

Public Personas in a Digital World: Media & Social Media Training

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MEDIA

How it became normal for public officials to attack journalists

A California sheriff's targeting of a reporter is the latest instance of authorities misusing power. 'These are steps toward autocracy,' says one press freedom advocate.

Police arrest Vegas-area elected official in reporter death

By KEN RITTER September 7, 2022

STATE WATCH

Alaska state senator slaps reporter over story

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COLORADO
MUNICIPAL
LEAGUE

We all make mistakes – they just don't always end up on the front page!

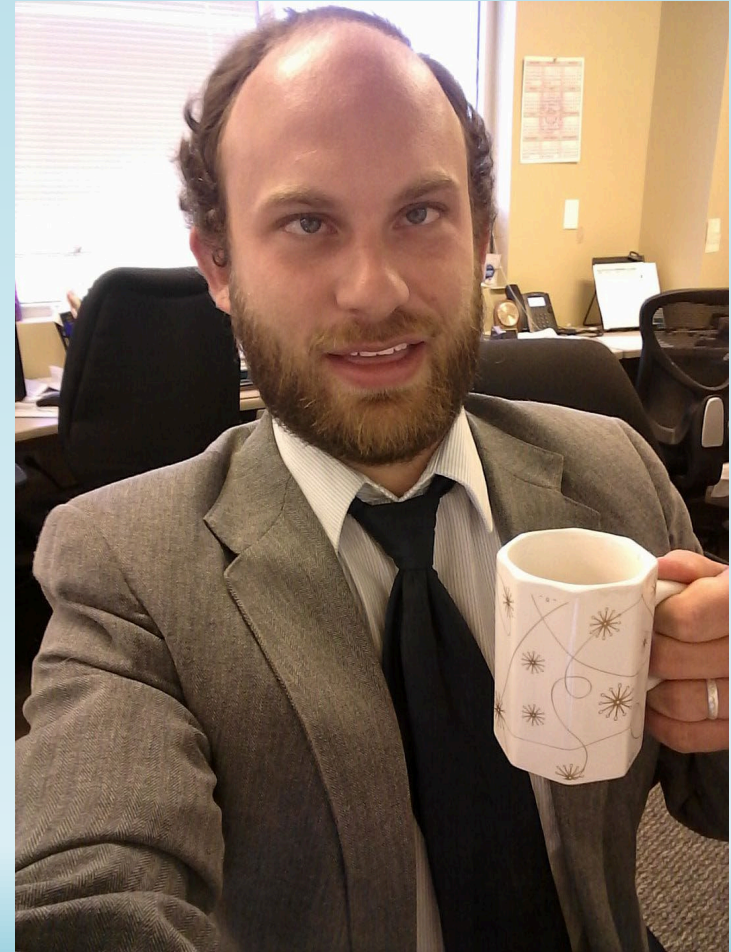
Five takeaways from today:

- **Build relationships in advance**
- **Develop and stick to key messages**
- **Never say “no comment”**
- **Be nice, assume everything you say or do is being recorded**
- **Don't be afraid to say “I don't know.”**



WHO ARE REPORTERS?

- ***Human beings!***
- ***The job means long hours, low pay, public scrutiny, political vilification (Sounds a bit like public office, doesn't it?)***
- ***Reporters come in all types, just like the rest of us: the good, the bad, the ugly.***



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WHAT IS A REPORTER'S JOB?

- ***Broadly, to serve as a stand-in for the public. What do they want to know? What do they need to know?***
- ***To hold those in power accountable.***
- ***Newsrooms are much smaller. Layoffs are frequent. Pay is terrible. Institutional knowledge is on the decline. Reporters must jump from story to story, with little time to dig in.***
- ***There are big differences between types of reporters. A local print journalist will have a very different approach than a local TV reporter, who will have a different approach than a national cable TV reporter. Get to know your local journalists – they care about your community too.***



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An ironclad rule:

**JUST BECAUSE YOU DON'T
COMMENT DOESN'T MEAN THE
STORY DOESN'T GET WRITTEN.
IT JUST MEANS YOUR
PERSPECTIVE ISN'T INCLUDED.**

Another ironclad rule:

**NOTHING MAKES A
REPORTER WANT TO DIG IN
MORE THAN BEING TOLD
“THIS ISN’T A STORY”**

LITTLETON'S MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY:

•When reporters have a question, get them in touch with the city's subject matter expert. That could be a librarian, building inspector, or mechanic.

•As long as you're the expert, speak with reporters if you feel comfortable. If you're not the expert, be careful. A librarian shouldn't comment on a criminal investigation.

WHEN TO BE CAUTIOUS

Refer to the Director of Communications:

- ***Matters in litigation***
- ***Personnel investigations, disciplinary actions, terminations***
- ***Council policy decisions – speak for yourself only***
- ***Crisis events***
- ***Anything you're not sure about***

COUNCIL NOTIFICATION

Council members don't like surprises. If you know a story is coming, send a quick message to council and the city manager.

In the case of a story in Littleton but not about the city, we coordinate with other PIOs such as South Metro Fire Rescue, Arapahoe County, Littleton Public Schools, Arapahoe Community College, or South Suburban Parks and Recreation.

Build relationships in advance. Make sure you have the right phone numbers.

RESPONDING TO MEDIA

- ***Reporters are aggressive when covering breaking news -- competition is fierce.***
- ***Say only what you know for sure, as circumstances can change quickly as an incident evolves.***
- ***Don't be defensive.***

RESPONDING TO MEDIA

- Find out what questions reporters have and get back to them, even if you still don't have the answer. Email is a great option – although a good reporter will try to push you for a phone call!***
- It's okay to say “I don't know.”***
- Remember: Colorado is a “one-party consent” state. You can legally be recorded by anyone at any time without notice.***

RESPONDING TO MEDIA

- ***Don't play the blame game.***
- ***Set a time limit on in-person, virtual, or phone interviews.***
- ***Don't pass judgment.***
- ***Don't violate privacy laws (HIPAA, personnel matters).***

RESPONDING TO MEDIA

- ***A lack of response implies that whatever is reported is true.***
- ***Polls indicate that a “no comment” response is almost the same as admitting guilt.***



RESPONDING TO CRISIS

- ***Show empathy but don't tell people how they should feel, i.e., "We know what they're going through." No you don't!***
- ***Be aware of body language. Smiling or laughing can come across badly.***
- ***Don't use sarcasm or humor, this isn't the time or place.***

RESPONDING TO CRISIS

- ***Our policy and best practice is to designate one person to respond to the media, usually the PIO.***
- ***Reporters will scramble to interview anyone remotely affiliated with a crisis – especially if no one is made available to talk to them (generally onlookers or neighbors, but also: your critics, ex-employees, etc.)***

KEEP IT FOCUSED

- ***Prepare three key messages and keep coming back to them.***
- ***Limit your response to 30 seconds or less. Anything more will get left on the floor. Be succinct.***
- ***Know what you want to say, regardless of the questions asked. Think of the Sunday morning network news shows.***

IF YOU'RE AMBUSHED

- ***Stay calm***
- ***Never put your hand in front of the camera or touch the reporter***
- ***Never say “No Comment”***
- ***Try to be nice and acknowledge the reporter***
- ***Let them know you are happy to set up a time to answer their questions***
- ***And then: follow through!***



PUBLIC MEETINGS

- ***Almost all city council meetings and study sessions are recorded, livestreamed on Facebook or elsewhere online.***
- ***So are many boards and commissions.***
- ***Microphones are more sensitive than you think to muttering and whispering!***
- ***Whether you are speaking or not, assume the cameras are on you. You will be quoted!***



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SOCIAL MEDIA

•Know your audience!

- Facebook: Versatile, trends older, big engagement driver**
- Instagram: Shifting toward video content, good for showing relief efforts**
- Twitter/X: Formerly a cornerstone of communications, but trust and security issues are rapidly growing**
- Nextdoor: Good for talking to community, but can be a rumor mill**

•Littleton's follower counts:

- Twitter: 11,400**
- Facebook: 10,000 (main account)**
- Instagram: 3,933**
- Nextdoor: visible to 23,850**

SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- **Reflect your own views but remember your role on the governing body**
- **City-run pages discussing public business likely offer more First Amendment protections**
 - **Even if it is a “private” page like a mayor’s account**
 - **Limits on censoring comments – talk to your legal team**
- **Don’t:**
 - **Share confidential information**
 - **Discuss public business with other officials (potential Open Meetings Law issue)**
 - **Disqualify yourself from public business or quasi-judicial matters**



Mayor Kyle Schlachter

November 23 at 9:01 AM · 🌐



Today is a day for gratitude and thankfulness, and we have lots to be thankful for in Littleton. I am grateful for my family, my friends, and my entire community. However you celebrate today, may you find some time to acknowledge all that you have to be thankful for today and everyday. Happy Thanksgiving! 🍁🍫🥧



Mayor Kyle Schlachter

October 17 · 🌐

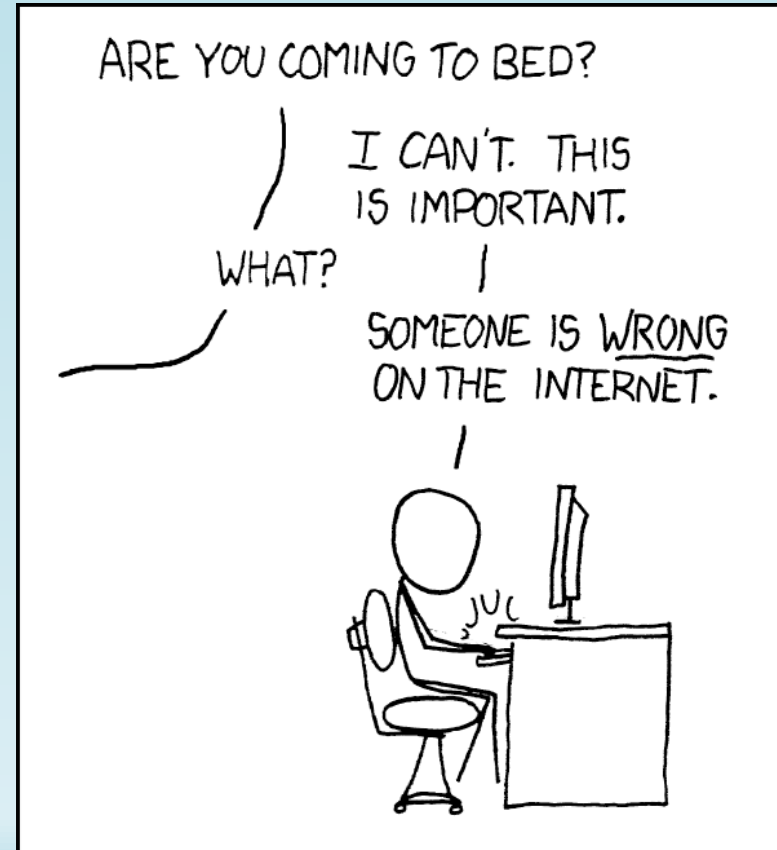


My heart completely aches for the family, the school, and our community. One of my son's classmates sadly will not be at home tonight. His friends will never be able to see him again. We can and we will do more to make sure our kids can bike to school and home safely.



PRIVATE SOCIAL MEDIA

- **No social media is ever truly private – be aware it can be shared or be evidence in legal proceedings**
- **Even a “private” page can involve First Amendment protections**
- **Try to maintain strict boundaries (e.g., title, posts/links, disclaimers) and don’t use public resources**
- **Your social media policies should provide guidance**



THERE IS HELP AVAILABLE

- ***Colorado Municipal League PIOs***
- ***Emergency Services Public Information Officers of Colorado (ESPIOC)***

WORDS OF WISDOM

- ***“By being cooperative, quotable and confident, a clever public figure can often get the media to make him look good.” -Newsweek***
- ***“There’s an essential link between government and news reporting and when that link is strained or broken, things go wrong for government.” -Cecil King***
- ***“If you don’t want it printed, don’t let it happen”
-Aspen Daily News motto***