Position Your Leader as an Expert

Positioning your executive director as the local expert on your key issue helps build valuable credibility for your organization among stakeholders. Sandra Beckwith, the keynote speaker at the National Council of Nonprofit Associations’ 2007 annual member meeting and author of *Publicity for Nonprofits: Generating Media Exposure That Leads to Awareness, Growth, and Contributions*, offers the following advice for starting that process.

“Start by making sure that if your leader isn’t already an expert, he or she is taking steps to become one,” she says. This is one of those situations where you don’t want to use smoke and mirrors.

Next, showcase that expertise by providing opportunities for your executive director to share that knowledge and experience freely in public forums. “This is essential,” she notes. “It’s a situation where you show, rather than tell, that your leader is the local expert on the topic.”

Here are specific steps she recommends taking to begin developing expert credibility:

- Make your leader the exclusive spokesperson for your organization, whether it’s for media interviews, public service announcements, or advertisements.
- Send your local media a letter listing story or news segment ideas that your leader can contribute to as a resource. Attach your director’s photo and narrative bio, a backgrounder on your issue, and a brief history of your organization.
- Produce a relevant consumer booklet with tips or advice from your leader, who is clearly identified as the author. Send it to the media with a news release announcing the booklet’s availability and how to receive a copy; distribute it to stakeholders; promote it in your newsletter and on your Web site.
- Continually schedule speaking engagements for your executive director with community groups.
- Write timely op-eds with your leader’s byline for the newspaper as frequently as possible.

These and other steps executed well locally could help your leader become recognized as an expert nationally, too. While that might not be your goal, it will certainly enhance your local efforts by boosting your leader’s credibility.

*Reprinted with permission of Sandra Beckwith. Contact Sandra Beckwith at sb@sandrabeckwith.com with questions or comments or visit http://buildbuzz.blogspot.com/ for more publicity tips.*