

The art of the interview



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THE PATRIOT-NEWS
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

Let's start at the end



Hani Farzai remembers screaming as Taliban fighters broke through the wooden door of her family home in Afghanistan.

She quickly glanced at her father and grandfather, hoping for an explanation. None was offered.

Guns pointed at Farzai's family, as they attempted to pack their belongings into small suitcases.

“Faster, faster,” the Taliban fighters shouted.

Then, a blaring sound of gunfire and the smell of smoke filled the room.

Farzai turned her head from the flurry of bullets. When the smoke cleared, her father and grandfather had been shot 20 times in the abdomen.

Farzai, now a maintenance worker at Big Company downtown, cried as she remembered the night she left her home in Afghanistan to begin a new life with her husband and two children.

What's the story?



- **The story drives the interview:**
 - What is this story really about?
 - What is the conflict in this story?
 - Who are the main “characters”?
 - How will I tell this story?
 - What’s the news peg?
 - Is there a broader truth to this story?

Get ready



- A story can be “fixed,” but no one can fix an interview for you. How do you prepare for an interview?
 - Circle the subject.
 - Do your homework on the topic.
 - Check out the source.
 - Consider the order of your questions.
 - Consider the type of questions.
 - Pre-interview.

You called?



- **Why we love the phone (and shouldn't):**
 - I don't need a GPS!
 - I can type right into my story, then I just add some quote marks and transitions. Done!
 - I can do three phone interviews in the time it takes me to do one in person (and I'm all about efficiency).
 - I can multi-task. Facebook fills in during those long, dull stories.

Hang it up



- **Why phones kill important interviews:**
 - No rapport with the source.
 - No color.
 - Source anticipates that it will be a shorter interview.
 - Very little down time for those fruitful pauses.
 - Source will multi-task.
 - Source isn't likely to trust you or confide in you.
 - No small talk.

Tool of the trade



- **What are you writing in that tiny little notebook?**
 - Write more legibly.
 - Give yourself room to make notes later.
 - Put quote marks around real quotes as they're said.
 - Write a big question mark on pages where you need to follow up.
 - Circle or underline key points in the interview as you go.
 - Have you taken note of person, clothes, room, pictures, desk, notable characteristics?
 - Are you writing everything?

Welcome ...



- **Get the most out of an interview:**
 - Go to the source's home or office.
 - Arrive early.
 - Ease into the conversation.
 - Keep a poker face on dumb/scary/weird/great answers.
 - Work on eye contact.
 - Don't interrupt, unless ...
 - Show that you're prepared.
 - Be mindful of the time.

Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?



- **Think about the types of questions you're asking:**
 - Open-ended vs. close-ended.
 - Opinion vs. fact.
 - Too broad? Or too narrow?
 - Too vague?
 - Why? Why? Why?

Back to the story ...



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What's really wrong?



- No idea what the story would be about.
- No homework.
- Source led the interview.
- Reporter timid.
- Emotional story that's told coldly.
- What do even the best reporters fail at: They aren't comfortable asking questions that they wouldn't be comfortable answering.

Slam dunk or foul?



It was standing room only in Seneca gymnasium Nov. 4, as fans, friends and former players turned out to pay tribute to former Seneca basketball coach and athletic director Joe Jones.

For about a half hour before the boys varsity game, players from Seneca's girls and boys teams walked to center court to greet their former coach, who led them to a combined 380 wins over 19 years.

It was a time of smiles and hugs, and tears were shed as they walked out to meet their coach.

Foul



- The story isn't about how people cheered for the coach at the game.
- The story is about the coach – his years of sacrifice OR how he put his players ahead of himself OR something else that's compelling.
- Just because there's an event – a game, a retirement party, a meeting, a rally, a parade, a charity auction – doesn't mean the story revolves around the event.
- Do the interviews – that's where the stories are.

The best interview



- You know the story you're telling.
- You're confident.
- You know what you need from the source.
- You go with the flow of the interview and follow up.
- You start on time and end on time.
- You keep the focus on the source.
- You dig with good, solid questions.
- You create opportunities for anecdotes.
- You learn things along the way and adapt.