



Who speaks?

How to pick and prepare a spokesperson

There is no college program for training spokespeople. They typically have backgrounds in communications, journalism or broadcast, but the profession includes people of all academic – and even non-academic – backgrounds.

Good spokespeople all have one thing in common: they are translators. And because they are the face and voice of the organization, choosing them carefully is critically important to the success of any operation.

The spokesperson does not need to be the person who has been with the company the longest, or the most technically educated person. They're not running the operation, after all.

They don't need to be the highest-ranking person in the operation – in fact, using the CEO as the primary spokesperson often proves an unfortunate choice. When the public sees an organization's top person speaking, they presume the news is either very good or very bad, but very important either way.

While the technical staff or CEO can sometimes serve as the spokesperson in strategically chosen moments, the daily job of spokesperson is about effectively communicating the company or organization to the public through the media.

That means a spokesperson should be:

- Seasoned and savvy about how the media works.
- Committed full time to working with reporters and audiences of all kinds.
- Able to discuss the complex work of the organization in simple, relatable terms, free of jargon.
- Visually presentable as the professional face of the organization.
- A solid writer who also is well-read and well spoken.
- Focused on the broader news cycle at the local, state and national level, continually on the lookout for ways to connect the company's work, goals and challenges to other news and events happening in the world.
- Sufficiently experienced to know when to tap staff or the CEO for communication opportunities.

The most effective spokespeople are connected throughout an organization, receiving information from staff and making informed communications recommendations to upper management.

A spokesperson is only as good as the information they possess. If they are uninformed, misinformed or underinformed, the entire organization will suffer the consequence.