



Tuesday, December 10, 2019

**Media Relations Workshop:
How to Manage Racing's Message in the Media**

Speaker:

Greg Peck, Media Training Professional

Ms. Jane Murray: All right. As promised, we wanted to move quickly through this so we can get to the cocktail hour on time tonight.

Without further ado, I'd like to introduce Greg Peck. He's a media relations professional, widely experienced in the horse racing field.

He's gonna conduct a small media relations workshop on how to manage racing's message in the media.

Greg?

Oh, you've already gotten down.

Do you want me to hand some of those out?

Mr. Greg Peck: Can everybody hear me?

Is my mic up? No. Can we get it up?

Testing one, two, three.

Testing one, two, three.

I kept shutting it on and off.

Welcome. Sorry it's late and I wish I was the real Gregory Peck and then you wouldn't be so disappointed.

I'll tell you why I'm here today is to do just that. I'm gonna give you handbooks here, make it like a workshop here.

I'll interview some people and give them feedback and I'll condense the session because it is late in the day.

The other one went on for a while.

What I'd like to do is — we've heard a lot today about consistency and I'd like to put you and all of the industry in the mode of consistently speaking that what we are doing that is in the best interests in the health and welfare of the horse, of the rider, of the driver — me being from a standardbred background — I heard that in Alan Forman's strategic media interview — strategic plan for Mid-Atlantic here, today, and I said, "Boy, that about says it," and I must say, based on what's happened with all of the injuries and catastrophes that we've had, we're making significant headway. I mean, there is some good to it.

What I want to focus on with you today — let me get up here. We're a little bit challenged by this; I wanna make sure it works for us — is put you in a position of which you better understand the media — and this is not an "understanding the media" type of session, by the way because I'll have lots in the book for you about that, in the best interest of time.

I wanna get you so that you can prepare an effective message. You walk into these media interviews where you're message-driven, not question-driven. Not saying, "You know what? He or she didn't ask me the right question."

Yeah, you've led the horse to water, but let's see if we can make that horse or that mare drink.

That's the media. I'd like to put you in a position in which you can handle some of the difficult questions that come at you.

What I'm also going to do too is I'll take a couple of volunteers to talk to and interview them and give you feedback, so we do that.

Let me start off with — and I don't know if any of you have seen this, or some of you have seen it.

This puts the whole issue of what you've all — we've all been going through with the media and I think this gives you a starting point of where we can get better.

Some good, some bad, but inconsistent. Let's start with that.

[Video Shown]

I'll stop it there. What did you notice about that?

Yeah, pretty fragmented. What else?

Commenting on behalf of others, giving motivations on behalf of Jerry Hollandorfer, the trainer talking about how they push the limit. And he's gonna be here tomorrow.

You got to hand it to him.

Our media darling Baffert did say he really cares about that.

Bothered him.

Takes good care of his horses.

He's a good trainer.

It happens.

But I don't see anything in it for us to do, really, anything but that.

To be consistently talking about whatever opportunity you get to say what you are doing — within what you are doing within racing or gaming that is in the best interest in the health and welfare of the horse, of the rider, the jockey, whatever you wanna say, the driver.

I'd start with that.

You need to go into an interview with a theme. And a theme is — I'm trying to condense it with some walking along because of the time frame.

You guys didn't get any of these, did you? No. If I run out, give me a card and we'll get them for you.

You got to walk in there and say, "What is it that I want to say here?" Not avoid or evade, but you kinda saw what happen — If you walked away, you really got no sense toward the end, except Dr. Benson in the start and Bob Baffert in the end about the care of the whole situation.

And as they say — and I was really impressed today with what I saw.

Being a Standardbred horse trainer myself, I didn't mention that, by the way, I grew up in Nova Scotia, Canada, which is not quite the end of the world, but you can see it from there, believe me. For me to be even here, in this place in Arizona, having trained a horse like Muscle Hill, it's hard to believe, really.

Put it this way. If that can happen, well, anything can happen.

That's what racing is all about.

What else did you notice here? Noticed they were pretty reactive.

Oh, did anyone see that originally, that CNN? How many saw it before?

Well I'm glad not that many because I said, "Oh, you hate — it's so hard to find things and you don't want people to see stuff that they've already seen a bunch of times." I'll keep these up here for now.

I'm gonna say start with that. I wanna make it simple for you. That's the other thing.

If you came in here and said, "Oh that's really hard, to do a meeting —" It'll be the simplest thing that you — much easier than what you do every day.

I was thinking about — when they were talking about the track and how you grade it and the degrees or take out, this, that. Doing a meaty interview, it's really easy — but it starts with, again, yes, being message driven and not question driven.

How do I get this to move again?

I'd start out with this. The first thing you wanna do in an interview is — and there's an interview plan in there. There's a lot in that workbook that we had a day to do it. We'll go through all that, but I wanted you to walk away and have a takeaway with that, and I know Wendy likes that.

Really, the reporter's gotta have a subject, an issue, but come at it from an angle. And obvious the angle here is the catastrophic incidents that have been happening at a lot of the tracks over the last several years, especially here lately.

What I'd like for you to start with in an interview.

First thing you're asked is if you could state the position — let me first put this in perspective.

I'm going to talk to you to about — not evading or avoiding — by the way, what they didn't say — who did all the media training the last couple elections for the Republican National Committee?

Yeah, a Canadian. Can you believe it? Now – not Trump. Because by the way, Trump, he violates everything that I say, but it works for him.

Yeah, he does all that — I'd be telling you, "Don't say anything about another trainer. Don't say anything about another track. Don't compare —" It's like the doctor friend that gave my dad his first horse.

He said, "You can say something about a man's wife, but don't say anything about his horse." Donald Trump called him a liar, but I caught on to that, that buzz language and negative advertising in that industry works because a lot of people, that's where they get — they don't know.

They hear enough "So-and-so is a liar," they figure it may be so.

But in our situation, you can clearly state the position. What's the single most — don't think — I'd be making sure I say it every day.

"Let me first put this into perspective here." Whether it's the trainer that I don't know from California, whether it would be Bob Baffert, whether it be Dr. Benson, let me say this. I'll tell you one thing is — Mark Casse said, about the seven-day thing. We do everything every day to promote what's in the best interest and the health and welfare of the horse. But now it's funny, as they say, because we forget about the riders as well.

Then the support. You do have facts. You do have statistics and illustrations. The four instances.

What is it that you're doing at your particular track that gives you that illustration of, really, the — that they can see? They can say, "Oh, I went to the track and I noticed what they were doing now, with regard to moisture in the track," or whatever.

I noticed that the veterinarians were really examining the horse's lots. And restating. "Just before you go, let me —"

You want to end with the same thing that you started with. Talking consistently — gonna wanna make it simple — the best interest of the health and welfare of the horse, of the rider, of the jockey, of the driver, whatever it is in our business.

This idea of message driven – and I don't mean evading or avoiding. There'll be times when they're going to ask you a question. He could've said to the gentleman, "About Jerry Hollendorfer." Here's what you'd wanna do. Don't avoid it. "Well, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on his behalf or what happened in this situation. I think you'd have to ask him that question."

Or, "Let's talk about – the 30-some breakdowns we've had, let's not talk about the thousands that we didn't have and what we've been doing to get to the bottom of this." You'll have time to get to that, but you don't wanna be the politician – they ask you about X, they talk about Y. You don't wanna do that either.

Be message driven and not question driven. I call it verbal highlighting. Punch it up. Pause before and after it. "These trainers really –" pause – "take great care of the horses –" pause, and it'll just highlight it and punch it up.

By the way, there's people will tell you about the social media and the tweeting and that. I get into that, but I'm not an expert in that anyway, but that's all the reason today you need more consistency of message.

Let's try the next example.

[Video]

What did you notice about that one? Notice about that one? I did notice "We're not Santa Anita" – not a great defense. Here's the problem. We pretty well know – it's like a – I can say but breeds. Fortunately, Mike Tanner who runs the United States Trotting Association for us, we really don't have the problem. It's an amazing thing. I said, "It's amazing, when was the last time that I saw one break down?" I can't – maybe when I was a kid in Nova Scotia. The old-time cheap horses.

My point is this. You would not want to compare one against the other. I was big on – about the medication, by the way. A lot of what the messaging was this. "Well, it's better testing than what they have with the athletes." Problem with that is then becomes an issue as well. I'd rather not compare one against the other.

I noticed – here's the other thing. The irony of the interview there with the Del Mar CEO – he broke himself into jail, as we call it, in a way, because remember, it was a collision.

Yeah, it was not horses broke down. It was an accident, that one. My sense of it was – is maybe, tactically, he was trying to promote that they do care and what they do do, but again, it just kinda didn't work the way I would like to see it work.

This one. I'll kinda hit it with that, and then I'll do a couple of examples. There was some better stuff in this one.

[Video]

Now obviously, there's another issue there that they'll get into because we do have so many jurisdictions and what have you. There's no doubt about that.

"At least we got to our goal of zero."

You couldn't pay for that advertising, as what was said. "Did you notice that? Our goal is zero?" It overshadowed most other things that was said. Anything else you noticed about that one? Something else I wanna show you here, too, because it's not all TV.

Donna Barton Brothers. You all know who she is, right? This is really — everybody see this?

In the Paulick Report about PETA being a bully, anybody see this? If you didn't, read it. Wow, did she ever do a job. That's where it starts.

Start it right there.

It's a challenge, it really is.

It's a major challenge.

But at least you can look at it this way, that we are getting the coverage, so we at least have piqued the interest, however bad that may be. If we can keep at it — and I know, gee, I watched it with Mongolian Groom because what a day they put on about the experience and the commitment and we are the industry and all that.

Aw, gee. And we still had one.

I'd say this.

Keep doing what you're doing when it comes to that.

What I'd like to do — in the interest of time because we ran over — Mike, I already volunteered him.

I want to interview somebody about the whole catastrophic injury issue, and then I'm going to give you feedback. We'll tape it and feed it back. Have we got some of the volunteers do that for me? I promise I'll be easy — I won't be easy on you,

but I will — I'll build your confidence, not destroy your ego. That takes a few hours. We can't do that in just an hour. Anybody help me out on that one? Come on up. We got the microphone, the handheld. My guys, handheld mic? It's here? Wireless? Okay, good. Testing, one two three. Testing, one two three. Let me knock mine off. What's your name?

Ms. Janet Van Bebber I'm Janet.

Mr. Greg Peck: Janet van what?

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: Van Bebber.

Mr. Greg Peck: Van Bebber. Where do you work, Jan?

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: I work for the American Quarter Horse Association.

Mr. Greg Peck: Oh, you do? You guys have the biggest membership, don't you? You always did.

Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to ask you about what has this done for you.

I suppose they are more durable, and they go shorter distance, but have you had the breakdowns? This is pre-interview, by the way. I'm not gonna be taping it.

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: — My response to that would be it's an industry-wide issue. I think we all are in crisis management, no matter what specific breed we're representing.

Mr. Greg Peck: We ready to tape that? Where I'm gonna do about a three-minute interview? Can we get — can we get close up?

How would we do that? Would you have to bring it up or we'd have to go down? You can zoom right in?

Couple of techniques for you on this. Have your feet about shoulder-width apart. You're on the balls of your feet. You're making eye-contact with me, because you could have several people there.

Although I notice, the younger ones, the Jordans of the world, the social media — some of the interviews, they're awkward looking, like there's — somebody's over there, somebody's over —

But I'm not — I don't wanna make it. I wanna make these for the more — ones that are professional, that they're going to be taped edit, usually. That's what's going to happen.

They're going to be used for something else. They're not gonna be used in their entirety, put it that way.

Pardon me?

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: It is dark if you look on camera.

Mr. Greg Peck: What can we do with the light, guys?

Thank you. Look better, yeah?

If you want to break eye contact, look down. Don't look up.

It looks like you're looking for that divine intervention. You — want to look down.

Hands. People say, "Well, what if they only shoot me from here up —" No, what hands do is they physically get you into it. You can use less words then. Smile when appropriate. But the big thing I want you to be as message-driven not question-driven and say what it is that you think we should be said.

In five, four, three, two, one. Janet, good afternoon.

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: Hi.

Mr. Greg Peck: Let me ask you, what has happened in the Quarter Horse industry with regard to — we know.

Wouldn't you say it's just been a disaster for the Thoroughbreds? Is it the same for the Quarter Horses?

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: I think this is an issue that crosses all disciplines and breeds. I think what's paramount to take into consideration is that every life is of value to those of us —

Mr. Greg Peck: No, but how would you compare it to the Thoroughbreds? We know Thoroughbreds, they're breaking down all the time.

It's a major issue.

It's now national media.

There's even talks in California of banning racing and that would include Quarter Horse racing as well.

What is your take on it from the Quarter Horses?

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: We know because we've invested in measures to help protect our horses that our equine injury database numbers are fairly consistent with what our Thoroughbred counterparts are experiencing.

Mr. Greg Peck: Are you saying that the Quarter Horses break down as often as the Thoroughbreds?

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: They're very similar numbers, yes.

The important message there is how many are successful in walking off the track to see a healthy tomorrow and to have longevity in their careers and even enjoy after they're done racing.

Mr. Greg Peck: But one would've thought the Quarter Horses, they're more durable, they go shorter distances — it's only a quarter of a mile — that they would hold up better than a Thoroughbred.

But you're saying — and they're built different, they're a sturdier-made animal, but you're saying they're breaking down as much as the Thoroughbreds.

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: The important thing to consider is that we have as many that are walking off the track and they are sprinters.

They run hard.

We have similar concerns, but we are doing as good a job of protecting them.

Mr. Greg Peck: Thank you very much.

Give Janet a hand for that. I didn't know about — I'm gonna play it back for you, by the way. Mic?

I want to make it easy for you.

No, it's not that hard.

It's not gonna be Sam Donaldson.

And even if it is, the more — the tougher they become, the calmer you become.

Get Mike so I can get you in the light here. Mike, U.S. Trotting, so I'm gonna ask you about the comparisons too. Likewise, we want Mike up here.

I wanna get it so I can get him toward the — not worried about it. Just so you can — yeah. 'Cause I'm not worried about me. I'm worried about getting you in.

In five, four, three, two, one. Mike Tanner, what has U.S. Trotting Association done with regard to comparing what's been happening with the catastrophic injuries in the Thoroughbred industry?

Mr. Mike Tanner: It's a narrative that, while we're not eager to tell, necessarily, because obviously, there are major problems on the Thoroughbred side of things, it's not an issue that we've seen at all on the Standardbred side.

I'll give you an example. California, since 2009, there've been 914 racing fatalities in Thoroughbred racing. There have been seven in Standardbred racing.

Mr. Greg Peck: Would you say that the Thoroughbreds are doing a bad job of this?

Mr. Mike Tanner: I would say that the breeds are very different.

Standardbreds are more robust, a heartier breed, if you will. Their gait is very difficult as well. Two hooves on the ground during each stride, as compared with Thoroughbreds.

Mr. Greg Peck: Would that almost be a marketing and sales strategy of yours? "Come to the horse races. You won't see any catastrophes."

Mr. Mike Tanner: I don't think you ever wanna call attention to something as tragic as a horse dying, so I'd stay away from it as a marketing approach, but I will say that we have been questioned before on Capital Hill, for example, in state legislatures by those who assume that we are experiencing the same difficulties and we just tell them that we're not.

Mr. Greg Peck: Have you had discussions — do you think the Thoroughbreds are learning anything from Standardbreds?

Mr. Mike Tanner: I think that the Thoroughbreds are concentrating on those things that they can control. I have not heard from anyone who's called over and said, "Hey, what are you guys doing differently," but I think it's an apples to oranges comparison. I think they're doing as much as they can over there.

Mr. Greg Peck: The Standardbreds, we race at a harder surface and we race more often. They were talking earlier today about synthetics.

We certainly don't race on those.

What's the takeaway from the Thoroughbred industry? I'm sure that you at the United States Trotting Association — they're all horses and you don't wanna see what's happening there at all. What would you recommend to them?

Mr. Mike Tanner: I would say to keep doing what they're doing right now, which is facing the problems in a straightforward manner.

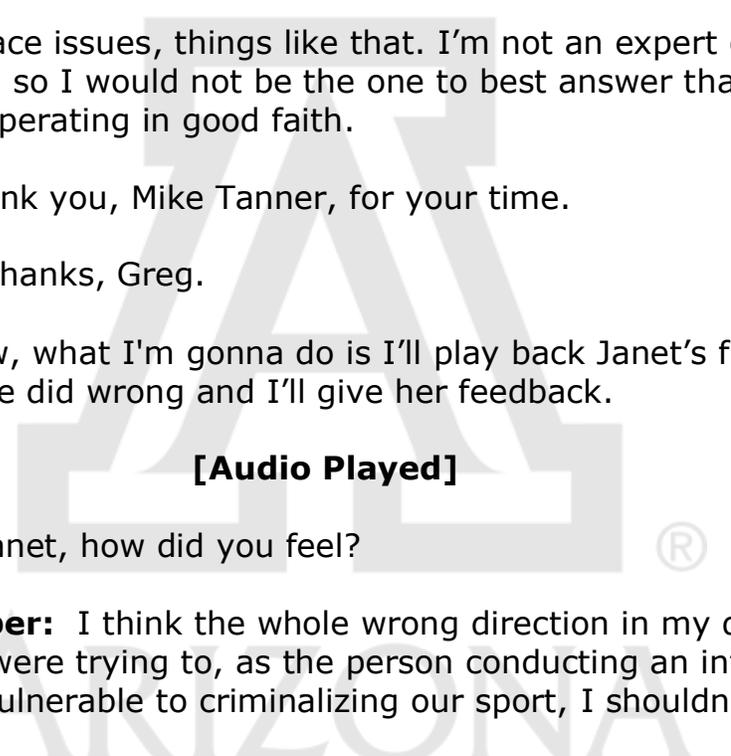
Examining track surface issues, things like that. I'm not an expert on Thoroughbred racing, so I would not be the one to best answer that question, but I do believe they're operating in good faith.

Mr. Greg Peck: Thank you, Mike Tanner, for your time.

Mr. Mike Tanner: Thanks, Greg.

Mr. Greg Peck: Now, what I'm gonna do is I'll play back Janet's first and I'll ask Janet if she thinks she did wrong and I'll give her feedback.

[Audio Played]

Can you hear me? Janet, how did you feel? 

Ms. Janet Van Bebber: I think the whole wrong direction in my defense because when I — when you were trying to, as the person conducting an interview and basically leaving us vulnerable to criminalizing our sport, I shouldn't have gone with EID.

I shouldn't have gone with talking about how they're both the same. I think I should've reconsidered my message.

Mr. Greg Peck: Here's what I thought.

First of all, with the rush that we had to do, it was a job well done. I think the group will agree with that, right? A hand for that one? Well done.

I liked this idea of walking off the track with an after career and a good life and all that, but yeah. I think if you could — you're gonna have to say, "It would be

inappropriate for us to compare. You'd have to ask somebody from the Thoroughbred industry that question."

I'd really be punching up the idea of more of them — "Let me put this into perspective, Greg. There's X amount that race and there are so many that walk off the track every time, every race, and have a wonderful, caring life."

I think that that's what I'd like for you to see — and then give me an example of how you do examine them and give me an example of what the aftercare is, because I know from being in the Standardbreds and I know Mike Tanner, because I read about them. They're very much into the after care.

They've set up a new group now — haven't you, Mike? — that does all that as well. You give us the impression that they have a very caring, loving life while they do what they do and they do the same after — you can name the different groups that you work with that help you do that, where they go, how that works, the funding.

Name some names. Name some committees that are done to that, but overwhelmingly, that an awful lot of them — a lot more walk off the track every race, every time, and have a good, caring life.

Nonverbally, you're very good. Good smile, good gestures, good animation.

But you'll find this, though.

If you have a good message, you smile easier, you move your hands, everything — yeah, it really — the message is the engine that really drives the whole thing, so once you have that, you'll just find everything seems to work better if you, again — but I think you were on to — remember, in your handbooks, there's even a — you'll get to see them later — you get a chapter — where you can do an interview plan.

You'll have a chance to do that, but in this form, you couldn't. I commend you on that, but I — build on this idea of how they walk off the track, a lot of them, and they have quite a life.

Mike, can we show yours? Guys?

[Video Shown]

How'd you feel about that?

Mr. Mike Tanner: I spoke way to quickly.

I think I could've paced myself more and stuck to maybe one or two themes. In retrospect, I think I tried to cram too much information into it.

The main message I was trying to get across, which is something that we've been on-message with for a while now, is that this problem is separate from harness racing.

It's not one, thankfully, that we are experiencing, and yet to the vast majority of people at the general public, a horse is a horse is a horse and they look upon us as having those same issues.

Mr. Greg Peck: What's interesting about — and I thought about it — about what the wording could and should be, because yeah, a horse is a horse, and all people know is that they are racehorses.

You're an intellectual.

You started with the statistic of 914 died on the track of Thoroughbreds, seven the Standardbreds.

I wouldn't volunteer that one. I think I could see the look in your eyes. You know, "Oh, I probably shouldn't have said that one." I think what we would be doing is — yes, you could certainly say you're confident in the health and welfare and the care that you go to Washington.

You're involved with other groups that do involve Thoroughbred people. They are concerned. But again, you'd be better off asking them what they're doing. I think the message for you is yes, that they are a sturdy, durable animal. Come and watch them race — see how you can get them out to the track — and what about you're doing in after care.

I know you're big on it. I'm reading about it now. It's something that you might want to promote.

By the way, for all the Thoroughbred people in here, what's really created a boom for us, and you'll get this, the Amish. You know how many Standardbreds have an afterlife there. Unfortunately, the Thoroughbreds don't have that possibility. Whether that's good or bad, I'm not gonna get into debating that. Let's not debate that one, but it is the fact that the Standardbred is a mode of transportation. That can be happening as well.

I'd like to see you focus your eye contact better.

I like your smile. Smile more.

I think you can use the hands more.

The big thing is — is I think — don't get into commenting.

Don't get into implying because again — I get into this with the oil companies.

I do a lot for Big Oil. Exxon Mobile can't say they're safer than Chevron. Why? Well, then it's an industry — there's no compromise when it comes to health and safety.

It's the same with this. You can't get in that, but what I'm suggesting that you do is that when you do get the time, that you take advantage of the time. It's free. Now that we're getting more of it, that because of — where there is crisis, there is opportunity.

By the way, it's getting late and I know everybody — I'd have to rush through this, and this is okay. In your handbooks — anybody who hasn't gotten one, come get one. If we don't have enough, leave your business card. We'll make sure you get them.

Pretty well it's all in there if you get a chance. Everything from how to get started, from the tools and techniques, the different styles, the different interview forms, a little bit of crisis planning, and lots of plans and checklists in there.

By the way, I've gone out to a lot of groups and done the media training for them. I've done the circuit over the years as well, by the way, and I even done role — done a session for them at Lone Star Park and I — you get on the circuit. I've been at this — I first did this in 1990, so it's only 29 years ago. I said that to — yeah, he's 31. I said, "Yeah, you wouldn't remember that time."

Couple things in summary. You made headway. Is it happening? Yeah, but are you doing something about it?

Lots that I can see. Prepare for it. Embrace it. It's not that bad.

The big thing. State it, support it, illustrate it, restate it, and have that scene.

You just should say, "Under that tent," as you'll see in my handbook there, "we're doing what's in the best interest in the health and welfare of the horse, the rider," whatever it happens to be. I'd stay at that.

Finally, like I said, what you do every day is a lot harder than this. I want it to be simple for you, not difficult.

Any final questions?

I know it's late and I know with the time change, if I can keep them — I'm happy I kept half here.

Thank you very much.

