor and duty and country, a good Christian, not the kind of guy who wanted to coverup something he thought felt wrong or was wrong. We had discussions about these, and he'd say, I don't know of anything going on, but if there is something on, we ought to be thanking you instead of criticizing you. And that was his perspective, which going back to the *[other previous]* story, was the total opposite of that kind of perspective, that he did not put his department first and the truth last.*

Appendix B.2 (Continued)

So do you think that public information officers can be relied on?

Well yeah, I think it's--I've learned enough to know not to try and make that generalization. I think that an experienced reporter, a prudent reporter, will treat PIOs the same way PIOs treat reporters. You have to look at them on an individual basis, you have to develop a relationship with them, you have to be forthright and not dishonest in any way, and I think that, what was the question again?

Can they be relied on?

Some can and some can't. There are some PIOs that, if they say the sun rises in the west, then I would, unless I had evidence of the contrary, go with that. There are others that I wouldn't trust, either because they are inaccurate, they are just not very good at what they do or not very careful about what they do, and some of them quite frankly I think have another agenda, so I don't trust them that way. I think PIOs are almost just so worried about being accurate and don't tell you anything unless they know that's absolutely the case, which can also be a problem. Of course, there is the off-the-record perspective, sort of conversations that you have with people, affect working relationships.

I think, when somebody trusts me enough to tell me more off-the-record so that I can have a better perspective on a story, an accurate perspective, and maybe pursue the same story from other sources to make it happen, then that makes the rest of what they tell me a bit more credible. It tells me that we're both on the same page, we're both trying to get the whole story out, whatever that story might be..

I'm a documents guy. The thing I trust most, and the thing I've learned to rely on all the time, are public records. You know, public records are my friend. Sources are great, sources are really good tools to get you started on a story, to help bump you in the right direction, to help you look for things, but when the rubber meets the road and I have to get something on TV ... when I write my story, what my managers and editors and lawyers want to see are documents. They don't want to see 'he says this and they say that,' he says she says only takes you so far. So I look for documents that for me would substantiate the stories.

So are the public information officers capable of doing what they say they can do?

It depends on how long they've been doing the job, and the culture of the organization they work for. I think the ones who have been at it for a long time know, because they get beaten down everyday by reporters. They've learned that they're just making their lives miserable if they put up a false front, if they don't come up with the information they know you're going to want., they pretty

Appendix B.2 (Continued)

much anticipate the questions. What I've been having problems with lately, quite frankly, is a quasi-government organization. It's a private company that's doing public business, so it's quasi-public, therefore, it falls under the public records act, but this particular organization, ... has done nothing but obstruct, try to delay, my persistent efforts to get documentation, to get background checks of temporary workers which, they should do, is required by law. To that extent, this particular public information officer, who works with this organization, very clearly is holding to the guy who runs it, not feeling at all responsible to the public who pays the bills, basically. ... It is the public who is served or not served.

I mean, I've been doing it too long to say that they're all scum or they're all great. They're all pals. I realize that you can't become too friendly with sources, because they're all ultimately, you have to ask the hard questions. There is a certain danger when people become too pal-sy-wal-sy. I realize that I'm not in it to make a friend. I mean, you have to be friend-ly, but that's not to say that you can't have good relationships with these people but you have to know where to draw the line, too.

I think that they probably have a varied view of us. They probably have a list of reporters that they don't feel threatened by, and a list of reporters that might make them a little more nervous. I think probably, if I had to guess what they fear the most, or should fear the most, are reporters that don't get their facts straight. But I think they're also, depending on the nature of the person, that they may know who won't take the easy answer. Even with really good relationships, things can get very tense in a hurry. When police shoot and kill somebody, in a police shooting, even guys that you work around, and you feel have a good relationship with, will get hinky on you in a heartbeat. They feel a certain emotional attachment to the people they work with, and I understand that. And sometimes they forget that I still have to ask the hard questions. At the outset, if it was a good shoot, I have to ask the hard questions. That's my job. So it gets tense sometimes. The mature ones, and the ones that are professional, eventually put that aside. It's never personal. It's certainly never personal with me. It's not about my relationship with them, it's my relationship with the truth in my stories.

If there is somebody in public relations who can get me to the truth, I see public relations people, or PIOs, especially in government, as a conduit to the information, and not as a roadblock. And I can that basically there are two kinds: the ones that see themselves as a conduit and the kind that see themselves as a roadblock. And the roadblocks, I do what most people do: you go around them. It's like, what are you good for? And the conduits, I make good use of them. And quite frankly, those are the folks that get the judgment calls. Things are seldom black and white, so where there is a tone of a story that could go either way, something sort of hangs in the balance, if I've got somebody that I've learned to

trust telling me something that, look I can't tell you why, I can't tell you how, but you've got the wrong idea about this, it isn't going that way, I'm kind of going to
Appendix B.2 (Continued)

take their word for it until otherwise proven. But once burned, forget it. There's no going back. It's not to say that I haven't gotten things wrong in my stories sometimes, but I respect when people come back and they tell me, I didn't get that right, and I take it seriously. If it needs corrected, I'll correct it. And if it's too late to correct it, I'll try to learn from it. I never take the view that what I said is right, whether it's true or not. The truth is what's right. I think we reporters take the power that they have to affect people's lives for the better or worse, and you kind of forget that you can really hurt people by not getting it right or by getting it right. But it's your responsibility. What's the greater good here? Why are you doing this story? I think PIOs sort of look at it the same way, and again, don't write the story for me, just help me get the facts and it will be best for you in the end.

APPENDIX B.3

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: Newspaper Writer

I really do not rely on the local public information officer ... pretty much because I've always preferred, and even when I had that role, ... the reporters go straight to the person who has that information, and I know who has that information most times, which department head, which person is responsible for that area and who is responsible. It is very difficult to go through, time consuming and it's kind of a ridiculous exercise to go through a public information officer when you have more than a simple question, and it, if you're doing research, or even just a basic daily story, you're going to go right to the source, the person who is most knowledgeable, why would you go through a public information officer? It is always been my philosophy, and you would go to that person if you were new and didn't know who to ask, or I sometimes do that when it's an area that I haven't dealt with or I'm not quite sure, but that is for me, because I know the area. ... I think that television reporters rely on the public information officer a lot, or a new reporter would because they are not knowledgeable. I think the districts probably prefer that, they certainly did when I was a public information officer. They wanted it to go through me because it's a way of control. I didn't prefer that at all unless ... someone was not comfortable, and then I would prefer just helping them when I was a public information officer, I know this isn't what you're asking, I prefer helping them find information or deal with, or be comfortable dealing with the media. It is no advantage to have a two or three or four or five-way conversation through someone else, and I have found dealing with the state and national PIOs, and district PIOs, that you can get information mixed up, because they misunderstand or misinterpret a question. You can't have a follow-up question. It would take you days to get information. And more and more, since I've done this over 30 years with, particularly at the state level and the national level, there's been kind of a lockdown of information. Everything has to go through a spokesperson in many cases, who knows nothing about the subject, unless it's a current subject, a hot topic that they've gathered some information. If you're doing any kind of research in any depth or something that's not one of the hot topics that they've got some canned response to, it's difficult because they can not answer questions, and then they'll go back go back to get an answer which leads to another question, or clarification, and then it could take days. And it takes a great deal of time, so this is what you run into, this is what I've run into, and it just gets worse everyday.

Appendix B.3 (Continued)

So the ones in the area, you just go around them exclusively, or do you ever work with them?

I do sometimes, if I need a response and cannot get ... whoever it is I need, sometimes I will rely on, or call on the public information officer or page him and say, can you find this person, I really do need to talk to him, or that is the most useful and several times, he's been able to do that. And sometimes they don't even respond to him. They don't want to answer my call, he will presume to lean on them to call me and they won't. That is the most useful. Sometimes for the most basic information, gathering public records, they prefer that we go through that office, and that seems to be easier, although they haven't been able to, I'm waiting two weeks on public records that they haven't been able to get out of one of their own offices. So you know, I do check every day with the public information officer to make sure that there is nothing going on ... on my beat that I don't know about. So I do check in to make sure that I haven't missed something. And actually, he has called me, he does call me when I request it, or if there is something big going on he will call me. So I think we have a good working relationship. I may have a different role than some different people for a relationship.

Working with the state has been a nightmare. It's gotten worse in just the four and a half years since I've gotten here. It is ridiculous situation that I think I have talked to other ... reporters across the state and I think they agree it's ridiculous. You cannot talk to. When I first four and a half years ago came here, I could call the head of testing at home for the state. I called anybody who was knowledgeable on different areas, directly to their office, and a lot of them gave me their home numbers. Now, they cannot, they're not allowed to respond to a direct call. And it is a whole series to go through the spokesperson ... just to get an answer. And they want things in writing, and only after I try to have a conversation with them that goes back and forth with a list of questions they can't answer they finally get me with somebody and say, well you'll have to talk to the person who knows the most about this, and sometimes you wait days to talk to that person, because they just get frustrated because they can't answer the questions. And it's just like, pulling teeth out of a jellyfish. It's tedious job, very difficult. It's ridiculous, actually.

You don't see that as much on the local level?

Not as much. Although there are ... people, I've done this long enough that people know me, and we there every so often I'm told, well you have to go through ... the district spokesperson. ... Or have you talked with him, and I have a regular conversation. I call up the superintendent, and say, when did you put this gag order on that nobody can talk to me personally, they have to go through, and they say it's not that, we just want to know, we go through this little dance. But they are clearly trying to keep control of, and they want to know, now it's become every person that I talk to, almost, talks to the public information officer and tells them what I'm asking and what information I want, because they want to know. They want to know everything that we're doing. It's kind of interesting.

Appendix B.3 (Continued)

So you can still call people directly, and they say either go through him or they say everything you say to him?

They either report back, which I know they're going to, I don't care, or they a few of them who aren't comfortable, who are really concerned and don't know me well, or they're just afraid or have been burned by the press, will not even me, will not talk. And it's just sort of evolved that way.

They're trying to maintain control, and they try to be helpful, they try to keep us happy, and keep control, I understand exactly what they're trying to do. It's even worse in Tallahassee and Washington. But that's the way it's going. And it bothers me because when I was a public information officer I would do workshops with ... anybody who would deal with the press, and I had a little card that kind of advised them, 1) get all your facts right, 2) call the press back when you say you will and be sure you do get back to them, never lie to them, if you don't know, tell them you'll find out and call them back, some real basic, I don't know why they can't do that. But, I think it's troubling, I think the whole way it has evolved to the public having to rely on spokespeople in public is how is this going to be spun or whatever, I think it's really troubling if you cannot get to the people who actually do the work and are knowledgeable. Or they don't feel free to speak, you're giving a filtered version that may or may not be anywhere near the truth. It makes it much more difficult to dig down for the truth. And we do any number of stories about spokespeople who say one thing and the truth is another, or mislead you, whatever, but we do that I think to keep the public aware, that you have to look at this with a jaundiced eye. You've got to, we certainly do. What someone tells you, is certainly not necessarily the truth, as we're finding out on all sorts of levels now. So it's something you just fight all the time.

We have an understanding, and I don't think it's been breached, that if I am working on a story, they know, they will not tell another reporter and they will keep it confidential with all the reporters, I do get tips from them because I do things that I'm following, and if it is of particular interest to me, they do keep me informed but I keep asking, also. You know, fair is a hard thing to define. They, it's if we do think, and a couple of occasions I have thought that I have not gotten information I have asked for, I've been waiting for and someone else has, I've certainly had heated discussions about that. And actually, we just had, my editor here just had a big scene with the public information person from Tallahassee about us, trying to get public records for a couple weeks, they dribble out a little here, dribble out a little there, you can't get anything out of them, to respond, you're just kind of sick of it. So it's up to us to stop it. They try to get away with whatever they can, it's not, it's really not the ideal relationship certainly you know, certainly on the state and national level, it is far far, and getting worse from being an ideal relationship.

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No, no. There's no reason to withhold a public record. And they do, they say we don't have them, they say you've got to pay for them, why would you not want to give up a public record? I always thought that was strange, when I was a public information officer, I would just go into the file and get it for somebody I wouldn't even make them wait or right it out, or whatever you want?

So these weren't protected things?

Not at all. None of them are protected, it's not a matter of, I know what's protected and what isn't, I don't even ask for protected information. No, it's a matter of it's too much trouble, it's going to take a long time, and they don't have a lot of time, or they don't understand, put it in writing, or they give you part of it. It's dragging their feet, it's not wanting to, especially information that is not positive, and they just hope you'll go away, and not figure out where it's leading, or whatever. And I think they look at that as their job.

Is that better or worse locally, getting you the information?

It's OK locally. It's better than at the state level. But we've had our times that we've actually written about it when it's a problem. You kind of have to, when you fought for public records, that's part of our role. Why would, I'm waiting for something right now that should have been here a week ago. It's ridiculous. And I asked yesterday, simple documents...and I've had to tell them, if they can't pull these simple documents in one week's time, that makes me question what sort of condition your records are in?

You mentioned earlier that ... you have been given false information before or whatever, ... was that a deception kind of thing, or he just didn't know?

He didn't know, it was off the top of his head. And once someone gives you bad information, you really don't trust that person again. You always, you need to double check, especially if it's a new source, there are very few people that you don't double-check behind, anyway. I always try to get two sources for information, to make sure it makes sense, before printing it.

It's hard, sometimes we want to go so deep, and I certainly do, want to go so deep in the reporting that I may know better what records I need and where to get them. Yeah, I find sometimes a lack of knowledge of the system. The PIO ... has been in that job for a number of years and makes quite a hefty salary. And the sheer lack of knowledge, now, of various documents and how the system works by this time, is surprising. I mean I think that's part of the job. ... Because with the public, these are public servants, and that's what, sometimes they'll close meetings to us, and I know what meetings doesn't involve ... public officials doing public business, certainly they can close a meeting with ... staff, or whatever, but my question to them is always, why would you want to? These are public servants, unless it is an issue of ... confidentiality, or safety, that cannot, security would be breached, why would you want to close talks about public issues, about public money, about spending public money, using public money by people who are paid by the public? That happens all the time. I was just

Appendix B.3 (Continued)

kicked out of a meeting Of course they could have that private, but why wouldn't the public, the media representing the public, be allowed? It just doesn't make sense.

How do you think the public information officers, do you think they feel treated fairly by journalists? What do you think they think of the other side, of you?

Having been on the other side, it was the bureaucracy, and I've just seen it in all types of county governments, in any different public agencies that I've dealt with, it was us and them. It was a very adversarial relationship. And on the surface of course, it's nicey, nicey, most of the time. But no, it's us and them, they're the media, ...I mean, that's just kind of their attitude.

Why?

Why? Because the media sees itself as a watchdog, with access to the public work, and bureaucracies have a different culture, and unfortunately do not understand or have an appreciation for the role of the media. Maybe they do understand somewhat, but the culture, the bureaucratic culture is such that it circles the wagons, in the hopes it will go away, or cover it up, or whatever. That's the sort of general, human nature. You don't want people to see your mistakes, and your bureaucracy, you're afraid of those above you or whatever. And the simple rule, and this is what I used to tell ... administrators and people I advised in that role, the simple rule we learned in Watergate. It's not that you made a mistake, because the public can understand a mistake. It's cover-up or lying that the public doesn't understand. So you see public entities getting into that all the time. I mean, it just continues. Then they're caught lying or covering up, and it's a mistake, or it's unintentional, or whatever, but it's just sort of a way of work. It's refreshing when you call somebody who just says yes, I made a mistake. And this is what I'm going to do to fix it. And it's just great to report that, and gives you faith in people, but it doesn't happen all the time.

All reporters, occasionally, it doesn't matter what you report on, but you deal with other spokespeople and all sorts of liaisons, some of them, particularly when we do the police beat, we all do that on nights and weekend police beat, sometimes you get very helpful public information people, sometimes not. A lot of it is personal, it depends on their experience, it depends on their level of competence, it depends on their philosophy, and what comes from above, whoever their bosses are. The amount of openness always goes to the leadership. And there's a great variety, and some of them are so great and so helpful. I don't think that overall, you can make any overall blanket statements for all of government. Every government agency, but particularly Tallahassee and Washington, have become increasingly difficult, lockdowns of information, I would be surprised if you spoke with anyone else who deals with them to say otherwise.

APPENDIX B.4

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: Radio Reporter/Producer

Because primarily you say government, because we've got local, state, federal, and if you're looking at government entities it could range anywhere from US immigration, which is difficult to get anyone to speak with you, on a federal level, it's tough in certain departments. But it can be equally challenging at a local level, depending on what department. Local level is much more personal, they know your name and face, usually.

I worked previously in television behind the scenes. As a researcher, I assisted reporters who were in the field, so I had a good telephone working relationship with a lot of the public information officers, even though they never saw my face. ... So I've had a wide variety and I've also seen this community really develop in how it handles public relations. To the betterment, I would say. Years and years ago, there was a gentleman by the name of *[PIO identity deleted]*. You wouldn't get anything from him. You knew you had to make the call, but you knew exactly what he would say, and it was a closed shop, it was difficult. I have also known... a former TV reporter who took over and was the public information officer for this, and I considered them local even though it was a regional office. They're supposed to have that local contact. And he became a problem for a lot of people in the market, because he became selective. He would send out selective press releases. ... Which is totally against any credo, but if he decided that if he didn't like what a reporter wrote, or said on air, he would only notify certain people. Which of course luckily most of the journalists in this market I find are extremely professional. And when we found out, and this was when I was working at one of the TV stations, when we found out this was happening, we would cover each other, and let each other know because who knew who would be on the hot seat next. It was an unprofessional way, but it took a while before he was eventually. I don't know what happened to him, but it was unprofessional behavior that local journalists found a way around. But it, so I have seen some negative sides.

When you are in law enforcement there are a lot of things you can't say when an investigation is going on. Journalists understand that. Yes, we're still going to ask questions, but sometimes there are things you do need to know, or you would like reflections. Well *[name of government official deleted]* was the

Appendix B.4 (Continued)

kind of individual who would answer your phone call and work with you at that level.

This is such a broad brush issue, or if you will, a tapestry and every thread is a different color. And every pattern, there is a weave or a pattern, and each agency is different and it is dependent upon the individual.

(Specific details of local PIO not providing technical needs at public facility deleted.) So I usually just back away from something like that. I won't back away from the fact that it's still a facility that if they hold events there, and they continue to do it, news people know they aren't going to get good sound. It's something that hasn't been fixed, and is that the job of the public information officer? I would hope so.

Now the people who are under him and send out endless press releases on a wide range of things, you know what this is sort of a trend of, I see happening, where because people don't like their perceived coverage sometimes. They feel it necessary to have their own channel to speak. Which is, that is a service to the community, taxpayers' dollars are paying for it. But I think that where they miss the, where they miss the message, is that is good and that is public service, but that is not news broadcasting. And your reach is only as wide as who might be tuning into the government access channel. But yet more money is spent on that and people being convinced politicians and whatnot, 'oh, but we've got these beautiful little packages.' But in other worlds, if it were the Soviet Union, some people might just call that propaganda. Because it has not undergone editorial scrutiny. So there are some crossovers that are interesting. You know, what's really needed, a better situation too, in my 23 plus years, is the internet. Where you can find more information readily. Gone are the times, pretty much, and although there are still some ... that do this, they insist all calls go through the public information officer. Well, initially, I guess, if you want to know who the reporter is, I can maybe understand that. I can also understand that it can be a part of job security. But I think that, I would hope that public information officers, some are, some aren't, so that's, very few have that criteria, but those who do hold by it. And are immovable. And it really gets in the way of being able to do a story or get to the right person, sometimes. So there are all these little challenges, depending on the individual person, the agency, depending on whether it is my first time calling them or my hundredth time. Whether we cross paths in other capacities. It definitely, it's a one-on-one, very situation-specific. So my relationship with them, it depends on who it is, and again, it could depend on the time of day (laugh), the story I'm working on, whether I'm under deadline pressure or not, whether they've had a good meal or not in the morning. But although no, there are people who you develop these relationships with, who you can call, or they can call you and say, 'hey, you might not know about this, but...'

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It's really incumbent upon us, it really is. Yes, it is their job to get the word out, but on the same token, it is incumbent upon me as a reporter, if I need the information, I will call. If they don't get it to me, it is my job to call them back. If I have a problem with them, with their rules saying, 'well, no, you have to talk to me, you can not talk to this person or that person, you have to go through me,' well then I ask to speak to a manager. That's my prerogative. If I'm happy enough to just get a PIO on a breaking story, a good person, a good example, *[local PIO name deleted]*. Very accommodating, but at the same token, yeah, she'll do a sound bite for you, but if I want to try to get *[local PIO's supervisor name deleted]* instead, the director, she knows how effective he is, and if he's available she'll try to get him for me. If he isn't, she'll tell me.

You want to talk about a quality, again I think a PIO is only as good as the administrator or people, person, he serves in a way. And if the person is uneducated about what the PIO should do, then you have problems.

[Referring to another local public affairs department:] I think that they view their job, and this is again, how they view their job more as a gatekeeper. To protect, especially in controversial issues. They also still are available if you want an expert on this or that and don't know, or for fast facts, but I would guarantee that if you ask *[director of same department]*, he, maybe he wouldn't admit it or not, I don't know, but I suspect in his heart he feels he's been a protector at this point, because they have to put a good face or good spin on things, and that that's their job. And I don't necessarily think that that is the overriding factor of a public information officer.

Unfairly, we talked earlier of previous years when public information officers try to exclude notification to and in essence burn a station or someone. That was when I was working for a station and it wasn't me personally. To me that's unfair. Or, the behavior of the one public information officer, who, for years and counting, still refuses to provide broadcast capabilities and literally lied to the governor's people, saying oh no, it's all broadcast-ready. And it wasn't. The governor's people knew that. Now how did that county come across looking? Was that unfair to me? I don't take it personally, but it sure is unfair to my listeners, though. Because there was some valuable stuff said, and the quality of the sound was such that I did limited reporting because again, the quality of the sound was OK, marginal at times, and secondly, when you're holding, above your head because the TV was mounted, the TV guys, they taped their mikes up there because they have the little lavalieres. They taped them to the speaker on the TV. I had to hold my mike like this (gestures to demonstrate awkward reach). I've done that in a lot of different circumstances, and you learn to work with what you've got. But that was an ongoing thing, and how does that individual, I think he just sort of steers clear of me now. It doesn't affect my job or my reporting, but that to me was again, not unfair to me, but unfair to listeners, and to the people I'm responsible, need to answer to. And the good stuff, like I said, *[reference to*

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another government agency deleted]. Again, arranging something outside of a news conference, sometimes this is, these are people who already have a lot on their plate. And to say hey, you don't know this reporter, but I talked with her once and she's a good person, why don't you let her ride along with you, that was appreciated.

[Referring to another positive example:] But he called back within 10 or 15 minutes, and literally I had, I didn't even have 30 minutes to do the interview, sit down, write it, produce it and get it on air. It was such quick turnaround, that if you consider all the process, and he was so accommodating, I cannot, those are the kinds of things, when you know people are taking time to go that extra yard, and it is done on both sides of this equation a lot. Or when a PIO will call and say, there's this story, we're not sending a press release out on it, but I think ... you might be interested. And that does happen on occasion.

If you really need it, you need to define your deadline. And if they're sharp, again, we're talking, it's up to the individual. If they're sharp, they ask you, if you don't define. But is also incumbent on me to call back if I have not heard and I am pressing deadline. Have I called and requested stuff and waited, and not heard back, and not heard back? Well it's incumbent on me to call them. Not just get ticked off because they haven't returned my one request. As far as reliability, I guess, the reliability of returning a phone call or finding information, now do I think that they are, again, depending on the individual, are they reliable in getting the specific information you might want if you're doing an investigation piece? That *really* depends upon the individual. I don't get as much time to do it, but that's where again, and I talked about shielding the agency and the individuals. That's probably the biggest mistake I would think any PIO would make. Because if there is a problem, it will come out one way or another, and I think that there's an appearance of, or if somebody has lied, and I have had on occasion, individuals, it wasn't a PIO, it was someone, who, a lie is of omission, but that is a lie, when you ask a question, 'oh these are the circumstances.' Those are the circumstances but without this part of the equation, and I won't go into it. But on occasion, if that happens, that person has totally lost my trust, and I will find another way to tell a story without going through them.

At some point, you have to determine how important is that to the overall story. But I think that is something that reporters have gotten less, broadcast more than print, certainly, less vigorous on. You need to ask for specifics, and when somebody side-steps and side-steps, especially public information officers. I'd rather somebody tell me, I'm not going to give that to you. Because then I'll file a public records request. It is public records, but when they 'you don't, we're not sure yet,' You say are they reliable? Well, if it is about information they don't want you to get, they'll find, it's up to you to go back after it. After a certain point, how much energy do I want to spend on that one speck of information. But yet,

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looking back, that's still something I would like to have and may still pursue. Because to me, I get tired of, it's the reporter's fault if you settle for wishy-washy inconcise, muddled statistics or information. The clearer, the more concise I can be with that story, the stronger it is.

Are most of them capable of meeting your needs? ...

It depends on the individual, but yeah. I would rate that at least 90 percent. At least 90 percent.

How do you think they perceive their treatment by journalists?

Again, I think it depends on the individual. I'm sure that there are some people, because I can be very direct sometimes. So I'm sure in my 23 years, ... I'm sure that there are some people who might be less than enamored with me. But I can't think of too many, because if anything else, if I ever felt that any feathers were ruffled, I would call up a day or two later and say hey, I don't know what happened, or I'm sorry that another journalist was causing such commotion that I had to be rude myself and cut in, whatever the circumstance may be. I feel it is incumbent upon me to make that move, to say, let's not have it again, or let's not let it happen again, let's keep it on a professional level. I don't recall ever having to do anything really severe like that, but really, touching base with people, letting them know you're human. Again, I've served on a lot of panels. ... You name it. If they ask, I will come. ... Again it's important for people to understand how journalism works, because it's their job to make sure that we do our job well, and demand better journalism.

APPENDIX B.5

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: Radio Reporter

Here in the Tampa Bay area, especially our radio station, deals with government public information officers on a daily basis. Through, they communicate through a variety of means, the most popular avenue is a system we have called Quick Alert. And what Quick Alert is a computerized press release system that is automatically fed into our computers. Any time there is a breaking news situation that is of significance, the fire department or the police department or the emergency managers, whoever it happens to be, will send out an electronic press release to us with sometimes just sparse details at first, and then additional details as the stories develop. All of these sheriff's offices in the immediate Tampa Bay area now have access to this system called media alert, in fact, you can look it up on their Web site, it is media-alert.com I think. But basically, it's a system by which they can notify all of the media at once, of breaking news activities that they need to know about. For instance, if there is an emergency situation on one of the interstates, where there has been a terrible accident of some kind and they need to stay away from the area, or in the case of emergency management if there was a problem at the port, with an accidental release of ammonia or some other type of deadly gas, we get media alerts from the Sheriff's office daily about shootings, things that happen, so that when listeners start calling us and asking what's going on, at least we have a basic frame of reference of what's happening. So, that is, that is what you might call the early-type responding information that we get then, is to this system called media alert. And it works very well. We're very pleased with it. I don't know if they have it in other cities around Florida, if they work with it quite as closely as we do, but it's an excellent means of communication because they can essentially write one news release and send it to everybody at once and everybody gets the information. So that way, we get it all, have an idea of what's going on from the perspective of the police department or the emergency management or fire department. So that helps us out a lot. There are a variety of different types of public information officers that we deal with, principally, again, the ones we have the most contact with are people in the Sheriff's office, the various police departments, the various fire departments, and also the emergency management offices, particularly during hurricane season, or preparing for a storm that might be coming this way, that type of thing. So we have a variety of contact with a variety of different public information officers. Some of them in particular are excellent in what they do. One in particular is a *[PIO identity deleted.]* And his job principally is to deal with the media, and notify us of what's going on. He's

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been doing it for a long time. He's very good at his job. At the first hint of any type of news situation he thinks the media may be interested about, he'll pick up the phone and call us. Give us a heads up, in addition to a media alert. He is Johnny-on-the-spot any time we need him. We can reach him 24 hours a day, pretty much, and he's a great contact to have, because in the case of ... any kind of major accident. *[Details of example deleted.]* He was one of our first points of contact, to tell people to please try and stay out of the area, because we're sending a half-dozen emergency vehicles to pick up the wounded. You know, so when people see a flurry of activity there, we put it on the air, this is what it's about, please give right of way to emergency vehicles, this is a serious situation. ... And he is exceptional at his job, because what makes him good in what he does is he's proactive. He doesn't necessarily wait for us to call him. Now, he'll come to us, he'll tell us what's going on, here's a heads up. So that helps us out a lot.

On the other end of the spectrum, you have public information officers who are just the opposite of that, it is their job to put out as little information as possible. ... or at least, that's how they act. They're very secretive and they just give out the most basic details to people. *[Details of federal example deleted.]* We tend to deal a lot with *[local law enforcement agency]*. And they have a staff of two public information officers, both of which are very good, and they release information to us as they can, and what they know. And a lot of times, it takes time for them to get the information and get it verified, because anything they say may at some point be used in court down the road. So they have to be very careful about what they say, about what information they release. ... Anyway, we were out at the house, and you know, initially when we had heard about it, it was a homicide, and we don't necessarily go out and cover every homicide. But in this particular case the public information officer told us that we were going to want to cover. 'We're sure you're going to want to go out there.' It turned out that it was one of the largest number of killings that had taken place in a single area before in *[the area]*. So we were out there, and we were out there all night long, and the information that came was very slow in coming as detectives worked the scene, and sometimes, that's just typically the way it goes. You have to wait until the homicide detectives have done all their initial assessments, because it was such a large crime scene, that the information was slow in coming.

Generally speaking, we have, I wouldn't say we have an adversarial relationship, it is their job to provide information to us, and in many cases I think, most of them put a spin on it to make their particular department or agency look favorable. And I guess that's to be expected. A lot of times, we get better information from eyewitnesses, neighbors, now family members, people who are associated with any given story that happens. But everyone is different. In something like the case of the gas truck blowing up, you know there are certain basic facts you need to know, and a public information officer ... can give that to you in a relatively short period of time, in a more complex situation where you have a homicide, the information can be a lot more difficult, and slow in coming.

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For a variety of legal reasons. So, sometimes that's why the information comes slow. Also, some public information officers are very quick about giving out information. And others are not, and I think that speaks more to how good they are at what they do. Because the ones who are the best at what they do release the information as fast as possible because they know we need that information. You know, to tell the public. There are some in this particular area, and I don't want to mention any names, but some are extremely slow in providing information to the public to the point where the information they give us is sometimes 24 hours old, and by the time they get around to telling us, we already know pretty much what they were going to tell us ahead of time, because we found out from other sources. But it helps to have a good working relationship with them, because a lot of cases they provide sometimes critical information that you have to have to cover your story. But I have to say that some are better than others at it, and I'm sure that's the case in any profession.

Obviously, you would think that we would have a lot of contact with public information officers from the city, and from the county and places like that, but actually we don't. If we want information let's say, for a particular councilman, or the mayor, or someone like that, we typically go direct to them and direct to their office to get information. The people that I know of [*in city and county communications departments*] don't have a lot of contact with the media necessarily. It seems their job is more to put out information and deal more with the community relations, rather than media relations. And by community relations I mean they put out flyers, and put out direct mail to notify voters and people like that about what's going on. Different events the county is doing. They deal with them a lot through their own television station that they have, and that for instance, if I need information about the city ... I would not call their Communications Department and ask them, can you put me in touch with somebody. I would just find that person, myself. Call their office and say, this is who I am, I need to talk to you. Can you take some time out. The PIOs at the city and county level don't tend to interact with us the same way that police, fire, and emergency managers would.

Going beyond the information, the volume of information they can give you, do you think that the PIOs treat journalists fairly?

For the most part, yes, I would say they treat journalists fairly. What you have to understand is that there are basically three types of journalists. Print, TV, and radio. And each one has different needs. TV folks naturally need video, and pictures, critically, that's the first need that they have, is to get to a scene and get pictures of what's happening while it's in progress. Photographers for the newspaper would need that same access. Reporters, if you're a print reporter, you don't necessarily need emergency information, right away, because you are not going to publish it for at least 12, 14 hours. So they can afford to sit back and wait a little bit till the smoke clears to get the details of what happens. In the

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case of radio, we put news out every 30 minutes, so we need the information as it's happening so that we can put it out on the air as it's happening, so that we can let folks know that this is what's going on, this is why you're seeing 20 police cars on I-75 or down by the port, or in the downtown area, This is why there's 10 fire engines down there or that sort of thing. Television is the same way, in that television has a much more immediate need, as radio does, than newspapers do. So public information person and decide sometimes, who gets the information first, and whose needs they try to get to first. They realize that there are a lot of larger, in-depth types of stories that newspaper and radio may not cover but the newspapers would. So a reporter might require, a print reporter would require a different type of attention than a broadcaster would. There's also some favoritism that goes around, I'm sure that all public information officers would have reporters that they favor, that they like sometimes, and sometimes the reporters are given heads up on a story before anybody else is, and they break the news, and that happens. Every reporter develops their own sources, but by-and-large, I would say they treat everyone pretty fairly.

How about, are they reliable, will they do what they say they will?

Yeah, for the most part. I think that they know that ours is a long-term relationship. They know that if they tell us they are going to do something and don't come through for us, they understand that that could hurt or jeopardize the relationship, so they know that next time they need us to help them, then it would not be in their best interests. Because they know that reporters have long memories. So, therefore, it's going to be a working relationship, they need us, we need them, we work together as closely as possible in terms of that kind of working relationship.

Do you think that they are able of doing what they'll say, are they capable of meeting your needs?

Most of the time, most of the time. Part of the problem with it is that most of the time they're giving us information that they got from somebody else, so we're sort of getting the information second-hand instead of directly talking to the source. Because of a number of lawsuits and things that have been filed over the years, a lot of police departments have a public information person who is trained to release information that is not going to get them into trouble legally. In the past, years ago, you would go to the individual officer or detective who was working the case, and you could talk directly to them to get the details and information. A lot of that stopped now. The public information person has been set up as a barrier or a go-between, if you will. And as a go between or as a liaison, they are specifically educated not to release information that might come back to haunt them later on in terms of a possible lawsuit.

To give you a perfect example of all this, look at Ari Fleischer in the White House. He's the ultimate government PIO. And everything he releases from the

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White House he puts a positive White House spin on it to make it look good. And that's virtually the job of every PIO. His job is different because he's in politics, not dealing necessarily in crime. But that's pretty much a standard that that's what they all do.

How do you think they feel treated by journalists in return?

You know, I don't know. I tend to think that in some cases they do, I'm sure, and this probably goes back to the issue of favoritism. They know that some reporters are better at their jobs than others. Some reporters are more thorough, and I'm sure in some cases they feel that the reporters who do a better job, they feel that they got a better shake, the reporters who don't, who might be, I hate to use the word sloppy, but it happens, I think in some cases like that, they understand that there are people in every profession who are good at what they do and there are people who aren't. And so, I guess, you would tend to think that so long as you do your job and do it well, and report it accurately, that they feel they're getting a fair shake. A lot of times though, sometimes you'll see a quote or something attributed to a public information officer, and you go and ask them is this true, and they say no, I didn't say that. So it is true, people get misquoted. And I'm sure that leaves a bad taste in their mouth if a reporter misquotes them.

APPENDIX B.6

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: Television Assignment Editor

Let's start with the *[federal agency]*. I have a history with the *[federal agency]* that's gone on in Tampa Bay, Tampa Bay is like the headquarters for the *[federal agency]* in the central part of Florida. So the main office is here, their main public information people are here, all their brass are here, so I have a long relationship, just happen to have a good relationship with the public information officer with the *[federal agency]* ... very personable, ... friendly ... very tight-lipped. Though *[federal agency]* has, they've gone under a lot of changes lately. The problem with getting information from the *[federal agency]* is they never release anything. ... While the friendship is there, the communication, the *[federal agency]* doesn't tell you anything, and that's their policy. Getting information from federal government people is very difficult. Probably always will be. It's been even worse since September 11th.

Do they have to follow the same public record laws in Florida?

Um hmm.

They do?

They would, absolutely. They would be subject to the same open records laws for sure, but what are my chances of submitting a Freedom of Information request to the *[federal agency]* and getting whatever I want to find out, plus if I go that route anyway they have like 20 days to work with and I have a daily news story. So the information 20 days from now, even if I get it, is not going to be as valuable as it would be.

[Referring to local law enforcement agencies 1 & 2:] They have excellent public information officers. They will pretty much tell us anything they need to know, or can know, when we need to know. Kind of the policy, kind of military public information officers have, and it's taught in military journalism school, so I know what they're taught, they're taught maximum disclosure, minimum delay. That's what they're taught. However, once it becomes time to put that into effect, you know, you have maximum delay, minimum disclosure is what we get from them.

For which, the Sheriff's Office?

No, for the military. They are very tight-lipped. ... Going back to the *[local law enforcement agencies 1 & 2]* are excellent people. They both have pretty good-sized staffs, like maybe three or four people that work in a public information office, which is a pretty good number of people, directly to media

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relations, questions. So if I have a shooting in *[law enforcement jurisdiction 1]*, and I hear it on the scanner, I can probably within two or three minutes, four or five minutes, once they get on scene, I know if it looks like a drug deal, or it looks like domestic, or you know. That's because their people are efficient and they deal with us very well because that's their jobs. So they will tell me ... don't get excited, there's nothing bizarre, this looks domestic, like the man killed his wife and then shot himself, whichever way it happened. So *[local law enforcement agencies 1 & 2]* had great public information people that make our job easier. I make their job easier. You go to some of the smaller counties, some of the outlying counties, *[local jurisdiction 3]* is actually pretty good, too. They have two full-time public information people. *[local law enforcement agency 3]* is pretty good at disseminating information, at telling us, this looks like a story, or you might want to send someone, or don't bother sending anyone to this scene. So they're pretty good.

Problems get to be when you go to the smaller counties, who have less media saturation, like *[local law enforcement agency 4]* is notorious when it comes to bad communication with the press. Their public information officers have been bantered and beaten by the media for probably years, 5 years, or as long as I've been here. One guy up there, we all tried to have fired one time, and it didn't happen, although he won't tell you anything, he won't return phone calls, he just is very difficult to work with. But I think it's a factor of being an outlying county, where they don't get the calls all the time, and they don't have, like my office is not on their doorstep like it is with *[local jurisdiction 2]* or *[local jurisdiction 1]*. *[Local jurisdiction 4]* is tucked away, it is a smaller county, more rural area. So we don't have a good relationship with them. It is very difficult to try a relationship. *[local jurisdiction 5]*, kind of the same way. Smaller area, they've never had a media outlet stationed there except for their newspaper for many many years, and now, in the past year, we have put a news bureau in there, so we now have a full-time face in *[local jurisdiction 5]*. However, has it made it any easier to get any information from the *[local law enforcement agency 5]*? No. ... *[Specific example of crime not reported to public for five days]* But to me, that's a big story. You know, it should have been divulged when it happened, or as closely as possible to when it happened.

A good relationship is when I can call, say its you. When I can call you, I'm not sure exactly what it is ... but between you and I, you should probably get someone out there. You know, while she is not giving me specific information such as it looks like we have several dead bodies out there, she's telling me, knowing what my job is, that if there are several dead bodies out there, that I'm going to want to be there. Where she probably will not, like early on, but she's telling me I want to be there, even if she is not telling me why I want to be there, it's a trust relationship where she knows what we do at *[interviewee organization deleted]*, so she knows that several bodies in a home is going to be a news story. Where, that's a good PIO. That's someone I built a good relationship with over

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the years, just to say that she trusts me enough to know, off the record ... there are several dead bodies out there, then I'm not going to go on the air and say there are several dead bodies out there until they release that information. So she's going to give me a heads up about, without giving me specifics or permission to go on the air with that several dead bodies. She knows I want to move a crew there and she tells me that. So I can get a crew there. If that happened in *[local jurisdiction 4]*, they might say, he might know damn well that he has several dead bodies at a home, but our relationship has gotten to a point where he's gonna say ... you want to be there. He's going to tell me the official stand where we're still investigating it. It might be five hours later, and I still won't know for sure that there are several bodies in that home. So he plays it, really straight to the book, he's never worked out a relationship where he trusts me to know that I'm not going to compromise anything that he tells me off the record, so we just haven't built those kind of relationships in those further counties yet.

[City 1] is pretty good, *[City 2]* is pretty good, *[County 2]* is pretty good about telling us things that might be coming up. You know there's two kinds of news. The stuff they want you to cover, and the stuff they don't want you to cover. You ever hear the saying, the stuff they want you to cover is public relations, it's the stuff they don't want you to cover is the real news, everything else is public relations. So if I get a press release, I know it's probably going to be something that is positive to the city. You know, people are not always anxious to talk about the bad news, unless they have an opportunity to put a good spin on it.

Generally, I think we get a pretty good shake. If you look at it as a whole, *[City agency PIO]* is an awesome man. I could call him at 3 o'clock in the morning and he's say, yeah... what's up? As a whole, I would rate this as a, I'd give this an 80 out of a hundred. You know, on general people, if I need to know something, can I pick up a phone and get that information in a matter of minutes? Chances are, yes, pretty good, that I can get that information in a matter of minutes, just because these people respond to their jobs, they know that their jobs are to supply us with the information, so I would give it a pretty good overall rating. ... They know what their jobs are. Their jobs are to supply the media with the information so that we can put it out to the public. You know, so people will know when they have to flee their homes, or evacuate, or they have to pack up their hurricane supplies, so those people are all pretty good. We have a good relationship overall, I have a fairly easy job here. I don't like to admit that, I like to make it sound like it's very hard, play it up like it's hard. But I'll let you know that.

They will meet us. They will go out of their ways, for the most part, again, they will give us interviews when we need them, they will be available after working hours if we need them, I can get them on the phone. Some of them I have their home numbers, or some of them I don't, but as a whole, they are very effective and communicative.

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They get me the information. The other thing I'll ask them to do is find me sources. You know, if I need, if I want to do a story about computer porn, or pedophilia, I can go to *[local law enforcement agency 1]* and say, I need a source. I need your guy or woman who handles sexual predators on the internet. And chances are pretty good that I will get that person within that day, or the next day. News is done on a daily basis you know, so I'm the one generally asking them for an interview tomorrow or for today. For the most part, I'd say 60 percent, 70 percent, depending on the agency or request, you can count on getting someone, getting the people that you're asking for.

And then, an incident that happened as a result of that, I called the public information officer to say, hey why did it take you three days to tell us about this, and she never returned my phone call that day after that. The next day, or later that same day, I called her boss. I found out who her boss was, and I called her boss and I go, I want to know why it took your public information officer four hours and she still hasn't returned my phone call. That was her job, public information. Dealing with the media. If she hasn't returned a phone call for four hours, that's unacceptable. So, she called me later and asked, why am I getting nasty messages from my boss, and I said because you're not answering my telephone calls. And it became an ugly situation. She became very angry and I became very angry as well. We had a little bit of a shouting match on the phone. You know, she returns my phone calls now, and a lot of the times, that's all that I need. So that's a fairly bad example of a relationship that got to a point that it shouldn't have had to.

A good example? If I need information, they will get me the information. ... He will tell me ... you want to be here, or you don't want to be here. So those are people I could pull examples of good relationships everyday out of them. I can tell you things they did to make my job easier, faster, more effective. Pretty much any time.

Do you think, in return, that the public information officers feel that they are treated fairly by ... journalists? How do you think things work the other way around?

I think things work the same way. There are some stories they don't want to have to deal with when they are negative stories. You know, for the good outfits, they are going to give us the interview when they don't want to talk about the shortage of police officers. That's not a good story for them. But they're going to give us the story. So turnaround, how do they feel about us? They probably feel that we're nosy. We're short tempered, we're impatient. Which is all pretty much accurate representations of what kind of people we normally are. For the most part, they know that deep down, I think that they see us as they know we have a job to do, and what their job is to do is provide us with the information.

Appendix B.6 (Continued)

And I think you develop relationships on personal levels. They have a respect for you, say if you report accurately, which you strive to do, we're not tabloids, so we're not going to take a story and make it sound worse than it actually is with them. So I think they have a mutual respect for us as well. But as I mentioned earlier with *[local jurisdiction 4 and 5]*, we don't have good relationships with those PIOs. They probably don't like us. On a personal level, *[local law enforcement PIO 4]* probably hates to hear my voice on his voice mail. Because he doesn't want to deal with me, any more than I want to deal with him.

APPENDIX B.7

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: General Assignment Bureau Reporter

[Two government PIOs] both understand television, they both understand deadlines, they understand the need for video, they both understand the need for on-camera interviews. So they know television news. And it's clearly a part of their thought process as they put together dog-and-pony shows, which is where they're going to have a news conference or something, an event, that's going to be largely staged. They try to provide material to do it, or even if it's not a big thing but it's an interesting arrest with media interest, they try to make sure that one of the case detectives are available. I can certainly ...questions just come up from time to time. They'll find the answer, or find the person who can answer it. That's all a reporter needs. Or, if the reporter needs something more.

Worthless. Will try to downplay things, trivialize them, promise to get information and then you never hear from him again, if it's a hot case that the Sheriff wants to profile, then he makes himself for interviews and things like that. Otherwise there are a lot of meetings that take three or four hours that he's at. Then he's unavailable, and generally speaking, unless it's a dog-and-pony show, or a high-profile case that's been pulled, he's worthless. He's not there. Just flat not there. And those are probably the two extremes. There are others who come more toward one end of the spectrum than the other.

That's in law enforcement. That's where you run into a lot of PIOs. Not a lot of cities have a full position.

How does that differ between law enforcement PIOs and regular city or county PIOs?

Yeah. Cops, law enforcement agencies are more accustomed, because of the nature of their work, accustomed to the media interest and have tried to facilitate it to acknowledge that there is value in having a PIO, that it's a two-way street, A- you don't want miscommunication, you've got to keep a handle on communication and they take it very very seriously because they have the license to kill, literally. And the license to suspend liberty. And so, they have all kinds of considerations that they will, bureaucrats as they're called, don't have. Bureaucrats aren't going to shoot you. (*unintelligible*)... There is this attitude, this mindset. That differs in law enforcement agency to law enforcement agency. They will do everything they can, to consider a media specialist as damage control. You know, when we give them what we have to, they'll not be overly helpful. There are others who go to the extreme. Yeah, we arrested somebody,

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their mug shot is their Web site, or they'll e-mail it to you. So they're all over the board.

Cities, by-and-large, don't have a PIO per se, it's usually handled in their marketing department. And because it's a collateral extra duty, aside from their main job, they approach it with varying degrees of enthusiasm. They're used to cranking out news releases that are positive for the city, but as far as a contact person who can answer, this is who I need, who can I talk to. *[Referring to former local official:]* he had an assistant who filled that role, and I could call her up and say, I want to do a story on water rates. Who does the administration want me to speak to? Because whoever I speak to is speaking for the administration. And she would find somebody, she would call the somebody and tell them this is the inquiry, and we would like you to respond to this question. *[Current local official]* does not have such a position. He has an assistant who schedules him, but if I call up and say, you don't want to bug a mayor too much, use up all your coupons or whatever, so I'll call up and say, who do you want to respond to this particular question, I find it quicker since I know most of the department heads at this point, so I go directly to them.

Fair is probably not giving one media information that you don't give to another. Something that I view as grossly unfair, and most PIOs abide by this. You have your dog-and-pony shows where they're putting information out, but you also have enterprise stories where a reporter gets curious about a specific question or issue or case and makes an inquiry. And it should end right there. A PIO should not share that with other media. Here's a classic, this was the classic. *[Example of interviewee requesting information from law enforcement agency, which was distributed via news conference to all news media.]* And almost every PIO in the world wouldn't do.

What would the etiquette be, normally? Would your station get it first, and then the other stations would request it and then get it? You would break with it first?

It wasn't their idea, it was my idea. And they chose to share it with the world. And another one. I deal with this office a whole lot differently than I would any other organization through experiences like this. I had another one, where I had heard they were having a problem *[specific crime example]*. So I say very casually, hey I hear this have you heard that? No, no, haven't heard anything about that. Two months later, dog-and-pony show, we've made dozens of arrests, they were working on it when I asked, they had made dozens of arrests, drug seizures, blah blah blah. After telling me flat out, that they hadn't heard anything. I've been here a number of years, and they could have said, as a matter of fact, it's under investigation, they had options. They chose to do what they chose to do. Consequently, *[this]* office has zero credibility. You know, they've burned me badly a couple of times now. And there will be no more.

How would it be no more?

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If I had a question about something going on ... I'll go look. I can't trust them. And I've told them that. And if they say anything, the terms claimed, alleged, words like that always get used.

So you wouldn't normally use those words with other agencies, then?

Not with the frequency.

Do you think you can rely on the public information officers in the area to do what they say?

Well, again, not always. Usually. To the best of it, I understand to some degree where they are coming from. I understand that it's collateral duty for them, they've got other issues on their plate. They've got, a marketing department again, is sales. You don't talk about your blemishes in sales. So I just know again with them, I'm not going to get the best information.

It's agency by agency, or individual to individual. ... They have a seminar every year for law enforcement public information officers. And I participate on the media panel every year. So, you know, those of us on the panel with the media share our experiences, and some of those that had been PIOs for a while share their experiences coming back, and they've had some bad experiences. What they, what it teaches you is you have to deal with people individually, their strengths, weaknesses, pros and cons. Just because somebody has a job, doesn't mean he's going to be the best at doing that job. So it's going to be a case-by-case. So what I try to tell the PIOs, is you can learn your media. There are only so many reporters. It's not like it's an infinite number, unless you have a national, if you have a plane crash, or a national story, then you're going to be dealing with a bunch of strangers. Day in, day out, there's only four or five reporters from each station, and there's only four stations, so you talking 20 or 25 people, and you're going to get to know them to a degree. Some are smarter than others, some like to spin stories very negatively, if there is any way to make a situation sound worse, or sound more dramatic, they're going to reach for that hot button. There is one station in particular that's their MO. And everyone knows it. So you're going to have reporters that burn you. They're going to say they won't repeat something and they do. You're going to have others you know you can trust because you told them stuff, and you said they couldn't repeat it and they didn't. So over time, you get to know who is who.

There are bad cops and there are bad reporters. Some just aren't real smart, some are vicious, some have no reservation about saying something they don't know to be true, I mean, there's not a lot of instances where they flat make stuff up, but sometimes they'll get information that is questionable, and they should be going, wait a minute, is this really true, before they repeat it to a hundred thousand people? And they won't take care. So, in some respects I understand why public information officers grow the reservations that they do and the reticence that they do when they operate. But some take it too far, some

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make it a blanket. Just ain't gonna happen. The more professional ones make a distinction. This is not unique to our little culture, the PIO/reporter culture. In cops, some have street snitches, and some are more reliable than others. Any cop deals with a number of state attorneys. Some are more effective than others. It's the human condition.

And so, you think they have mixed reactions in the way that journalists treat them in return? Do you think that they feel treated fairly the other way around?

By and large. I mean, they could all tell horror stories of somebody who got it just flat wrong, or there is a funny one from *[a law enforcement PIO acquaintance]*. One of these guys ... there were two of them, and they had been out playing with, the rub was, they had some real high-tech gear that a federal grant had procured. I think there was maybe a robot, which is useful for a hostage situation, put cameras on them and whatnot, and I don't know, some night vision wear and, this reporter, was, insisted on calling them toys. Which is a natural enough inclination. Except, they asked her not to. They said, this stuff costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. We would really prefer it if you wouldn't call them toys. I don't know what happened. What they said happened, was she seemed to go out of her way to use the word repeatedly in the story that she eventually broadcast. And almost made light of boys and toys. And, they were, needless to say, very, very upset. So I asked, whatever happened to the reporter? And they said she got fired when her contract ran out. She's on the beach as far as we know. Out of a job as far as we know. But part of it was the flack the station had gotten from them, so, and these things come around, they come back to you.

Especially if you're going to sit in the pond, and most people like to sit in this pond, it is a very attractive place to work. It really behooves one to be sensitive to others, especially if you're going to work with them repeatedly.

Cops need to remember, and every now and then it comes back to them, that they like to think, get in the mindset, that the media is always coming to us, always coming to us, always coming to us. They never stop. So they think they are the grantors. While A) what they're granting belongs to us. It's not theirs, they're public officials. Everything they touch is public. They have the public interest. A reporter has no higher standard than any other citizen, except they happen to have taken on a societal role when they represent others who may have an interest, then they share the information. Law enforcement, frequently, has an interest in getting information out, in using the media. Or accessing the media. And so, what they teach at this week-long course that they have, remember it is a two-way street and remember to use the two way street. Just because you're usually going one direction on that street, answering inquiries or whatever, it is in a department's interest to get some coverage of a good arrest. Of somebody who was a problem or was related to, who has been apprehended. It's

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in their interest to show that they're doing their job. It is in their interest if they need information from the public, to give us a holler, police are asking for information on who this man is, a bank robber whatever, if you recognize this man call Crimestoppers. It's a two-way street. It's a big city, we're not exactly looking for stuff. Generally speaking, there is enough news to fill up the time.

Yeah. We actually had, some of us reporters one time, watching a city council, thought that Sigma Delta Chi should do a survey and rank them. Because we had a couple in mind that ought to go on the bottom of the list. I'm thinking of, it wouldn't be a peer review, it would be an industry review. Of course, we didn't do it. There are attempts to reach, when a PIO is persistently problematic, usually somebody from management will try to go see the *official* himself. It's happened in *[local county]*, it's happened in *[local city]*, recently, that they've got problems with the new PIO. And I don't know how high up in the food chain, but they went up to express their concerns.

Does that make any difference?

Usually it does. To a degree. But you always have to bear in mind, is that person you are having a problem with reflecting his or her marching orders? Or are they incompetent? And you've got to remember, if you criticize somebody, you have to work with them again. They're not going to be as warm and fuzzy as they were before.

Usually if I have a problem with a PIO, I'm not real shy about stating what it is. Obviously, diplomatically. For a reporter, a lot of reporting is diplomacy. It's just knowing how to talk to people. How not to, reading books on how not to anger people unnecessarily, effective communication, I love that term. Effective-- something happens because it occurred, and hopefully what you wanted to have happen. Something you could anticipate. But that's a lot of what reporting is.

APPENDIX B.8

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: Newspaper Reporter

It has been a good experience overall. I think they've been informative, timely, especially for deadlines. My deadlines are different from TV, but you know with the internet, ... you know our deadlines changed, you want something on there immediately, for instance with a murder or a breaking news story, announcing, they want that up there as soon as possible on the site. So I think that their access to information has been good, I guess, I think overall that they basically have some understanding. I don't know that they have experience, as, due to their background, for instance *[law enforcement agency 1 and city agency 1]* I don't think that they hire people who studied public relations. Is that a positive or negative? I don't know. They obviously were aware of the police work. For instance, the main spokesman for *[law enforcement agency 1]* he worked up his way in *[law enforcement agency 1]*. He wasn't a public information officer before. ... It's interesting that they gave him that position. I think he's a lieutenant now. ... Now, is that a negative? I think there are sometimes that they don't, I guess, realize that our deadlines are what we need. I think there's, I'd like to give you some examples.

You know, my feeling is, and I really experienced this with *[law enforcement agency 2]* more than *[law enforcement agency 1]*, the reason there also could be that I was covering *[law enforcement agency 1]* so I had a rapport or relationship with them over a long term, whereas *[law enforcement agency 2]*, I would come in when the person who did their job was off on Friday or Monday, then you know would call me and have it covered. So my feeling is that I think at times, they didn't or don't understand the difference between print or TV, and they were very, ... as soon as TV came, it would be different, like 'let's go to TV and tell what we need to tell,' and obviously to me it's not easier, but the information needed on TV was who, what where when why and how, and that was it, whereas, I need that information, but I also need detail. More detailed information, and you know, and when you ask that, 'well I need this,' sometimes, not that they were reluctant, but they made me feel like I was being difficult. It's not like I was being difficult, it was that I was doing my job, and trying to create a more comprehensive story. I think that for the readers reading it, he or she wants to get that information, the lights were off, the person was asleep, the person had their back to the door, it's like, very minute detail, but it paints a picture. People

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can see that. People can visualize that as they read it, as though they've been there.

I have a good example. When Dwight Gooden got arrested on DUI charges ... I covered that. And my question was about the bottle of beer they found in the cupholder in the car, and my question was, what beer was it? And they were like, and I think they said it was Michelob light. That's not a direct quote, and I can't remember now, and then I said how much beer was in it? Well, I never got an answer, and the response I got from them, from a PIO, was that 'why are you asking that?' They didn't argue with me, they just kind of like 'why are you nitpicking?' That's not a quote, but basically that was the response. I remember asking a couple of other journalists, because I really felt uncomfortable about it, and I said, 'I asked this question, and was I wrong to ask that question?' and they said 'no, that was a great question.' And still to this day I felt it was a good question. And I never got an answer from them. And the spokesman, at the time, made me feel as though I was being nitpicky, that I wanted to know every detail. And I thought that was unfortunate, because I think it was interesting in a crazy little way. What if it wasn't Dwight Gooden? What if it was an accident with a very serious death, a DUI accident, you know, I'd be interested to know how many beers were in the car, or stuff like that. I think the question was quite valid. I didn't want a specific number of ounces, eight ounces of beer left in a 12 ounce bottle, I wanted like, it was half-a bottle, it was empty, that's what I was looking for. I thought that was kind of uncalled for, and I thought it was a poor, that happened rare. But when that happened, ... it wasn't a couple months ago, you know that was a year-and-a-half ago, it stands out. My point is that those things happen rarely, the response that the PIO had, but when it does, it obviously stays in my mind. I don't forget it, and it still leaves a bad taste in my mouth. And I don't think I would do that, I don't think I would do that to somebody.

[Referring to encounters with corporate or nonprofit public relations practitioners:]
And there, if you ask me, and if these people landed on me I wouldn't know them. But if you asked me what their background was, I would say these people have college degrees in public relations. Whereas opposed to the ones that I work with in *[law enforcement]*, they have degrees I think, at least associates degrees, but I don't think in public relations. And I think there's a difference. There is more of a professionalism from, you can tell, but they were like, call me anytime, here's my cell phone. Now the stories are a little different when I'm calling them. ... I just thought that they were very forthcoming, not with the information, but they were very available. They make themselves available. ... Not that the cop ones aren't, they're very accessible. It's just that they seem to want to, they're more professional, experienced, I'm not sure. But it did seem that way. What is it, they practice their craft a little better, this is a customer service, the media is your customer. This person is a customer that is writing something

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about your company, about your organization. It's a sensitivity, I guess that's the difference. There's a sensitivity that they know. So I think, and I don't have an example.

As far as getting information, they were frank and said I can't tell you that, I just felt there was more professionalism. It's not that I'm coming down on the *[law enforcement agencies 1 and 2]*. I think they do a fine job, they really do. I think they're accessible, they respond incredibly well. You could call them at any time and they would call you back anytime. Anytime, there was no hesitation. They are very good with giving information. Obviously, the difference here is there are legal matters, there are certain things they can't say, a pending trial, things they cannot say. That's understandable. I think my biggest complaint is what I told you about. I think in four plus years of covering cops, that only happened a handful of times. And that's rare. But sometimes, they are insensitive about detail, but overall they were very good, and try to build a warm relationship. They tried to create a fair and open relationship. There is a different of approach and opinion, the people at *[other agencies]* just more professionalism. They studied journalism, they became a spokesperson later on, they have a sensitivity to what people need. And I think there is this feeling that when TV comes, it's easier, just tell them this, answer the questions, they're on TV, there's a little stardom, but with newspaper it's like the old media that can't seem to die. I don't think they're feeling that, I'm just exaggerating. But you see what I'm saying.

So your issue with professionalism is more of a government PIO thing, or law enforcement, or educational background?

I think it's education. I think it's also a different form of public relations, people *[in law enforcement]*, aren't, don't have a background in public relations. The other people are more refined. It's also a different subject matter. You're talking about somebody getting shot. I don't know if you think of this but police work is more blue collar. Whereas someone from *[corporate agency]* is more white collar. Not that the work that they're doing isn't white collar, PIOs at the *[law enforcement agencies 1 and 2]*, it is white collar work, but there is more of a refined. They're more refined, I felt. Did they give me all the information I need? Do they do their work well, yeah. I felt they were very informative, and I think that they always contacted me when I needed them. Which is what I need. I need information, I need it now, and I need you to deliver that information as soon as possible. There is not one that didn't give me information. ... There's only so much information they can give. Sometimes they think I'm asking questions from left field, and that's what in they're mind "why is he asking that?" They don't say it, but I can sense it. I think they wonder 'why on God's earth is he asking that?' And again, it goes back to the detail. I'm trying to extract what I'm doing for a daily story ... if I'm dealing with an in depth story, I need detail. And I think that's my only gripe. I need that information.

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No, because they were really good about contacting me. I have an open mind, they always call me back. I would call it from organization to organization or individual. I wouldn't broad stroke it with a large paintbrush. This is it, I've worked with PIOs from *[law enforcement agency 3 and city agency 2]*, they'll return calls, and stuff like that. And each agency does it differently. I'm not sure how other agencies do it. ...

One thing I don't expect from them is to give me information like tips, never expect tips. I never expect sources like "Deep Throat." Some people have it, and they never did that. They never told me what other media was doing, never. I never really asked. I wasn't that type of person. Here's what I'm doing, this is the best I have, and this is the best I can do. If someone beat me on the story, I'd just deal with that.

I think they're fair, I think they try to get information out. Sometimes they have press conferences the morning of, 9:30-10 a.m. this morning ... and I'd be checking at home my messages just to make sure. I'd think that was weird, give us the day before, but they'd say 'press conference today.' I don't think they tried to throw people off, that's their style. It's cops, so things happen at the moment. And that's how they want to do it. They don't want things out too early. All fair, yeah, I think they are fair. They are as accommodating as possible. They gave out as much information as they could. I don't think they're slanted, sometimes they can make you feel that way. Here's an example. There was a case, I'm trying to remember it, ... a big case, a huge case, and the competition was pretty heavy duty. And the *[competition's]* reporter, she's not there anymore but she was really good at getting access. And sometimes she snaked her way into the *[law enforcement agency's]* stuff. And there was some document in a personnel file for a police officer that was involved in a shooting. And I wanted the internal affairs report, and I was looking through this guy's stuff, and I would think, there's no internal affairs report, then they would say that she's taken it out and given it to the *[competition's]* reporter. They should have said to me, the internal affairs report is also available in that room. I didn't have to go out of my way asking about it, when they knew they gave it to another person. It was very frustrating and made my job more difficult than it really needed to be. And I think that sometimes when you're not, if you don't ask for it, they're not going to give it to you. There is no guidance. Which is part of why I ask 10,000 questions too, because if I don't ask the question, they won't give it to me. And if it shows up in the other paper, they'll just say, 'you didn't ask.' How am I supposed to tell you that. It's not that it's frustrating, but it makes my job that I have to, that's one thing that I found out that you have to ask a lot of questions, so back to that internal affairs report, I have to keep hounding them for that, whereas what they really should have done is say 'here's that personnel file for this officer, here's the one for the other involved in the shooting, and here's the internal affairs report, and here you go. There wasn't anything secret, it was all public record, and I thought

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it was kind of typical. They had two PIOs, so they might not have been on the same page. But you see what I'm saying, they could have cut through a lot of red tape, if they helped me nip it right in the bud. Here's my question, can you help me answer that.

It's a matter of making things easier. Be organized. That's what I think it was, a failure to be organized. I didn't take it personally. If this is what we're going to be asking for, be prepared. At *[law enforcement agency 1]* it we want to look at a deputy's personnel file, daily, OK it will be available at 3 o'clock, even when I'm calling at 10 in the morning. You've gotta be ready for these things. You've got to anticipate this.

Yeah, I would trust them. I think they're reliable. And that is the main concern. Is he or she reliable? And I would say, yes. One thing that's interesting, is that they have a concern, I don't know if this is different in the corporate world, but at *[law enforcement agency 2]*, they want you to go through them to get information. And they will direct you. OK, we'll direct you to that person. They want to have the pulse. It became a frustration a little bit, because at *[law enforcement agency 1]* I had a pretty good relationship with one guy, the second-in-command, I had a good relationship with him, and the current *[official]* as well, I had a relationship where I could just call up and say, hey, can I meet you at a certain time, and they would be like no problem and they would meet me. So I had this established relationship. And it got to a point where the PIO wanted, he didn't like seeing the story that I had written that he didn't know I was working on. His complaint was "this is my job" and they want to know 'did you know about this' and I didn't, and this would be very frustrating. My response to that was my job isn't to inform you this is what I'm working on. If I didn't have a relationship with that would be different. If I did a story on another department, I would call him up and say who should I talk to and he would direct me to the person in charge of that department or the second in command. And if a few months later I have a question about the same topic, I would call that person directly because I have a relationship. It was very logical. It got to a point in a meeting where this *[official]*, I had known for a long time, years... I had story ideas I would pitch to him and go interview him, it got to the point where the PIO would have me contact him, who would setup the interview, I would go to the PIO's office, he would walk me to the *[official's]* office, then he would sit in. He couldn't complain about what I had written about, there was never a complaint of what I was writing, or concern of what I was writing, he wanted to be in the know. He didn't want to see in the paper something he wasn't up to speed about.

I think they trusted me, I mean, granted, I did have some issues, I can't say that every single time I wrote a story that it was perfect, but I think that overall, they're sensitive to. I think they feel good, at least with my work. About the media, I think there are some people in their minds they say, 'get this clear

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with this person because last time they...' or 'that person really jumps the gun.' I'm sure they know the different personalities and they know how to, not how to, but how to approach the person and whether to trust them. I think that overall it's pretty good. I felt like, they know they need the media too to, it may be a person missing, they need to get that information out there. Or if they failed, there are a lot of good stories that they don't promote. They have stories out there about their departments that they don't know how to promote them. This is a very good story that we need to tell TV or newspaper or internet that this is happening, or this is a concern, or issue, or this is someone who is doing good work. I don't think that all media is bad, that's a myth too. There is a lot of negative, I don't know why, I guess that's what people want to read.

I'm sure there are really good programs out there that they don't promote. *[Law enforcement agency 1]* did give me some tips, some ideas, this homicide that's unsolved, that's three years old, it may be an interesting story. They wouldn't give stories to write, they'd just say, check this out. Not flagrant, there are probably some really good programs, some grants they're receiving, we've got a grant to do this, a grant to do that, that could be really interesting stories. A grant, or a certain way that they're doing speed control. I don't feel that they would do that that often. And I feel that's an opportunity missed. I really do. But again, that's the professionalism part I'm talking about. They don't see it, they haven't practiced outside of law enforcement. Look what we're doing, look at what we've done, then again, that may be another form of public relations, outside of government, or law enforcement.

APPENDIX B.9

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: Television Senior Reporter

To start off generally with kind of my philosophy of that relationship, my perception of that relationship, it's an interesting balancing act because you develop relationships with these people, but you also hold these people accountable as servants of the public, they work for you and me the taxpayers, and they have a responsibility to be forthcoming with information and property that belongs to the taxpayer. And of course there are all kinds, you've got police agencies that need to protect certain kinds of information because they don't want to compromise an investigation, and I think we're a little more forgiving sometimes with information that they say they need to uphold than we would be of, say, a county commission or city council. But, there is the, again, that delicate balancing act that you want to perform with holding them accountable but establishing a relationship. I think that all too often, and I'm guilty of this, we have relied way too much on the PIO or the public affairs officer, as a conduit, and not gone someplace else.

There is a public information officer [*a local county*] that is pretty much the thorn in the side of just about every reporter in the Bay area. ...It was years and years of agony in dealing with them, I found not only less than forthcoming with information, I found them at times to be actively misleading. I found them to be fairly incompetent, I found the personality to be difficult to work with, after many years it got so bad that when there was a new [*elected official*], we finally had to go to that [*official*], and a group of reporters in the market, television, newspaper, radio, assignment editors, and as a body complained. I think this happened several times over the years, I happened to be involved in this one. The [*public official/PIO supervisor*] promised—this was a new [*public official/PIO supervisor*] who really seemed to be showing integrity—promised that he would force this person to be more forthcoming. So that's on that end of the spectrum. On the other end of the spectrum, I think you've probably anyone whose been in this market for any period of time, would probably hold up [*former law enforcement PIO*] I think they hold him up as the model of what you would want in a public information officer. [*He*] used to be a television reporter. ... He was somebody who clearly got it. If something really bad happened in [*his agency*], you would call [*him*] and he'd say, you know what, we stepped on our tails. We made a mistake, we're just going to fess up, we're going to give you what we have, and we're going to move on. He was never critical of the department, he was walking this amazing balancing act between being forthcoming and being honest, and getting along with reporters, while at the same time always being loyal to the

Appendix B.9 (Continued)

police department. So I think that's the range, those are both ends of the spectrum.

I think that when they make a promise, that most of them that I have dealt with, and trying to think of beyond this market, but let's talk about the 12 years that I have dealt with them in this market, I would say if they promise to do something, they often follow through. This is an interesting way to handle things, though, if you call them about something, and they may say, 'yeah, yeah, I'll get back to you,' and they don't. They, I think what happens is, they get a hundred and fifty calls from networks, national media, local media, on a variety of issues, and they kind of do a little triage, and say, well, *[interviewee's name]* needs some numbers on this, and I'm not going to be able to get back to him. But if they made a promise, and they know that I have a deadline, I would say most everybody in this market about delivering on a promise.

Most of them are smart enough to know that if they make a promise, they're only going to make it if they can deliver on it. Of course, it depends on what the request is, but again, there is an enormous amount of media scrutiny in this market. You have two major daily newspapers here, you have I don't know, about 7-8 different television stations including Spanish language TV, cable television, ... the network affiliates, so there is an enormous amount of scrutiny here, so usually by the time somebody becomes an important public information officer for an important agency, they pretty much have the competence and the smarts to know that if they make a promise it is one that they can fulfill.

It's funny, if you get a new one, they, you can tell, some of them take time to get up to speed. There was a new public information officer at *[local law enforcement agency]*, it was clear that they were not ready for the rigors of this market. And it showed for a long time. But, many of them quickly get up to speed and understand the demands of the market, and my argument in sometimes demanding information from a public information officer, is that they don't owe it to me. I am making money everyday, they don't owe me ... information. They owe the taxpayers of this county, this city, the information. And that's why I get so passionate about it. They're not withholding information from me, they're withholding information from their bosses, the taxpayers.

Does that affect what you think about the whole profession?

No, it does not change the way I feel about the whole profession at all. It does affect the way I think about that entire agency, because I wonder, that that public information officer is obviously an extension of whoever is running that agency. So if they're withholding information, if they're standing in the way of us getting information, if they're misleading us with information, what messages are they getting from their bosses? What is it that, how is it that the agency as a whole is running its business?

APPENDIX B.10

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Journalist: Wire Reporter

I have probably the full range of relationships, everything from the professional and cordial, where we enjoy each other and enjoy talking to each other, and it really, there is no pattern to it, it is so much about whether personalities click. I mean, I have had good relationships with people who were terrible public relations officers, and bad relationships with people who were the best at their job. It's just a personality thing most of the time.

[Describing a good experience with a state agency PIO in Tallahassee:]
He would answer phone calls, he would answer your questions promptly, he understands that's our job and our role, he handles his job with a good sense of humor. He understands exactly what we need to do to do our jobs, and it's not personal. He expects the tough questions, and would probably be disappointed if we didn't ask them. And that's the kind of, we have gotten along for years. Even though over the years, there have been some times that I have had to call him up and I have had to ask him questions that I know he didn't want to answer, and made his boss look not just bad, but horrible. He has never once been nasty about it, or vindictive, or not refused to take a phone call, or not wanted to talk to me, even if there were times he didn't want to talk to me, he never acted that way. He never said 'you're just trying to get a story' or never done any of that. And most of the public relations professionals I've worked with I think they understand the nature of our job, and the nature of their job, and they work in an arena where they're going to get tough questions and they're ready. They don't want to take those jobs and then say, OK, I'm working for an organization or firm or state agency, and handle a serious particular matter and that there's going to be questions about what we're doing and that's there's going to be scrutiny, but I don't want to ask questions, He does not take it that way. And I really recommend you talk to him. He's one of the best I've ever worked with....

Regardless of what was going on ... he would always take your phone calls and answer your questions, and never took it personally, even if it reflected negatively on him, because he understood the nature of what we do. We cover government agencies and public policy.

Part of it is just personality I think. They don't consider a reporter asking tough question a threat, where as there are a lot public information officers who take it as a personal attack, or who need an explanation about something that

Appendix B.10 (Continued)

kind of looks, there's probably a perfectly reasonable explanation for it, but it doesn't look exactly right, and they get very defensive right off the bat. They take it personal, or they think it's a personal attack on their boss, it's nothing but a fight from the minute they pick up the telephone.

I'm not going to name names. I do need to work with them, but they know exactly what I feel about them, there are people working in law enforcement particularly. And I've covered both government and law enforcement, and I think this crops up more in law enforcement in terms of stories, involving shootings, or if the police chief is or is not doing this, or is there proper protection, or citizens complain, and it's very, you're literally dealing with issues of life and death. It's the heightened emotion when you're dealing with stories with police in general, and police in general, tend to be emotional, and the reporters who cover crime tend to be ... it's a very aggressive environment where emotions are almost always running very high. And there are people, the public information officers in law enforcement, who take almost any question as a doubting of their agency's ability to do whatever it is...they don't like reporters asking for public records, they don't like reporters asking for certain details, they don't like reporters asking them to further explain, it's kind of like what we tell you, we tell you, and that's it. It's not an attitude that lends itself to a long-term working relationship. So you take it, in situations, well, when there is a big incident or event going on, you need information and they like to pretend like, you'll get the information to you when we give it to you, they want you to be working on their time schedule and take the information they give you without asking any follow-up questions, and that's it.

And to a certain extent, in the agencies where this is occurring, it's a reflection ... they're not comfortable with reporters, they're not comfortable answering questions about what's going on. And it just makes for a bit of, they think you treat them unfairly, we're always out to find scandal, we're always out to make the department look bad, and we don't understand what a dangerous job they have, or what a difficult job they have. Which in some cases might be true and in other cases, if you've got a reporter that's been covering a beat for a while, or who has been covering law enforcement for a while, that person knows exactly what the challenges are. And in this one particular agency that I'm thinking about, there's even a situation where I've seen public information officers come and go out of that agency, and you know they're a terrible working relationship while they're there, and then they go somewhere else, which is a terrible reflection of the agency. And I think what happens, you have the person who is the spokesperson or public voice for the agency, they work for an individual and they transmit that individual's culture, and it's not that they as an individual have problems with a reporter, their boss's have the problem with the reporter writing the stories and they're yelling at their public information officer going 'why are you letting this happen?' When the public information officer doesn't *let* anything happen.

Appendix B.10 (Continued)

So that's a lot of it, there's all these sort of different variables that cover it, and there are actually these people out there who just don't like reporters. And they buy into the stereotype that reporters are always looking for a scandal or always making people look bad, you know we earn our stripes by bringing people down, and that's just how they see reporters. They don't really know reporters. They've never gotten to know journalists that have developed a professional relationship. They've never gone to lunch with them, they've never sat down and had a cup of coffee with a reporter, they've never just chit-chatted 'what did you do this weekend,' they don't know anything about this individual. They just march right to that stereotype that 'you're the type of person that's ready to pounce at any moment and you're just trying to bring this organization down so that you can get a promotion.'

Well a lot of the people that I've dealt with over the years, when I call them on the phone, the first 5 or 10 minutes are, 'how are the kids, how is your golf game going, or how's that house you're working on.' It's a very cordial, personal relationship. And then we kind of get down to business. I don't want to be one of those reporters that starts shouting questions and they get really defensive. That's not how I work, and I'm not sure that that's an effective way to work. I've always tried to get to know the person, particularly if I'm dealing with them a couple times a week, or in some cases every day. Sometimes a relationship will go on for years. There's other spokespeople that I talk to every six months or once a year, and when I call them they know I'm calling to get information. But it's a chance to catch up. You've got to be personable and professional. And that, I've found over the years, helps ease that relationship. So when you are calling about something for a particular story that's not going to make their boss look good, or it's going to bring some heat to their organization, they put it into context and say, she's not, she's OK, she's not this drooling attack dog coming to get me and my boss, trying to bring us down to the unemployment line. Which can happen, because if the boss goes down, his upper staff is going down too, including the spokesperson. Those people almost never survive. So I can see where they get defensive.

So you do a lot to try and foster the relationship?

Yeah, and once that door is opened, for the great majority, I've rarely run into anyone who doesn't want to have that kind of relationship. Once they see that you are a nice person, they want to be nice back. And I think that's on the reporter. I think that's our responsibility to offer the olive branch, because we are the person who is coming at them.

So you don't think they try to attract coverage?

Yeah, some do. There are some consummate professionals at that...battering us up. Yeah, and those people, we know it. We know they're battering us up. We know that they don't really like us *that* much, but I respect that. They're doing their job, which is to get the best possible press coverage for their organization. Those people exist more so in the business world than in government. Or within individual political, something like a spokesperson for a

Appendix B.10 (Continued)

mayor, or a governor, or for an individual as opposed to a spokesperson for an agency. You see that a lot in political campaigns. See, a well-run political campaign has a press secretary who finds out who are the reporters covering it, goes back and reads what they've written, knows all about them, and develops a relationship with that person and butters them up for the best possible press coverage.

If they say, I'll call you back by 3 o'clock with the answer, yeah, generally you can rely on that. I don't know, I think a lot of them are smart enough not to make too many promises because it's not totally under their control. A lot of them I know, only release the information they're allowed to release. They have bosses they have to answer to, and their bosses expect them to do what they say. So it's not that they go out of their way, there have been situations where a public information officer went out of his way to deceive me on a story. But that has only happened once or twice since I've been in this business, which has been nearly 20 years.

What happens when a PIO does something like that, or does something that..

Oh, there wasn't much of a relationship there before, but it destroyed any type of relationship I had. There was a lot of yelling. A lot of yelling on my part, my boss got a hold of him, and talked to his boss, and we take that serious...I mean this was a person who was working for a government agency. It's not like he worked for a private company. He had a duty to release this information, and we had specifically asked the questions.

So, yeah, it does destroy the relationship. In fact, if the deception was ordered by the individual's boss, then, I wouldn't use the term hell to pay, but that's what happens. I mean, they're, if reporters get the sense they've been lied to, out-and-out lied to, to them that says that this is an organization that has something to hide, and I'm going to find out what it is. And that just gets you going. It gets your...your watchdog sense is just going. You know, if someone is lying and has something to hide, you work extra hard to find out what it is. And that is why I think that most public relations professionals know that lying to a reporter is about the worst thing you can do. And eventually, it's really hard to keep a lie going to where it's not going to get found out, and when its found out, not only is that reporter going to be on you, but probably more, because reporters talk with each other, and once the press corps gets a sense that there is something going on that they want to hide, then you've got 5 or 6 reporters trying to find out what it is. It's a lot to deal with.

If you're asking for very routine information, or if you want some figure ... if you want the number of ... cases last year, that information is compiled, it's in their quarterly report, it's in a variety of forms. It's very easy for them to just go and get the information.

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...There are some public information officers who either put it off, or kind of blow you off, or they want you to call back again and then they'll get the information. There are, as in any profession some bad ones. But if you're asking them for something that might be a little more complicated than that, it's leading to something that's part of a bigger story, that the agency doesn't want out, or something their boss, or maybe not their boss but someone below them is blocking the information, I think reporters understand the realities of the workplace. Public information officers are not always free to give the information that we request. They may go to the department head with the information and that person is stalling them, or giving them a hard time, or asking them why they're targeting that information for the reporter, or release that, or even flat out... I mean I've known public information officers that were openly deceived by their own organization, they are told that information doesn't exist when it does, or that it wasn't compiled, or it's going to take us three weeks to get that information. That's not their fault.

You don't depend on them to do it. Number one, it's good to know that if you cover an agency, and you cover it on a regular basis, it's really the reporter's responsibility to know where the information is at. To find out how an agency measures its own performance. What documents are generated on a regular basis. Who knows what, who runs what, who controls which areas of responsibility. You don't just put it on the spokesperson to get the information for you. If that is the protocol to go through them for the first call, then you go to them for the first phone call, but if you're not getting the information you need you go directly to the person who is the head of the department where that subject matter is handled. And it's, if they don't want to publish it, I say the protocol is to go through the press office, but the press office doesn't have this information, you put the heat, not on the press officer, but on the person holding the information. It's not fair just to put it on the press officer. You can't depend on them either, because they have their own limitations. It may be under their control, it may not, it depends on how well you know the press officer and what the working relationship is to decide whether it's in their control or not. Don't wait for them, or you'll never get your stories done.

APPENDIX C.1

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: City Communications Director

I would say as a city, we had a very good relationship with the broadcast journalists, TV and radio, because they used our services in our office to set up interviews, help them on who they needed to interview, they would call us if they needed story ideas, so it was a very good relationship. Now with the newspaper, I would say it would be, in *[my city]* in particular, it was a volatile relationship. Although, it had gotten better in recent years when *[my colleague]* and I convinced the city manager that things needed to be open, we needed to be not responding to every editorial and letter to the editor, we needed to keep an open mind about things, and when there was a problem, we needed to admit our mistakes and tell how we were going to correct them and not withhold information. And once those sort of things took place, I think we had a better relationship with them.

Do you think that the local media treat public information officers fairly?

I think the TV do, I think the TV people are respectful of that. When you're in a town with a very dominant newspaper, I think they look at us more as spin doctors as opposed to a useful resource for them.

I think they're so used to calling in government, they're so used to calling up the person directly that they feel like going to, and going through someone else is filtering information to them. And they feel like they're only going to get the public relations version of the story.

So would they, the TV would use you guys, but the newspaper would contact people directly?

They would contact people directly, so we would ask our senior managers to, if they've had a media contact, let us know. If they've had a direct meeting, please let us know.

Do you think that, can you rely on journalists to do what they say?

Not always.

Can you give me an example why?

Lying. (laugh) I think that you know it's all about readership or viewership. I think if they can get the information they want, they go about it being devious. I mean, I think it varies reporter to reporter. Some are better than others, right now *[a local television station]* is trying to do everything sensationalized to build

Appendix C.1 (Continued)

viewership. There were some reporters that we had excellent working relationships with, so I could trust them when they said I'm not going to do this and I'm not going to do that,

Sometimes we've gotten burned by a story that came out much differently than we were told that it would. They know their assignments in the morning or whenever their shift is, the assignment editor gives them the assignment so they know the slant to the story. So if they tell you, and it turns out differently in the news than they told you it would be, a lot of times, I think they either knew beforehand, or sometimes their editor will change it after they've been out on the field or something, a different fact would twist out, but usually that doesn't happen.

How do you think they look at you the other way around? Do you think journalists feel they are treated fairly by public information officers?

I can only speak for my experience in city government. We always tried to be very forthright with them, if I can't tell them something I tell them I can't comment on that right now, but again I think that they probably felt that we were spin doctors.

Did you ever have any instances where they wanted something that you couldn't give them or provide, or conflict?

Um hmm. [*Specific example deleted to prevent identification.*]... They wanted, whenever there's a legal issue, or someone's threatened to file suit, you can only give them so much until an investigation is closed. And of course, they always wanting more, or they keep trying to use the term, gag order, when the city attorney said you guys ... can't speak any more to the press about this. We had gotten a letter of intent to sue from an attorney, but the [*local newspaper*] chose to call it a gag order by the city attorney to the newspaper, which was an inflammatory thing to say. Rather than saying, we've been advised not to talk about it due to legal reasons.

APPENDIX C.2

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: City Department Consumer Affairs Manager

The media needs us as much as we need them. Some educate what we do better than others.

Do you think that the journalists in the area treat public information officers fairly?

I think that they have a job to do, and I think that public information officers have a job to do. And it's a mutual understanding that we all can't get what we want all the time.

We just might have an issue that we need to get information out about, but they have other more important topics than they have their concept to worry about, and vice versa. They need us for something on camera, and we're just tied up doing something else.

Do you think that they're reliable? Will they usually do what they say?

Well, having worked with the press ... it's not about reliability all the time. You may talk to one person, they have an editor who has an editor, and then you have mechanical errors that can happen on the press itself. So to pin it down to one person isn't fair.

I think they have a job to do, and they probably do the best job they can.

Do you think that they are usually able to do what they say? Are they competent, are they capable doing what they say they will?

I think they're going to, they need to have a long-term commitment to us, just like we need one with them. We have that mutual respect. The bottom line is they may want to give us half a page in a certain section of the paper, but if something else happens, that's out of their control. Be it a hotter topic, editor cuts it, something may happen during the pre-press time, ads could change, whatever. Their overall responsibility to us is fair, as well as, you know, we try to be careful, they call us last minute, we call them last minute.

How do you think that the journalists perceive the way they are treated in return? Do they think they're treated fairly?

I think, I think everybody's pretty much professional, they feel if they've been treated inappropriately, there are certain avenues. If we feel we've been treated unfairly, we can write a letter to the editor, we can call the reporter, we

Appendix C.2 (Continued)

can call their supervisor. And vice versa. If they feel they constantly come to us and can't get what they need, they can go to my boss. They can go to his boss. So I think we're all professional, that we all do the best job we can do. We also know that there is a chain of command and protocol.

Do those kinds of things happen very often, where there are disagreements or problems?

It's the exception, not the norm.

The difference with accuracy, if there is a fact error, if there is 20 when there is really 25, that's a hard fact error. But about how people write, it may not be an error, but how the knowledge we have when we read a passage, we get a different meaning from a paragraph than something who knows nothing about the issue. So, it may not be a fact error, it may not be how we want it written, because everybody has different styles. You just need to focus on the hard errors, you don't need to worry about the semantics as much.

If there is an issue, if I thought they wrote something in the paper that I thought was completely wrong, then let them know. You don't just let it go, if it's going to impact your customers. If they're blatantly misrepresenting what the facts are, yes. But if it's something that, you know, doesn't really impact anybody, and you would rather they didn't word it that way, no. But if it is something that is going to cause concern for your customers, yes. If it's just something that just sets me on edge and doesn't impact our customers at all, it's not necessary.

Everybody seems to think it's all adversarial, but the bottom line is we're all professionals, we're supposed to be, and we're all human, which makes it worse. Because everybody wants to be right all the time, and everybody wants things their way, but the reality is, my philosophy is, if it is something I can just let go, if it's something to kill-you-on-a-dime, worth fighting-to-the-death, if it's not, you can probably let it go.

APPENDIX C.3

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: Communications Consultant

I have gone, one thing that comes to mind, I have gone to editorial board meetings with the city manager and other city officials. And I have facilitated those meetings, sort of quietly trying to ask the questions the reporters aren't asking. And then trying to provide direction to city officials trying to answer what the reporters are asking. So I've done that. A lot of what I've done for the city I've done behind the scenes. I haven't had as much direct contact. It depends on the project. Sometimes the media never knows I'm there. A lot of times they don't.

One thing that stands out to me with this particular client is that ... the primary news entity in that community is the *local newspaper*. And the city ... is a bureau; ... one thing that's significant about that is that frequently, reporters who come to the city ... are young reporters not long out of college. And they are not deeply experienced, and they are ambitious. And if you're a 24-year-old reporter not long out of college, you probably have an ambition to go to Tallahassee and cover state government, or go downtown and cover the bigger municipality, or cover other beats that your work in ... will springboard you toward. And the way you get noticed in a large metropolitan paper is to find malfeasance. And so reporters in this particular case, or in this particular environment are not so interested in covering the sort of mundane events of government. They're interested in finding where the bodies are buried. And so the nature of news coverage there, and nature of the relationship between reporters and PR types, the public information types, tends to be much more pretentious than it probably ought to be.

...I think it's something that's not uncommonly seen in communities that are satellites between the main office of the paper.

Do they treat the PIOs fairly? Well, I'm not sure what you mean by fairly. I think that, I'm not sure how to answer that. Yeah, I guess they treat them fairly. I don't know that there's fairness, so much an issue on that side of the relationship as on the other, in other words, I don't think that you're going to have PIO types leaping to their feet saying 'I don't think you're treating me fairly here,' they're kind of used to being abused, and I don't mean that in a bad way. I mean, I think that's kind of the nature of it.

Appendix C.3 (Continued)

I belong to a newsgroup of former ... reporters and yesterday there was a discussion on there about whether or not you should go off the record with reporters. And a lot of the discussion was that you can't trust them at times, so no one should go off the record. Well, I think that I don't entirely agree with that, but you have to use tremendous care when dealing with reporters who cover them, or reporters who cover anything. Because they may, it's a promise that's easily broken on their part. Because they may say, well I thought we were off the record, but what you told me is something that I cannot ignore. And so, the nature of newsgathering I think to some degree, if you want to be cruel about it, involves a certain level of unreliability. Their word isn't much good sometimes, but I don't hate them for it. There are times when you are told things off the record. If you're a combat reporter, and somebody tells you off-the-record that we're going to sign an armistice tomorrow, you can't not report that. It's such a tremendous weight, so I suppose you could say, this reporter or that reporter didn't keep his or her word, but the PIO has to be smart enough not to say something. And I think that newsgathering is not a profession that relies frequently on the word of the participant.

How confident are you that journalists can accomplish the things they say they can do, and can you provide examples?

That is a good question, because when I left the news media and went to "the dark side" the first time, one of the first things I really noticed was that the poor quality and work performance of the reporters covering *[the senator's]* office. It shocked me, because I had been in the media at that point for 8 or 10 years, and I personally held the media in high regard. And when I went in PR, I kept calling my old friends up and saying you wouldn't believe how stupid these reporters are. And a lot of times, unfortunately that's the case. I think, the fact somebody calls up and says, 'hi, I'm a reporter from the *Baltimore Sun* and I cover government,' or something specific like housing, and I want a story, you are really going in the dark, because this is someone you really don't know if he has 10 years experience and knows government inside and out, or if he's somebody who just came off the police beat someplace and knows nothing about it. There is no standard. You can't say, 'show me your credentials' so you're kind of in the dark until you find out the hard way.

Yeah. I've seen that happen a lot *[in this city]*, and one reason I've seen that a lot ... was because there is a revolving door there for the reasons I mentioned before. The 24-year old person two years out of college is in there, sent *[here]* to get his or her feet wet covering government, and knows nothing about it, and just when that person is coming up to speed on some fairly complex issues, and the issues are, even at the municipal level, fairly complex anymore, just as they're getting their feet wet, they get taken out and sent to Tallahassee to cover the state legislature and some other 24-year-old person two years out of college comes in.

Appendix C.3 (Continued)

Yeah, I think that when I was young, my first job was covering news in government. I was 21 years old ... what they really wanted me to do there was to follow the news there and to follow various issues through the board. So it was really important for me to go to all the meetings, and follow these issues, and I had to get up to speed on these issues involving the ... Housing Authority, and the ... Water Commission, and many other things that I've had to cover. The nature of that has changed a lot. The reporter who covers municipal government no longer follows issues through the governmental process. There may be some of that, but most of what they do is, really an easier, sort of process anymore. Because what they really do now is search for contentious issues and bad guys and villains and malfeasance.

Part of what's happened in the last 20 years, when I say the news media is in turmoil, one of the things that means is that the media is no, really no longer interested in pursuing issues over the long haul. They're interested in what happened today. And a lot of that is, certainly that's true in TV, where what the TV wants to do, is show up, put the tower up in the air, do a standup in front of something, and move on to the next story. And again, I think that the television, more than anything, looks for something visual and looks for something that's contentious. If there is a problem with the fire department, that's great because you can go stand in front of a burning building or people who are dressed funny, and it's good TV. And so that's kind of the nature, and TV in some ways, drives what the newspapers do. I think the TV more often than not takes the lead in coverage, when it used to be the other way around.

How do you think it plays itself out the other way around, do you think that journalists, what are their perceptions of the government?

Journalists think that people in municipal government are stupid. And what's the word I want, they are stupid and the objects of ridicule.

Is that talking about the officials, and the administrators, and department heads, or is that about the PIOs as well?

All of them. Everybody. And I think they have even less respect for the PIOs, because they think that the PIOs are there to make everything look good. Which is true, but it is simplistically true.

TV and radio have different needs when it comes to PIOs, the newspapers, which tend to go into more depth, sort of have to rely on the PIOs to dig up information for them. And that might go into some detail. The TV stations are more interested in calling and saying, I need to have the city manager outdoors in front of such-and-such at 11 o'clock, can you do it? And so the PIO to a TV newsperson is someone who facilitates the movement of human beings. While a newspaper person might say, give me the records to this. Give me the

Appendix C.3 (Continued)

records to that, I'd like to see the e-mail that the city manager got in the first two weeks of February. So the needs are a little bit different.

I think a lot of reporters see PIO-types to be impediments. Even though they rely on them to do the things I just said, they really consider them to be impediments. 'Have the city manager call me.' 'The city manager is a little busy, what do you want.' You know, do you want this or that, do you need the records, 'have the city manager call me.' Well, tell me what it is that you want me to do, the implicit sort of feeling is, you're just preventing me from seeing the city manager. Yes.

APPENDIX C.4

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: County Organization Public Information Officer

We have a different setup for the *organization* than I was used to, I'm used to all communications going through the public relations office, fielding requests and getting the right content specialists involved. ... Now I do work with journalists, mostly outbound communication, we have a calendar of events that we update every week that goes to every journalist that covers any aspect of government or planning, or neighborhoods, or anything, and let them know all the meetings that we're going to be having to that are coming up through the end of the year, and we have meetings every week. And then we do a quarterly publication that we send to the entire media.

We have an excellent relationship with the editorial board, because of what we do, *[organization's purpose and political role deleted to conceal identity]*... so we have very good editorial board relations and we are able to influence and shape public opinion by what we recommend to the editorial boards.

How do you develop that relationship, or can you describe a little more about your interaction with those editorial boards?

It's primarily the place of the director...*[who]* has reached the pinnacle of his profession. He holds an office at the national level in his national association, and his credentials are impeccable. We don't have an agenda ...*[the organization]* was created to be independent. It was to take the politics out of the recommendations ... So, because we are purists, and because our chief executive officer embodies everything that he should, his word is gold with the *[local newspaper]*. And you know, sometimes we are 100% in disagreement with our funding source, and so it is important that we can speak frankly, and not get ourselves in trouble, they request our need sometimes for anonymity, and sometimes they need for credit, it's a really good relationship. It's one that I think that our director has invested a lot personally. It's unusual for someone in my position to not be a direct contact with the editorial board, I'm accustomed to being the point of contact, and actually shaping our message to an editorial board. But in this case, it's not necessary, because we have a CEO who is media savvy, so, we don't plan that much.

Appendix C.4 (Continued)

They [*journalists*] are responsive, they're looking to us and thanking us all the time for making ourselves available, for returning their calls, and for giving them detailed information.

...They have to know that the majority of our relationship is responding to them. Not pushing messages out, we don't rely on them to get our messages out, as they rely on us for background information.

APPENDIX C.5

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: State Agency Regional Communications Director

Print, the relationship, I have my degree in journalism. My background is in journalism. And I was a reporter for print all through college and shortly after college, and so on and so forth. My relationship with them, I believe is a very professional relationship, there are certain boundaries they know they can't go through. Obviously, there are statutes and state laws that they have to adhere to. The ones being in regards to confidentiality ... of services provided to clients, in general. ... So there are obviously laws in place. However, there is a interesting law called 119, which is called Chapter 119 in the Florida Statute. It's one of the most wide public records public information laws in the books in the nation. Which they pretty much can get access to anything that is written if it's not held confidential, if it's not under those particular confidentiality laws. ... So it's a very broad public records, public information type statute.

Working relationship, I have found, that there are some of the most, I should say, professional and thorough journalists in this particular area. Over the summer ... I went up to Tallahassee for three weeks and subsequently to Miami for three days ... and I got to work with all the different types of journalists, press professionals, media professionals across the state. And I could say that I am most comfortable working with Tampa Bay reporters, with the exception of one or two, obviously you always have one or two bad apples in the bunch, but I have found the Tampa Bay media market to be less sensational than other parts of the state. Obviously Miami, they would sensationalize some of the smallest, most miniscule stories that you and I would say, why are they covering that, that's so goofy. But again, it's sort of a piranha tank in Miami. I have found Tampa to be more in line with mainstream media, meaning they are more middle-America midwest type media where, yeah, they're aggressive, and yeah Tampa is a springboard to other media markets, but I have found that they are much more professional than any other part of the state, including those in the panhandle, if you can believe that.

I think they look at us, they should question us, no matter what. They should question what we say to them, they should never take what we say as religion. There are some of us who are extremely professional and extremely upright. There are some of us who will go off-the-record and say, hey, look, so-and-so reporter, you're going off on a tangent, you're going the wrong way, you need to head back this way. Others, like I said with the exception of one or two,

Appendix C.5 (Continued)

for the most part, treat them very fairly. I know we have a very difficult task as public information officers. We're doing three jobs essentially. We're not just trying to take care of in-house, our internal conflicts with management, or with the new administration who may think we should have or present or have a certain message one way, when you as a professional know it's a completely different way, That struggle right there. But you also have the struggle to maintain media credibility, and also credibility with the public. And you do that obviously with your credibility with the media. It's amazing to see when public information officers, either in the private or public sector, but mainly in the public sector, how they come to us and pretty much hand us live grenades sometimes. It's like a hot potato, put a hand grenade or hot potato in your lap and see how you react to it. I think for the most part, PIOs, in and of ourselves, I know particularly those with quite a bit of face time and TV time, become figures and entities where the public obviously puts us with the particular agency. ... And so, I'm obviously proud to see that a lot of our PIOs in this area are females.

Do you think that makes a difference in the way they work with journalists?

I think that journalists, particularly those male journalists, there's a couple of them, I won't name them by name, but are more aggressive with female PIOs. And once you pretty much hold your own with them and do the whole, for lack of a better word, pissing match with them, once you hold your own with them, then they kind of back off. But you have to be aggressive but not quite as aggressive as they are to hold your own with journalists.

...When you're a PIO, you definitely have to have a personality where you can talk to the journalist, but also talk to the camera, and have that soft presence. And again, you're trying to create this public credibility, and that helps it.

Do you think the journalists in the area will do what they say, are they reliable?

I think some of them are, I think that they also too, especially with TV journalists, know the story they are going to paint. They just have to gather the elements to do it. For instance, we had a situation where [a local television station] brought to us a situation, and we were glad to help remedying it. And we were obviously glad to tell them we have remedied a situation ... And [the television station] wanted to come across that they did all the work. When in fact, they brought the problem to us, we already knew about the problem, we were already doing it anyway. And they wanted to take the credit for it.

I think they already have the picture they are going to paint. Radio is a little bit different. Radio is a little bit more objective, in my opinion. You know you have your ... different radio programs, news programs, and ... obviously they want to get the story out there, but they don't have a lot of time. They have less time than TV does to paint a story. And, but with print, obviously you can always tell when a reporter in print, I mean, my opinion, especially with the [local newspaper 1]. You can always tell when that reporter is frustrated with a source,

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just by the way they write it and just, and unfortunately that comes through in a story when it's not supposed to. And it's interesting to see when other journalists pick up the situation. I mean, I had *[another]* reporter call me and say 'I noticed the *[local newspaper 1]* article, and they were pretty rough on you guys.' ... You can tell by the words and the phrasing of the words they use that they were frustrated trying to get the information. And that's to a balance ... you try to accommodate the reporters as best you can with the information you can give them, and sometimes it's not what they want. They want more. They want everything. They want to know everything. And that, to me, is the problem with journalism today and news media today. They want to be right there, part of the discussion, and right there, in the middle of it.

... And it's like some of the most insignificant information overload that we have currently, that's the risk that they're running, providing so much information, they're trying to get so much information, trying to put it all out there, the first ones to have it out there, it's causing this information overload. And some people are just going to tune out.

Do you see that a lot locally?

Yeah, I see that a lot, where they want all the information they want. And sometimes, we just can't give them all the information they want. Because of confidentiality, and sometimes they just rub you the wrong way, where you don't want to help them, and you don't want to bend over backwards to help them.

When you have a public information officer who is a trained professional, who can go out there and diffuse a situation, then you allow someone, not allow—when the decision is made to allow—someone else to be out there in the forefront ... who is not necessarily the best person, who ends up not diffusing the situation and in fact, igniting more little fires around.

It's funny. It's kind of a joke, but there are particular, certain journalists, like *[local television reporter]* who, they don't look at all the facts, again, they have their story, they just want to get the elements to paint the story for them on TV, then they'll run with it. It's not necessarily the most factual information. ... I just kind of let him run with the story and fall flat on his face when another media comes up behind him and runs the actual story.

And does that usually happen? Does the truth come out in the end?

Yeah. *[Local newspaper 1 reporter]* picked up that story and did two stories on it, and had the tape from *[other sources]*, where I wasn't able to get her that information, but she was able to get it through other avenues. See, by law, I can't talk about it, but I can always point them to the direction where they can get the information. And that also helps your relationship with local media, because you may not necessarily be able to give them through your mouth or write it down for them, but you can point them in the direction to go to get it.

Does that kind of thing happen a lot?

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Yeah. Well, I shouldn't say it happens everyday, I would say it happens once every two months or something. And then you can pick up the phone, you call his editor. You bitch at him, bitch out the reporter, then call the editor, very calmly say, that was incorrect, that was inaccurate. And then you decide the next time that reporter calls you, you're not exactly going to be happy to work with him. So.

...You rein them in. And you tell them, don't do it again. And then the next time they do it, you scream at them a little bit...I mean, very professionally, and get upset with them. And then you just decide you don't ever want to work with them again, the next time they call, you just say I'm not working with you, and hope they learn their lesson. And those reporters, I joke with my colleagues and say, I'm going to send them an undergraduate catalog from USF in the journalism department, because it is obvious that they need to go back to school and hone some of their skills. So, but it's out of sheer laziness, or they just can't get someone.

Other journalists say that, I'll get a call from a reporter's coworker and they'll say, 'did you actually say that?' or 'did you actually give them that information?' I'll say, 'what do you think?' Some of them are such characters. Some guys are just characters. And you have to be so professional.

The most unprofessional moment I have ever had with a reporter was when [*local television reporter 1*] got up in my face and started screaming at me, and, like in my personal space. I'd take a step back, and he'd take two steps forward. So we were doing this tango thing for a little bit. And he put his finger in my face, and I just snapped. Excuse my French, <whisper>get your f__ing finger out of my face or I'll bite it off <end whisper>. And unfortunately, he got it all on tape.

Did he...

No, they didn't air it. ...It's just somewhere in some archives. ... He's come back and said, 'I'm not mad at you, I don't hate you, ' You know, and after all that, I had to go back and apologize ... He was the one who was physically...He was in my space. When someone gets that close to me, it's either because I want them to, and that's it. You don't get in my space when I don't want you there. So I told him several times to get out of my space, but he's a jerk.

So did you have any consequences from that, it didn't air, but did it cause a problem?

Not with the, because, he already hates my supervisor, he already hates her. But, I mean, afterwards, I apologized. I cooled off for 30 minutes, then I apologized.

That was your initiative to apologize?

Yeah. And actually, my boss told me not to apologize, and I said, I can't do that. I'm a bigger professional than that. I'm more of a professional, and I have a professional reputation to uphold. And the people who witnessed it, I went and apologized to them and they said, 'that's [*local television reporter 1 name*].' But I did go up to him and apologize, and I did call his station manager and news

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director and apologized to them. And they said 'oh, I know you're under a lot of stress right now, a lot of pressure.' That's putting it mildly.

It's harder to get information up there than it is down here, that was my big surprise coming to Florida, with Sunshine, the Sunshine laws. The broad and expanded Sunshine laws. I mean, obviously ... you've got your freedom of information act, information can get, but I can tell you that it is very easy to get public records down here.

... Journalists think that it is their free card, their free pass to go anywhere, when that is not necessarily the case, especially in this particular agency. There are *[people's]* lives at stake.

If they say they are going to be doing a story, and then they come to you and tell you their angle, first of all, if you have good relations with a reporter and they're trying to do a story, then you could ask them, what is your angle on this, or what's the real story here, so I can have a better idea of what you're trying to ask? If they say, I'm doing this story, they present it to you, and then they ambush you on something completely different, I have never had that happen before. The experience I have had, other than the few in this area who should go back to school, they're very professional, and they're very good at, 'Hey *[interviewee's name]*, we're doing this, oh by the way we're going to do a live shot in front of your building today, just so you know so you're not surprised.' And there are some great reporters who do that.

How do you think the local journalists perceive you or your office, or the public information officers in the area?

I think they perceive them as, I think it's a mix, I think they have a relationship with some of us, they think we have a credibility, I think overall, in general, public information officers in general they view as spin doctors, as liars. And there are some of us who have had to just go, 'That's not the case, we're here to give you the information you're asking for to the best of our abilities.' So, but they, journalists in general view public information officers as 'well it's where I have to start.' It's not that they really want to go through them, it's a courtesy where you need to start, or to get a name to talk to someone. But some of us, we're obviously friendly, but we won't necessarily. I mean, there's a couple of them that I'm close friends with that after hours, we take off our hats and go to each other's birthday parties, but we still have that professional relationship once we go back to work and put our professional hats back on. But I think they don't like public information officers. I don't, and they shouldn't. They should question everything we say and everything we do. And that should be their job. But out of convenience, out of this credibility we've created with them, they say, we'll take it at face value and report it.

APPENDIX C.6

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: Law Enforcement Public Information Officer

I think *[our department]* has a very good relationship. Years ago, people believed that it had to be an adversarial relationship with the media, but we have found that it is not true here with us. I've been in this job for 17 years, working all in the public information office, and I think we have a very good relationship with the media.

This is the thirteenth largest media market in the nation, considering *[description of services]*, makes *[our department]* a whole lot more of a focus for the media. We have, probably the majority of what we deal with are the assignment desk people, because they call in periodically during the day, and we average about 120 calls a day that are nothing but beat checks, or they're monitoring the scanners, and they will elaborate on something they heard on the scanner, we have about 120-125 calls a day from the media.

Probably most of them are assignment desk people, because when you're dealing with electronic media, they have the advantage that they have individuals who can do nothing but monitor the scanners, your journalists for the print media it works a little different because they don't, even though some of them have scanners, they don't have the privilege of sitting right there with it because that reporter may be working a story in Brandon, and then all of the sudden, the downtown office calls and says 'we need you to cover a press conference in an - hour.' So it's a little different there for them. So for your journalists in the print media are pretty directed on what they're going to cover that day. For your electronic, it's at the spur of the moment, depending on what their scanners, or whatever they've scanned in the newspapers overnight.

Do you think the journalists you work with treat PIOs fairly?

Journalists, in general, or as in print or electronic? In my opinion, they are different.

Please elaborate on that.

Journalists, in print media, are, they're more, in my opinion, they're going to do a more accurate story. Because they've got, they can sit down, they have the advantage that they can start at the beginning of the story, they're going to get all the facts, then they're going to do their interviews, and they're going to put in the color, other than just the fact that you've got a body, where it's found, and

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that it's a female. They're going to paint you a picture, the journalist is, and their stories are going to dig, and go into a lot more depth. Whereas your electronic media, 15 seconds. *[Our department]* found a body, on Highway *[##]*, and it's a female. End of story. So I think that your print media is a lot more accurate, maybe because they've got more time that they can devote to a story than electronic media.

So you think it's more just the depth of the piece that allows them to be more fair?

And I think it's the actual reporter, too. There are some reporters that come into a story with a pre-conceived idea. We have one media market that, they have some reporters that that's exactly what they do. They come into a story, and it's almost like it's going to be a bad story regardless, you're going to have to convince them otherwise. They don't come in there with what are the facts, tell me what happened, they come in with a preconceived idea already.

Would you say that's more in the print or broadcast?

Broadcast.

Do you think they, journalists, can be relied on to do what they say? If there's a problem, concern?

I think you have some that are true journalists, that are going to print the facts, and are going to devote the time to it to find out the facts ... There are some in this local media market that, they won't let facts get in the way of a good story, some have the concept that it's close enough for TV, it has to be edited, it doesn't have to be accurate, and recently we have found that there are some in the media market that they're editing stories to make it fit what they want. They will come in and do an interview with you and if it doesn't fit how they think it should, they edit your comments so that it fits their story, which is not always accurate.

Have you ever had an instance where they have taken your words out of context?

I haven't but *[my colleague]* has. He has with one of the local TV stations, they came in and did an interview with them, and basically I don't remember the exact story, but over, during the course of the story, they interviewed him and sat in his office, and said 'what do you think the *[law enforcement officer]* was thinking,' and he says 'I have no idea,' so the whole story was that *[our department]* did this, this, and this, and the only excerpt from the five minute interview they showed was 'I have no idea,' which they took totally out of context, which made the agency look bad, made him look bad. So what we did was we called them, and said look, you didn't do this story accurately, but unfortunately I don't think a lot of them care. Some do, and I don't want to lump them all in one lump sum, and say that they're all no good because that's not accurate. But you have some that are true journalists and do their job well.

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They will not do corrections, and the print media will not do corrections. The only time that you will see a correction in a story is if they have spelled someone's name wrong, or if they misidentified someone. But if any of their facts or quotes are incorrect, they will not correct them. And recently too, you will notice how journalism has changed, the *[local newspaper]* for instance has always had the policy that they would never run a story with anonymous sources, and not identify their sources. And now they are doing that.

... It hasn't directly affected us, but it has made us take a step back and look at the way that we're doing business.

No, a trust level, I don't trust any of them. I use the analogy, law enforcement is law enforcement 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If your neighbor, that you are best friends with, you find out that he is dealing drugs, it is your responsibility as a law enforcement person to do something with that. Journalists are journalists 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A trust level? no. Because, in my opinion, you've heard of people use the term 'off the record?' There is no such thing as off the record, unless you're willing to pay for it, or have your name behind it. That is my opinion. I have been doing this 17 years, I have acquaintances with the media, I have a wonderful relationship with the media? Do I trust any of them? No. Because they're doing their job, and should I trust them? I don't think I should, because I am doing my job. That would be like a doctor giving up something on one of his patients.

Are you confident that journalists are able to accomplish what they say they will do?

Keep in mind that the majority of what we deal with are the ones that work the police beat, the cop beat. The cop reporters. So the majority of what they're handling are your bank robberies, your homicides, your sexual batteries, your stories like that. The puff pieces will come out of where we're going out into the community, like today, we're at the fair inspecting the games. So we let all the media know and invite them to attend. We have reporters that cover other aspects of our office, the internal affairs, I think that most of those are very accurate, because they can come in, they pick up the report after its completed, they have a record right in front of them. So it's not like there is no background that they have to do. I think that when it's in-depth stories, a lot of them, the majority of them I would say, will accomplish what they say they are going to do. You know, or if you're working with them on a feature story or on warrants, or somebody wants to follow an officer around or something, I think that most of them are very good.

I think that as far as this office is concerned, I don't think the media has a problem with the way they're treated. They think they're very well treated and equally treated. We have always had, our motto is, if one gets it they all get it. And they know that. Because, a lot of times a reporter will call and say, ... 'has

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anybody else called about this yet?' and I'll say 'yes, somebody has.' So it's like, you're not the only one. So if I get one inquiry, and it's a story that affects the entire community and public, everybody's going to get it. Now, so, as far as fairness, sometimes I think they complain because we're too fair.

Do you volunteer things to other news organizations if another reporter asks for it? Or if one reporter asks for something, and a second reporter asks for something, they both get it?

It would depend on the story. If I have a reporter that calls in and says '...I want to do a story on prostitutes and I understand you arrested some last night, I'll say yeah, it's no big deal, we did, and I'll give the story to them. But if it's a female that her body was discovered that was cut up... and [local television station] calls up and says can we get it, then everybody's going to get it because it's going to be something that everybody wants.

So you go ahead and send the information to them first.

Yes, and we have several ways to do that. We have the media line, which we update everyday with 8 line capacity, so the media knows that we use it and they love it. So instead of calling us every 20 minutes for a beat check, they call the media line. For instance, it is updated every morning. We have media alert, a system that we have in our computer that the media actually pays for, and its free to us, as law enforcement, it's a computer system that say, for instance, we have a bad traffic accident ... and both lanes are shut down. You know that that's going to be a problem. So we go into the computer and type in that there is a bad accident at [location], traffic shut down in both directions, expected to be closed down for three hours. Boom, we hit one button, it mass faxes to everybody. It beeps on their computers at the assignment desk, immediately they know that there is a message and they've got it in one minute, everybody has it. A lot of us have that, a lot of the public information officers have that. Plus we have fax, plus every press release gets posted to the Web.

So you think that journalists perceive this well?

I think that our office is perceived very well, and I think that this is because the working relationship that we have, because of our availability. That is one thing I have always heard the media say is that we are very available. I have a pager, a cell phone, a home phone, and all of the media has all three numbers, so there is no way that they can't find us. And I return the call within minutes from when I get paged, so I think that they, we have a real good relationship. That they can trust us to be honest and accurate.

I think it (*problems*) makes us more cautious in how we respond to the media, during interviews or in any other way. I think that, from my perspective in 17 years here, that the media has changed dramatically. 17 years ago a bank robbery would have been massive news. We have bank robberies every day and the media doesn't care. 10 years ago drug stories were a big thing. If you confiscated drugs in a drug bust, that was a big story, you had a press conference, and everybody showed up. Now, unless you uncover a semi full of

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drugs, nobody cares. Now is that the media's fault, or the public's fault because we have become complacent with these things? And I think that the media has got an unbelievable job in a sense that society as a whole wants to know what cops do. Look at the TV programs now. Everything you see on late night TV is CSI, Forensic Files, Cops, you know, the District, it's all law-enforcement related. I think that society's perception has changed as far as crime has, so journalists have changed the way that they cover that.

APPENDIX C.7

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: County Communications Director

The communications department is the primary department for providing public information to its citizens, to the media, we don't really have a spokesman per se, we don't really operate that way. We are a very open government, what we strive to do is have the most appropriate person answer whatever issue it is. You can imagine with a government our size, we have 5200 employees, we provide hundreds of services, as I like to say, from aging to zoning, from A to Z, no one person could be a person on everything. So for the media, for citizens, for anyone who wants information, I don't claim to be a spokesperson. If they come to me, what I try to do is, if I can answer a simple question, if we have the information I answer it, if it gets into more detail, we try to find the person who has the expertise.

OK, So you're more of the facilitator, then.

In some things, yes, generally. Especially with the media, when they have an issue they're pursuing, I facilitate finding the answer. We do have an outreach program to the media by providing news and information to private citizens, civic groups and organizations. So in many respects we are constantly sending out information to the public, on whatever topics happen to be of timeliness, or importance. As people need more information, then we would route those to the appropriate person to get the information.

The public information office, which has grown into a much more full-service communications department, and since the very beginning I structured it very much like a news organization. We are basically generating news and information about *[our]* county and government, and as part of that, we are a constant pipeline to the media about what's going on, and they know me, and they know my associates, so there's a good working relationship when they need information. They know, if they're knowledgeable and have covered county government in the past, they may go straight to a person they know is a good source of information for whatever the issue is. If they're not sure, they'll check with me or if they're not getting information they need they check with me. But I think we've established a very high credibility with the media because we operate much like the media does. And by that I mean, our goal, our objective, is to provide information. I don't color it, I don't try to just present good news, facts. My philosophy is that when you are in government, you really can't category news by good or bad news. What is good news for somebody may not be good for

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someone else. For example, if we are building a road, or improving a road, or making a two-lane road a four-lane divided highway, is that good news or bad news? For the commuter who sees that will shave five or 10 minutes off their travel time to work that's good news. For the person who has lived on that two-lane road for 20 years, and has planted oak trees, and has got a nice yard and now we're going to take half of the yard and we're going to put a busy street in front of their home, that's not good news. So it's all in the eye of the resident. So I don't try to categorize into good news or bad news, we just try to provide information. And then it is up to the resident to decide if they like that, it's good information that's coming, or a good project, or if it's not, how they can come to county government and participate in the process and maybe get us to revise some of the ideas. And that brings me to another project that we started years ago that I think is very important. Too often, when government in the past has done a project, especially road construction or building, the only time a person knows about it is when the bulldozer blocks the street or blocks their driveway and they can't get out. ... *[Describes methods of informing citizens about county's initiatives.]* So those are really the kinds of things we've been concentrating on the past few years, keeping people informed, of not only current projects, but what's coming up in the future so that we can get their participation and input.

So how does your relationship with the news media affect all of these projects and goals? Are they another channel, or do you work with individual reporters?

It's a combination. And we have to be careful. We certainly don't want to play favorites. It's not a good idea to just call one or two reporters we feel will give us the best story. I know I've been on the other side for many years as a reporter, and I wanted to be treated fairly and wanted the same access. So we certainly make sure that our information is disseminated, it's on the Web site, we e-mail all of the reporters we know of or who would want us to send them the information so that they get it almost instantaneously. And then if a reporter wants something a little more comprehensive, we are certainly here to help them do that. And as you know, sometimes we'll send out a press release, one reporter may not think it's much news and toss it, another reporter will see something in there and want to follow up on it. So we're glad he or she knows that. But as I said, we have a pretty close relationship with the media, they're really still an important way to get information out. This electronic age that we're in allows us to do more direct contact ourselves through the Web site, through direct mail, through our *[county]* television our cable channel, and other venues, but still we rely on the media to help get the message across to readers.

We've had very few problems. I know from time to time, a department may feel that they've been treated unfairly because of what they perceive was a negative slant on a story, but that's part of living in a glass house, and government is a glass house and everything should be open to the public. And

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we do many things very well, and some things we don't do well. And my philosophy there is that we should always let people know the good projects that we do, but we should pay special attention when we don't do something well and let people know that we didn't do it well and we're going to fix it.

Do you think that the journalists can be relied upon to do whatever they say? Any examples of issues that you have encountered?

We've had very few problems. Once in a while there will be a reporter who did not get the facts right, and was not forthcoming about correcting it. But that's pretty few and far between, and usually they don't last too long. Especially in this market. The ones that we deal with every day have been very accurate, and very open to getting all the facts. And we are glad to work with them. As I said, sometimes certain departments may not be happy with a story, but then probably neither are we if something went wrong, we're not happy about it, but we want to correct it.

So you feel that they have the ability to take care of it if something is wrong?

Usually. Every once in a while, is a reporter will come on the scene and not really have the facts right, but it's our responsibility to get them up to speed, as quickly as possible. That's usually the TV reporters, because they cover such a wide field, that they, many of them really can't, develop expertise in any one area. And sometimes they're so stretched that a reporter may come here to county government and not really know much about government and we need to help them understand the process and who the appropriate people to talk to and why certain things are done. I had a reporter one time call me, and she was having difficulty explaining, and I thought it was a social service issue, and the more she talked, and finally was a little more forthcoming, it was obvious it was a state agency she needed to deal with ... and I had difficulty explaining to her it was the state responsibility and not the county. And either she wasn't from this area, or she was new or whatever and I had a feeling for a long time she thought I was trying to evade the question, when it was just her lack of information about the proper office. But that happens very rarely?

So do you think that most of the ones you work with trust you?

Yes, I think so. I think, I've been here a long time, and most of the members of my staff have been here a long time, and I think we've established a record of credibility. We don't avoid issues, we always try to provide information that reporters need, sometimes the information is incomplete, and I think they understand that we're not hiding, sometimes we just don't have the information to give them.

Well you have to understand that I was 20 years in media as a newspaper man before I came here, so I know that side of the news and information as well as I know the government side. So I'm not as thin-skinned as many people are in

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terms of government. Many people don't understand the role of the media. The role of the media in many cases is to ask the tough questions, is to be a little confrontational or adversarial, and we have to understand that. And as I've said, *[our county]* is a very open government. We follow the Sunshine Law to the letter, and if there is a reporter who I feel is stretching the truth or stretching their side in order to make the story better for them, or more sensationalistic, I don't mind noting that, but quite frankly they're free to do what they want. I always tell them to take their best shot.

APPENDIX C.8

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: County District Public Information Officer

I think I have a good working relationship with reporters. This is one of the most competitive markets in the country, driven by the competition between the *[two daily newspapers]*. ... Even though the public record law in Florida is quite liberal, it does exempt ongoing internal investigations. We have had a few instances where documents are leaked, but in those cases, we have been hamstrung to comment on them. *[Describes details of public record exemptions that apply to interviewee's organization.]* Public record provides these exemptions, but sometimes journalists think that I'm trying to block their access. Not all of them, but some journalists think that good PR is letting them have what they want, they believe in strict First Amendment, but that's not the only amendment to the constitution. We have to follow due process for our employees and the privacy rights of *[district's constituents]*. Most don't see this, but some do.

Fair is a relative term in this business. There are some who resent the existence of public information offices, even though these positions have existed for a hundred years, and there is a long history of this. We are a two-person operation ... for the 12th largest media market. It's a competitive media environment. We get between 150-250 calls a month, which would be burdensome without three people (including our secretary) to handle them. Journalists are usually pretty curious, but they are not curious of how our operation works, and there is a difference between print and broadcast reporters. Our daily print reporters are assigned to this beat zone; they are low maintenance. Over time they develop their own sources. Now initially they will need more help. They will call if they need to get the interview today, and they have daily beat checks. With television news, they are not assigned to this beat, and they have a working knowledge that is less than working from ground zero. They need access ... and it's tough to treat them differently because there is an inbred rivalry between print and broadcast. Broadcast tends to like us better. They are more reliant on us, they depend on us. They have a compressed deadline. The crews come in around 9, they have from 10-5 to do their story, in contrast, newspapers have deadlines that can fall quite late at night. Both are daily deadlines, but the television deadline is compressed. Plus, there is a certain elitism attached to newspapering, that TV is not pure journalism. I used to be a newspaper reporter. But with public opinion, TV news has a smaller share of the market on paper ... the paper may have a circulation of 170,000, while *[local*

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television station 1] has 60,000. That's a quantitative way to look at it. Qualitatively, who am I really trying to reach? ... *[The interviewee's target audience gets]* their news from broadcast, increasingly television. You can watch *[local television station 2]*, or *[local television station 1]* while you are getting dinner on. So quantitatively, newspapers have better reach.

Can journalists in the Bay area be relied on to do what they say?

It varies widely, and it depends largely on the news organization.

Can you provide an example?

...The *[local newspaper 1]* has high ethical standards, to the extent that they will even decline a cup of coffee. So with the competitive pressures, they are quite good. On the other side, there was a broadcast investigative reporter who is an outright liar. She will tell you that the story is more important, with the ... belief that the means justifies the ends. ... But she would cut ethical corners in the name of the public interest, or more likely ratings. ... It's hard to make a blanket statement, though. You'll see, if you do a long-term, quantitative analysis, that there is a marked difference between the two papers, even on the same story. The coverage will be completely different, including where the story is placed. A story will run on the front page of the local metro section of the *[local newspaper 2]*, and then on 3B in the *[local newspaper 1]*. Also, *[local television station 3]* is struggling to gain market share. ... It's a business, and it's a numbers game. I give different weight to different stories and media organizations, and there are as many negative stories as positive ones. A negative story on *[local television station 1]* carries much more weight than a negative story on *[local television station 3]*, since the *[local television station 2]* has a bigger readership in *[the organization's jurisdiction]*, it has more weight than the *[local newspaper 2]*. That's a fine point, but the distinction is lost on the average administrator who has a negative story published about his department and wants to respond.

Does this make a difference in the way you treat reporters from these different organizations, in order of importance?

Well, I try to service them in order of deadline, I think that's only fair. I try not to make those distinctions in the course of processing press inquiries. It is in the post-coverage analysis that I weigh that, because ultimately I have to work with elected and appointed public officials whose reputations are affected by this story, and it affects how we respond, if we respond at all. A lot of it relates to containment. It's one thing to have a negative story from news outlet. But when one story leads to many stories, the problem is pack journalism. It doesn't happen often, but it has happened. For example, last week, with the issue of homeland security, we wanted to get information to *[constituents]* and update our security plan. Every outlet did a story. It was mostly favorable, about the district being proactive, but a few thought we provided too much information, which is kind of ironic.

Are journalists capable of doing what they say, of keeping their promises?

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It's hard to make a general statement. There are reporters that I can go on background with. There is background, where they can say a '...district official,' deep background, where they can only say 'officials' and off-the-record, which they can't use at all. For example, I can say, off-the-record, *[interviewee's supervisor]* is going to Tallahassee tomorrow. He can share that with his editor, but he can't publish that. There have been times when I've given some background on a story. Others wouldn't enter that. It depends on the source/reporter relationship. I wouldn't go off-the-record with strangers, or if the truth has been shaded in the past. ... But in general? Yeah, in general they can be relied on, but it's a competitive market, they are vying for market share, they need a strong product, and it matters what their need is.

Do you think that the reporters think they're treated fairly? How do journalists perceive you?

Yeah, I think so. I can think of a couple instances where I have had an outright showdown. There was one new reporter, and he wanted ... access ... and it was a knock-down drag-out fight. He eventually sent a letter of apology. I know a very experienced reporter who is a friend of mine, where it's a little of a love-hate relationship. There have been times where we'll get angry, that I'm always trying to hold-the-line, and we will go around and around on an issue. But at the end of the day, we both know that we've got to work together again tomorrow on another story. So you can't hold grudges. He will not get all of the information, and say that he is entitled to it by law. But I have become real familiar with the Florida Public Record law at this point. I know when there are changes to it. I think that some reporters think that because of their dominance, they're entitled to more, or even the ones that aren't dominant think that they are. But they're not sitting where I'm sitting. They only think of their story, their station. I have to look at the much bigger picture because I work with them all.

APPENDIX C.9

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: City Public Information Officer

In general, I have a really good working relationship with the media, and I enjoy it, and I think that helps because they don't see me as the enemy. My philosophy, in government, we're required to give certain, and actually most information, to the media, Florida being the sunshine state, so my philosophy is if we have to give it to them, we might as well give it to them as quickly and easily as possible. And so I have a good working relationship with them most of the time. That said, I find the print media a little more challenging than broadcast media, and probably everybody does because they have more time to cover stuff, so they get more in depth and they want more news. They don't go away. So I find, the frustrating thing about it is that it is very time consuming. But as far as the working relationship, I think we have a mutual respect and get along, whatever.

[Describes recent organizational crisis.] And that day I had close to 80 telephone calls from the media and the public, but we fielded 80 phone calls that day, but it could be real busy, and if you have 2 or 3 stories going at once, and the one thing that becomes a little difficult is that we deal with egos, and each of the media people think that they're the most important of media people (laugh). I don't care how many other people are calling you, I want my information now. And so you have to juggle that. Sometimes the easiest way to do that is to take all their names and fax them the news release at the same time, so that you don't look like you're playing favorites. But a lot of the times it is, it's the person who happens to call you at the time that you've got a new piece of information and they get it before somebody else does. You can't blame them for doing that.

Do you think that journalists treat PIOs or your office fairly?

Again as a generalization I would say yes, on balance, I would think that it is, I think that particular people have less respect for the position than others, so I would say I have one or two people, that if I had my choice I would rather not deal with them. I have one, just as an example, I have one person who is fine and wonderful as long as they get what they're asking for, and the first time you tell them no, or I have to run it through somebody else, they go ballistic, pitch a fit, holler, scream, call me names, I've been in public meetings and had the person raise her voice to me in front of other people.

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Is it usually an issue of whether a public record is open? When is it that you can't give information?

If it's a, a lot of time, the press has their own contacts, and in a city or a company, or any entity that is the size of ours, and ... though I'm the designated press contact person, I'm not naive enough to think that the press doesn't have 30 or 40 other people within the city that they get information from. So a lot of times, I will get a call from a media person who says, I heard this, and I want all of the information pertaining to it. That's a very general request, give me everything kind of a thing, and I haven't even heard of it. So, you know, I'm sorry, I'm going to have to check back and get back with you. And they're a little impatient when something like that happens. The other part of that is that when you have people that are not trained to know what information should be released or not, and everybody likes people to know that they know something, that's part of—I've got the inside scoop and I like to show off—it's not unusual that somebody calls a reporter and says, I heard that...the problem with that is a lot of times they haven't heard all of it, they've only heard a little piece of it. And the biggest challenge in a situation like that, is if a reporter gets their story from an outside source, they have gotten their story. They have gotten 90% of their story already. And our job is to balance that 10% of that to the facts. So my philosophy is that if we know something is going to be a story, whether it be pleasant or unpleasant, that we're best to gather all of our information ourselves so that we're the 90% and they get the 10% from the other side. And that's probably the biggest challenge. Reporters are looking for news. Their idea of news and our idea of what's news aren't always the same. But they have a right to it. And that's I think the hardest part.

Do you think that ... they'll do what they say? Are they reliable?

I have to say that all of the people that I have dealt with the exception of one person, one time, I have a lot of trust in them. I think that they are honorable in what they do.

Would you describe further how you came to that conclusion?

A lot of times if people are asking, we have to, in our jobs, try to be aware of the fact that the media work on deadlines, TV deadlines are different than radio, different than newspapers, now with 24 hour news coverage on stations, they have deadlines that run every hour because they've got a news story breaking, at the top of the hour. And so we have an obligation to try to give them information so that they can use it when they need it. And a lot of times that calls for a balance in the system, that they call, and I've got something that I'm not supposed to give this out, let's say there is going to be an arrest at 2:00 this afternoon, we know the police are going out and they're going to be hitting this place at 2:00. Now I can't release that information until 2:00, because somebody might tip whoever they're going for off. I have a reporter whose deadline is 10 minutes to 2 in order to get this thing on the air at 2:00, I have to balance that. Is this somebody I can trust to not use this information before, and like I said, in

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most cases they're very up front about exactly why they're pushing for what they need. And once you learn, once you know the individuals and their system, whether they're telling you the truth or not. I know what their deadlines are...

Do you think that they are able to do what they say? Of living up to their promises?

You know again, I think they're capable of it, I think that it's an individual, question of individual integrity. Most journalists know that their success depends on their integrity. So if they, just like they talk to other people, they know that we talk to other people, and if I get burned by a journalist, they can be pretty sure that the spokespeople for other cities are going to know that I've had a rough time with one of them. And it does make it difficult. They're capable of it. I have had a couple of instances where people have not done that, and most of the time, they don't last, they don't last very long.

Do you think that they are competent in their jobs?

You know, I have a couple of people that I really, really admire in that business, and I hate to say negative things at all, it is uncharacteristic, but I think that the vast majority of them are lazy people who do their job as fast as they can do it, and they get just enough information to put a story together. They're not always, they're concerned with accuracy, but they're not always concerned enough with accuracy to always double check and make sure. I think that may just be a side effect of it being a business, and the fact that they've got to be fast to beat the other person, and dollars are riding on it, but we take the time to make sure that we give the most complete and accurate information. And it still doesn't come out right. (Laugh)

How do you think they feel that they are treated by you or public information officers?

I don't know. I'd like to think that they have the same sense of mutual respect that I have for them, and the feedback that I get in most cases when people call me is that they are calling me because they respect that I can help them. But I do think that they see us a lot of times as an obstacle they have to overcome. You know, their job is to figure out how to whittle information out of us, trick us into saying something that we don't want to say, and they do that a lot. And they do that a lot. They really do. If you watch press conferences, it's like, what a bunch of idiots, they're asking the same question 6 times, and it's not that they're dumb and didn't know they asked the question, they're trying to get you to say something different. They're asking it over and over again and they're going to try to slip up.

We try to keep up on what's going on as a city, and our policy within the city is that our administrators, our department heads, if there is something that is going on that is a breaking story, or something that's going on that even may

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become a story, they're supposed to inform me of it so that if the press does contact us, they don't have to go, "I don't know." The other side of that is, and I've tried to instill that here, that if it's a story and it's going to break, we build more respect by breaking the story ourselves. So sometimes, even if it's not going to be a good story for us, it's better for us to fax out a release or pick up the phone to a reporter and say.

... So it's been a year and a half since I've been doing that, we didn't have a position like that, so for me it's been building a relationship with the media. Most of them like having a contact person they can call. Once I've talked to them, they put my name my number into their cell phone, they know if they have a story they can call me, regardless of what the story is in the city, I'll either know it or can put them in touch with the right person, and it saves them time and they like that. The one particular person I've talked about with the print media does not particularly like that, because she's used to having a free hand and roaming through buildings and talking to people, looking on their desks and snooping and stuff. Now that we've defined a contact, people, more people, particularly directors or administrators, are referring her back to me. So she doesn't always like that.

... Yes it did. Things have gone, I think more smoothly, I think that on balance, our reach in the media has been more equal in terms of negative and positive, so you can't control the fact that bad things are going to happen, and they're going to get covered. But if you have a good relationship with them, occasionally they will take a good story from you and cover it as well.

It's a game, and I think that sometimes it's personal, and I think we need to admit when it's personal, and step back and look at it, but most times, it's just a job. She's doing her job, and I'm doing mine. And I have to say, even though we have our differences, I do respect her and I do know that I have said many things that could have been printed in the paper that would not have been...put me in the best light. So she does have some integrity as far as knowing when I'm, I don't want to say on-the-record/off-the-record because there's no such thing, but when we're speaking for publication.

I've said to this reporter, she'll call me and say, what about this? And I'll say, once the attorneys have it, I don't have any say in it anymore. So we kind of joke around once in a while. 'Let's do lunch, have your attorney call my attorney.' (Laugh.) So that stuff makes my job a little harder. Because I am, I started out as a journalism major. So I, my heart is in the people have a right to know and we should give them anything they want. And that's just kind of the way I feel about it. Some days it's good, some days it's bad, it's all information and people have a right to information. So if I had my way completely and totally, we would never withhold anything and we would never not answer a question. But then again, I'm not a lawyer. I don't get to make those decisions.

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... What I try to do, it's kind of interesting around here, because it isn't just an information thing. A public information officer provides public information, but it is a public relations thing in addition to that. It is a marketing job. And so, it's not only giving out information, it's giving out information in the best light. Letting people know how to answer questions when they get the camera in front of them, and it's sometimes even going, because the attorneys, their job is to fight, and my job is sometimes to convince them it's not worth it. We are going to look better if we give them the information when they ask for it. The difference between the nine articles on [*recent organizational crisis*], and one article, was not giving her the information that she wanted. Had she gotten everything she wanted—which we could not have given her at that time and it was unreasonable for her to ask for it—but had she gotten all of that information at one time, that would have been one article that had everything in it and there would have been nothing to follow up on. So when we refuse to give information, then the story is, not what the information is, but that we refused to give information. That we're hiding stuff, that we become the bad guys and we get hit three or four times instead of once. Most people read the story and don't remember it anyway.

APPENDIX C.10

Selected Excerpts from Interview Transcripts Government Communicator: Federal Public Information Officer for Region

I think I have a pretty good relationship with them. A lot of them I've known for many years, because even though there's turnover, there's still a lot of people who have been here for a while ... there's a couple of instances like that where I have, long-term, known a lot of reporters and stuff. *[Interviewee described work history in Tampa Bay.]* So I think overall, I have a pretty good relationship with the media. They know that I've been here for a while.

Do you think the reporters in the area treat your office fairly?

Yeah, I would say overall, they do. Public affairs is like any other field, there are good ones and bad ones. So I would hope that reporters would not make any assumptions about me, the new ones that come to town, sometimes, usually people will pre-judge when they shouldn't. They base public affairs people on the way they've had a bad relationship with one. What I tell reporters is that if you've had somebody that didn't treat you right, don't assume that all public relations people are bad. Just like if I've had an obnoxious reporter, I'm not going to say that all reporters are obnoxious. And that's one thing that I preach to people here that I've worked with. What happens is somebody's had a bad experience or one-time story, and that's what they think the media is. And what I try to say is day-in, day-out, there's news, they're putting things together, and they've gotta churn out a lot of stuff. So you've gotta base it on the overall picture, just not one bad experience. So what was the question again?

Do the reporters in the area treat public information officers fairly?

I think so. I think that as a public affairs person, you have to understand that the media is *going* to go around you. They're going to try and get more information. They're not just go with what you give them, OK. And I understand that. I think there are some people who go into public affairs and think that the media should only come to me. Why are you going around my back. And what I say, is I expect you to go behind my back, you're doing research, you have to do all of that. But I'll give you what I can give you, and good luck getting the rest.

Do you ... think they take that well?

I think they do, I think they find it refreshing. I think that they run into people in public affairs that only give out a certain amount of information as if that's all you need, you shouldn't need any more. The way I do it is say, here's what I've got, and then, what I always try to do, I've got a little saying, when I can't give information, I give education. OK? So what I'll do is I'll come up with a

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reporter, and they say, well I need some information [*on classified subject*]. So I don't just say, 'I can't tell you that' or 'no way, no comment.' Or, you've gotta be crazy. I just say, look. They have rules ... if I was to tell you ...what they're meeting about, I could literally go to jail. ... I've only been here two or three years, and I've learned a lot about just how secret ... stuff is, how important it is not to release any of that. So I'm talking through to let them know why I can't give them the information. Sometimes the federal system, the ... reporters, they know the system. But then all of the sudden, somebody who is on [*another beat in another location*] is told to go to Tampa and cover [*a situation with interviewee's office*], and I have no idea. ...So again, what I go back to is there's a lot of times that people in public affairs, if they have to be real tight with the information, that there is something they're not supposed to get out, they sometimes get terse, they just tell them I can't say anything. And that turns the reporters off. Whereas I try to say, look, I can't tell you what, but I'll educate you, I'll let you know why I can't. So I think that's how you get the respect and gain their trust. And one other thing I'll mention. When I can tell them something, I work real hard to do that. Yesterday we had this news conference that ... I said, look, the news release and the [*supporting materials*], let's get that out as soon as the news conference starts, let's get it ready in advance. Then it was moved from two o'clock to one o'clock. Then they moved it to noon. So you know, we could have just said well, we'll get it out when we get it out, or we'll wait until this news conference is over. But we worked really hard to make sure to get everything in place the day before and the 24 hours leading up to it. I said tomorrow morning, we need everything in place, and [*once the information was allowed to be released*], we hit the button and everybody got what they needed. But if you were, so I'm thinking of their deadlines and trying to understand what they're going through, so at times, if you could be aware of their deadlines, aware of what they're up against, you can serve them better, rather than just say they'll get it when they get it.

Yeah, a lot of what happens is what I always say is you have to understand what their job is and what they're after, what they're thinking, and sometimes the longer you know somebody, the more you trust them, the more you can work with them and I really don't like to go off the record or give one person something that I wouldn't give the other, and try to be fair to all of them, give everybody the same amount. But obviously, if you've got something as big as yesterday, then one of the things you do is you call the people you know and trust and say, hey, do you know what's going on, are you aware of this. And everybody has a list, there is maybe 20-30 people that I'm going to deal with on a big story. Well the ones that I know and trust, are they at the top of the list? Absolutely. Do they get treated differently? Maybe not differently, but when I have a stack of messages like that right there (*point to desk*) when I walk in, when I've got 80 messages and a lot of calls, I'm not necessarily going to go by the time I got the call. I'm going to say, here's [*local reporter*]. She's pretty reasonable. I know that when I call her she's not going to be screaming and

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yelling, she's going to be polite, she's going to be nice, she's always treated me fair. Who am I going to call first? I'm going to call *[her]*. I'm going to call people who I've built that relationship with. Not because I like them or because we go out and have a beer together, you know what I'm saying? It's because you know that they'll treat you right and treat you fair.

Do you have any instances where someone didn't treat you fair?

It's pretty rare. I think sometimes what happens, and I have a little class that I do on this, about why sometimes reporters are really obnoxious, really in a hurry, and people say, hey, what's wrong with that person? And I understand that there are three things that turns this person into a raving maniac. That if you went out and had a cup of coffee, or you went out and had a beer with them, they'd be OK. But the three things that make them crazy, even the ones you get along with. Number one, deadline. They have to get it done at a certain time. There used to be, in the old days, you had to get it done by the six o'clock news. Well, now it's the 6 a.m. news, or the 7 a.m. news, or the noon news, or the 4 o'clock news, 5 o'clock, 6, so deadline pressure. Competition, they've gotta get it better than the other, they're scared to death that somebody else is going to get that picture ... somebody else is going to get that interview ... somebody's going to beat me on it. So there is deadline pressure, competition pressure, and number three is what I call the chaos. Just gathering news is chaotic. Because you may be sent to one place, when the assignment desk says, no, go here. And then they say, we don't want you live here, we want you live there. So, things are breaking, things are happening, you think you're covering a search story, and in the middle of the interview you get beeped and told, no, you need to go to the fire in Carrollwood. So then you go there and they say, no, *[a local figure]* has been arrested. Call ... and find out what's going on. Now I've got this guy who is behind the story because the competition already has it, we've gotta do a live shot in 30 minutes. So it's deadline pressure, competition, and chaos. Those things turn that person crazy. So I think that public affairs people need to understand, not just public affairs people, people who get phone calls, have to understand and give them a chance, give them a little bit break. Now that doesn't mean that they can be nasty to you, you know when they get nasty and say well, the public has a right to know, you have to give me the news, well I say, it's a quarter to 12, I'm not going to get you a hundred-page *[document]* in 15 minutes. And so I'll say I'll try, I'll work hard to help you, but you've got to be reasonable.

Do you think that reporters are capable of doing the things they say?

Yeah, what I understand is that I'm going to give you the information I'm going to give you, then the reporter has got to take the story from there. And so I try not to say things like, this is the way you should write the story. This is what I want in the story, this is what you need to do to help me. The way I'll say is look, I'll tell you a lot, I'll tell you what is important to me, I'll tell you what I think is important to the public. You have the training and background, so you're going to do what you're going to do, but this is what's important to me. If you can fit it in,

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fine. If not, I understand. So I think that most reporters appreciate that, instead of you had better write this, because if you don't, that really, as a reporter, used to turn me off, when people would say, this is what you need to put in there. Because that just kind of, say, let me be the judge of that. I have more sides to the story, and I'm only going to have a minute and a half, or a number of column inches.

I'll do like background stuff, sometimes, where, (sigh) if somebody ... says, am I getting this? Is this what I think this means...? Then I'll say, let me check ... and I'll fill you in, and I'll say, this is what that means. I may not want to be quoted saying, this is what the *[document]* means, because, I'll explain it, do something technically, say look, I don't need my name in the newspaper. My boss is on TV, he's the one who is talking. So tomorrow morning I don't want to read my name in the paper after somebody's given a news conference, and now all of the sudden my name is in the paper, but I'll help you out, I'll explain it to you, but don't quote me on it. So sometimes I get to do that, and most reporters are pretty respectful of that.

And I would rather have the reporter say, authorities explained, some people love to get their name in the paper...I don't. I've been doing this for twenty years, and if I never see my name in print, that's fine with me. My goal is for the reporter to get it right, to understand it. I'm going to explain it to them. It's not that I just don't want to upstage somebody, I just prefer not to be, I don't want to be the expert, or come off as, 'this is what *[interviewee's name]* said,' but on some simple stuff, it's no problem.

So the problem, here's the dilemma. With print media, you can hear them typing your every word. So I am always, and I think that most people in public information are very, when you talk to a print reporter, you are always very careful about the words you choose. You're very careful about the way you approach things, because you understand that they are quoting you. So I'll say look, I'll explain this to you, but I don't want to be quoted. And most of them will just say, yeah yeah, just help me out here. And then they'll say, that was pretty good, can I quote you on that. Then I'll say, that's fine, we'll discuss that. But TV people, because I was in television and I understand better how they operate, you can talk more casual with them more, because they're not usually quoting you verbatim. And when they are, they want your face and your voice. So when you're on the phone, you're pretty safe. You know what I'm saying? Because a lot of times, they're really struggling to understand it, understand what this means because TV has to cover such a variety of subjects, they don't always have the expertise ... Whereas with the print people, I deal with the same two people from the *[local newspapers]* every day. They know this stuff.

*Do you think there's a difference in how you're perceived by reporters?
How do you think reporters feel they are treated?*

I can really only speak for me, but one of the key things is to make them happy. And they understand you're trying to help them. They'll go, if you talk to
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any person in public affairs who knows their stuff, they will tell you if you talk to any journalist is availability. If they call, you don't wait for them. Even when you know I can't say a word to this person, you call them back and say, I can't speak. Timeliness is the news business. It is no secret that they're on deadline, they have a very time-driven work. So, my thing is, I try to be available, like yesterday, I'll give you an example. I kind of wanted to go to *[an event]* yesterday, because that was a historic event. It would have been pretty cool. But I knew that the moment I walked over there that I would be away from my desk for one hour. And I knew that when I got back I would have 30 messages on my desk, *[my colleague]* would have another 20, so I said, how am I going to best serve the media in my job. ...I need to stay here at my desk and be available, so I did, and the phones just kept on ringing, people kept on asking me questions, but at the end of the day, at 5 o'clock, things started slowing down, my desk was clear, and I was able to go home. I mean, that's a long answer, but availability is such a key thing. If you call somebody back, if I call somebody 10 minutes later returning their call, they're like, thanks for getting back to me so quickly. Being polite, using a sense of humor, all of those little things, I say, I'm a human being and I'm just trying to get through the day. We all have to accomplish certain things. You as a journalist have to put a story together for your boss, I have to give you the information that pleases my boss, we all have bosses, we all have supervisors, if you treat people the way you wanted to be treated, usually you have pretty good results.