

How to Create a Safe Learning Environment for Media Training

Imagine you've never done a media interview before.

You're called into a room where seasoned public relations professionals are waiting with a camera poised to capture your every word in a mock interview.

Talk about pressure to perform. What if you say the wrong thing? What if you freeze or stumble over your words? The fear of judgment and the potential for embarrassment in front of more experienced colleagues and trainers can be overwhelming.



That's why creating a **safe learning environment** for media training is essential. For someone new to the experience, the intimidation factor can stifle their ability to learn and perform effectively. They need to feel supported and understood, rather than scrutinized and criticized.

A psychologically safe environment allows them to take risks, make mistakes and ask questions without fear of ridicule. It fosters confidence, encourages open communication, and ultimately helps them grow and develop the necessary skills to handle real-world media interactions with poise and assurance.



Your role as the trainer is to cultivate a safe learning environment for effective media training,

This guide dives deep into a sequence of tools and strategies to cultivate an experience where trainees feel comfortable taking risks, asking questions, and learning from mistakes.

Fundamentals of a Safe Learning Environment



Defining Safety in Media Training

Safety in media training extends beyond physical well-being to include **psychological safety**. This means creating a space where trainees and employees feel respected, valued, and acknowledged. Psychological safety ensures that people feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions and admitting mistakes without fear of ridicule.

Clear guidelines for interaction and feedback are important. Establishing rules against harsh criticism and encouraging constructive feedback can make trainees more willing to participate actively.

In media training, this allows trainees to practice their responses and refine their skills in a supportive setting. When preparing for interviews, trainees should feel that they can experiment with various strategies and learn from errors.



Benefits for Learning

Creating a safe environment will benefit not only your trainees, but also you and your organization. Think more engagement, greater participation, returnees to future trainings—and of course, better interview performance from your trainees.

Inclusive Training Content

Before you start training, you need to consider your materials. Are they inclusive?

You can lose your students quickly if they feel the material is “not for them” or worse, contains microaggressions. Creating inclusive media training content requires you to focus on cultural sensitivity and accommodating diverse learning styles. You’ll do better if you can anticipate, understand and address the unique needs of your participants.

Cultural Sensitivity

Design your content to be **culturally inclusive**. Use diverse case studies and examples that your trainees can resonate with. This ensures that everyone can relate to the material. Also be mindful that language and communication styles may vary across cultures.



Involve participants in discussions about cultural perspectives. Encourage sharing personal experiences related to media engagements.

This can offer valuable insights and enrich the learning process. Incorporating culturally relevant scenarios can also enhance understanding and retention.

Accommodating Diverse Learning Styles

Everyone has their preferred learning style, whether visual, auditory or reading/writing. Tailoring your media training program to these different styles can make it more effective.



- For **visual learners**, include infographics, videos and other forms of visual aids that outline key points.
- Audio recordings of exemplary interviews can aid **auditory learners** in understanding tone and delivery.
- **Reading/writing learners** benefit from detailed handouts and articles. Provide summaries of key points and reading materials.

If you’re able to find out from your trainees ahead of time how they learn best, that can help you tailor the session appropriately. Otherwise, try to vary activities so they address these diverse needs—especially for larger groups. This allows participants to choose the methods that best suit their style.

Preparing the Training Environment

Putting some thought into the actual space in which people will be training can help you create a conducive learning atmosphere.



Physical Setup

Your training space should be well-organized and free from distractions. You might set up a mock studio environment for TV interview training. Best practices include:

- **Position cameras, lighting and microphones to mimic real interview conditions.** This will help trainees get accustomed to the actual scenarios they will face.
- **Make the seating arrangements as comfortable as possible** for both the trainer and trainees. You want enough room to facilitate movement and interaction.
- **Visual aids such as whiteboards and projectors**, should be easily accessible. You'll need them to display key points and make your session more engaging
- Of course, **good ventilation and appropriate room temperature** also play a significant role in keeping everyone comfortable and able to focus.
- **Arrive early and check that all equipment is functioning correctly** before the session begins so you don't have any technical interruptions.

Virtual Training



Choose a reliable video conferencing tool like Zoom or Microsoft Teams for your training session.

A lot of media interviews are done over Zoom these days, so it'll be a realistic simulation experience. Encourage trainees to use neutral backgrounds to minimize distractions.

Virtual training sessions need to be planned, and in some cases rehearsed, so they run smoothly. Don't forget to take advantage of interactive elements such as screen sharing, breakout rooms and digital whiteboards to enhance engagement. We're all getting pretty good at Zoom by now, but brush up on any features you haven't used in a while. Software companies are known to change things around.



Ensuring Privacy and Confidentiality

Maintaining **privacy and confidentiality** is important in media training. If your training is part of managing an issue, sensitive information may be shared during the session, so creating a secure environment is essential. Ideally, your participants will also be sharing personal experiences, so what happens in the room ought to stay in the room.

For in-person sessions, choose a closed room where the conversations can't be overheard. For virtual sessions, use secure, password-protected meetings. Advise participants ahead of time to dial in from a private location so they don't have to worry about eavesdropping.

Ensure all digital materials used during the training are stored securely and only accessible to authorized individuals.

If you think it will help, you could draw up some simple confidentiality agreements for yourself and trainees to sign, emphasizing the importance of respecting each other's privacy. This fosters trust and encourages openness, so participants will engage better.



Policies and Procedures

Establishing ground rules before diving into the session goes a long way toward fostering a safe and effective learning environment. Set some clear behavioural expectations and implement guidelines to maintain order and make the atmosphere positive and inclusive.

Behavioural Guidelines

Behavioural guidelines serve as the cornerstone of an effective session. They provide clear expectations for professional conduct and interaction.

Respectful Communication: Encourage open dialogue while ensuring all participants communicate with respect. Name-calling, inappropriate language, and personal attacks should be strictly prohibited.

Inclusivity: Promote an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome and valued regardless of their background or experience. Activities such as icebreakers can help build camaraderie.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Highlight the importance of respecting the privacy of others. Information shared during training should not be disclosed outside the learning environment.

Participation: Set expectations for active participation. This includes participating in all exercises, engaging in discussions and completing assigned tasks.

Constructive Feedback: Encourage giving and receiving feedback in a constructive manner. Criticism should be aimed at behaviours or ideas, not individuals.

Building Trust and Rapport

Start by introducing yourself and your role. Share your expertise in media training to build credibility. When participants introduce themselves, encourage them to mention any experiences they've had with media, specific concerns, and their goals for the training. This establishes a foundation for trust and opens lines of communication.



Provide a short icebreaker activity where participants can share something interesting about themselves. This lightens the mood and helps create a sense of camaraderie.

Make sure to actively participate yourself. You're the one who sets the tone.

Active Listening

Active listening builds trust and rapport. When participants speak during the session, give them your full attention. Nodding, maintaining eye contact and occasional verbal affirmations show that you value their input. Ask clarifying questions to ensure you understand their points.



If you're listening, you'll likely pick up on specific fears or misconceptions participants may have about interacting with journalists.

Acknowledge the validity of their concerns and assure them that the training will equip them with greater confidence.

In your role-playing exercises, participants should be practicing both speaking and listening. The person playing the journalist can have a list of questions, but they should also improvise and ask follow-up questions based on what they're hearing from the interviewee. This is how you simulate real-world media interactions!

Empathy and Support

Acknowledge the anxieties and challenges participants face when preparing for interviews. Share personal anecdotes of your own media experiences and how you overcame similar hurdles. This will help participants relate to you and assure them that their feelings are normal.



Offer supportive feedback. Focus on strengths, and gently address areas that could use improvement. Be sure to provide ideas for solutions. Emphasize that mistakes are a learning opportunity and not a failure.

Encourage peer support by having participants provide constructive feedback to each other in group activities. Let everyone feel that network of support.

Encouraging Open Communication

The most valuable sessions have open dialogue and participants who understand how to give and receive criticism constructively. It's OK to remind everyone of this at the start.

Open Dialogue

Trainees should feel comfortable expressing their thoughts. Achieve this by setting clear expectations for respectful communication and actively listening to all participants.

Encourage trainees to share their concerns about facing journalists or public speaking. Discuss experiences and learn from each other's insights. Use open-ended questions to prompt deeper discussion.



Example: During a session, ask, *“What’s the most difficult question you’ve ever had to deal with from a journalist?”*

This kind of query opens the floor for sharing diverse experiences and strategies.

Giving and Receiving Criticism

Criticism is essential for growth but must be handled delicately. Teach trainees to give and receive criticism in a manner that is **constructive**, not damaging. Use the “sandwich” approach: start with positive feedback, then present areas for improvement, and end with encouragement or praise.

Stress the importance of focusing on behaviours or techniques rather than personal attributes.



Example: If a trainee struggles with maintaining eye contact during an interview, frame your advice with, *“You answered the questions clearly (positive), try to maintain eye contact to engage the audience better (improvement), and you have the potential to be an excellent spokesperson (encouragement).”*

Role-Playing and Simulations

Integrating role-playing and simulations is essential. These methods offer realistic scenarios, safe practice environments, and valuable debriefing opportunities for your participants to refine their skills and build confidence.



Realistic Scenarios

Role-playing and simulations present scenarios that closely mimic real-life media interactions. For instance, your trainee gets a confrontational interview question that verges into the personal: “How would you feel if your own [insert family member here]...”

These immersive experiences help trainees become better prepared for the unexpected, improving reaction times and responses under pressure.

Safe Practice

Simulations provide a safe space to make mistakes and learn from them without real-world repercussions. This is particularly important in media training. A misstep during an actual interview can have significant consequences.

Through repeated practice, your learners can refine their messaging, improve their delivery and experiment with different communication strategies.



For example, **practicing how to stay calm and composed when confronted with aggressive questioning can build resilience and confidence.**

By repeatedly engaging in these safe practice sessions, people will develop a toolkit of strategies to handle various media scenarios effectively.

Debriefing

After each simulated role-playing exercise, hold a debriefing session. Allow participants to reflect on their performance and receive constructive feedback. Work with them to identify areas for improvement.

Debriefing might involve watching a recording of the simulated interview to analyze body language, tone and content.

Highlight both strengths and areas requiring improvement, then invite participants to go again. Through this iterative process, trainees will actually feel themselves improving and that will give them a lot of confidence.

Improving Your Training

Enhancing your media training program involves **gathering feedback** from participants and effectively **implementing changes** based on their input. This continuous improvement process ensures that your training remains relevant and beneficial.



Gathering and Implementing Feedback

To improve your media training, start by collecting feedback actively. Conduct surveys or interviews with participants after each session. Ask specific questions about what they found valuable and what could be improved. Offer both **quantitative and qualitative** feedback options like rating scales and open-ended questions.

After gathering feedback, prioritize the common themes and actionable suggestions. Set clear goals for improvement based on this data. For instance, if participants express a need for more practical exercises, you can increase the number of role-playing scenarios.

Ensure that you communicate the changes back to the participants to show that their input is valued.

Final Takeaways

Your role as a trainer is pivotal in shaping the confidence and capabilities of your trainees. By applying the strategies and principles outlined in this guide, you'll not only equip your participants with the skills to handle media engagements, but you'll also create a space where they can grow and thrive—and perhaps want to come back.

Embrace the responsibility with enthusiasm and empathy, knowing that your commitment to inclusivity, support and constructive feedback will have a lasting impact. You're empowering trainees to face real-world media challenges with poise and professionalism. As you refine your approach and adapt to the unique needs of each session, you'll see the tangible results of your efforts in the improved performance and increased confidence of your trainees.



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