

Look and Sound Your Best

By George F Greene and Mark Brull

Looking Good!

Looking good on TV and sounding great on radio and TV is both an art and a science. You may never have done this before and, if you have, you're probably still no pro at it. There are technical aspects -what to wear, your good side, using microphones (see [How to Use a Microphone](#)), but there are also issues of preparedness and nimbleness under pressure. You'll have limited time to get across very important messages. In this age of journalism as spectacle and “balance”, you may be competing for precious time with an opponent *and* an interviewer. That's a lot to think about and that means it's important to be prepared.

A significant part of looking good on camera does not necessarily happen in front of the camera. Many people ask, “Why do I have to learn to be on camera? I'm not trying to become an actor.” Your reason for learning to be comfortable on camera – for learning some basic camera technique – has nothing to do with dramatic acting or performance, but everything to do with being prepared to convincingly and effectively deliver your message.

Cameras change reality in subtle ways. People will be watching you on a TV, which has subtle and not so subtle effects on what you look like. For example, striped clothing or deeply saturated colors may set off flashing and moving patterns visible on viewers' TVs. You will want to have some mastery of the process so that, in the end, you will come across as the person you really are, and not what the camera can turn you into.

-At the risk of sounding trite: BEFORE they turn on the camera or give you a microphone, ask yourself: “Why am I here? Why am I getting in front of a camera?” What do I really need to get across? Now, under NO circumstances should you ask these questions out loud. Asking these questions out loud made General James Stockdale, running mate to Ross Perot, famous: 17 seconds of audio ended his career!

Believe it or not, avoiding General Stockdale's fate is NOT the most important reason for knowing why you are in front of a camera or an audience. If you are composed; if your thoughts are collected; if you focus on your ideas, it shows on your face and it shows in your posture. It also makes you look calmer (usually, because if you are prepared you actually *are* calmer) and you'll feel more confident and relaxed. The subtleties of vulnerability show up very clearly on TV, so it is definitely better to prepare yourself well to avoid that feeling.

A couple of quick hints before we send you online for more details:

- Breathe. OK, now breathe again. Slowly. And exhale...slowly. That should drop your blood pressure about 20 points, and slow you down to a realistic tempo. Now, Smile.
- Do not get too close to a camera -your nose will swell like a labrador's and your eyes will look huge.
- HDTV is not kind. Let a makeup person help you if one is provided. You may not think you are sweating, but TV lights see everything and they can be very hot. A little powder takes the shine off your cheeks and your bald pate. Avoid stripes. Shave. Brush that dandruff off your suit. Bring a friend who will check you before you go on. Better yet bring your spouse: you know nothing gets by them!
- Find your good side in a mirror. Remember to turn your face a little to show off that side.
- With your body turned a little to your good side, sit forward in your chair so your back is not slouching.
- If the camera is below your sight line, ask to have it raised -or your double chin will have you looking like Jabba the Hut. If the cameraperson won't do it, then lean into the camera (but not too close -see above!) and tilt your head up a little to stretch out your wattles.
- Breathe..., smile. C'mon now.
- Nodding your head while listening to a questioner or other interviewee looks weird on TV -like you're a chicken. Practice *not* doing that in everyday conversation.
- Practice in front of a mirror raising your eyebrows, smiling, making faces, speaking normally. See what works, what doesn't. Ask a trusted friend or family member -or again, your spouse or better yet your mother- to be brutally honest with you about the things you do and the little affectations that might be distracting on TV.
- Microphones are like guns -always treat them as loaded. Be careful of what you say and do: when you *think* you are off the air, you are probably not. Technicians do not always turn off mics just because you leave the set to relieve yourself. And remember to get rid of the wireless mic the moment you are off camera! Think about this before you start jaw-jacking with the other guests or the crew. It's not unheard of for a candidate to forget and have the wireless mic on in the car while driving away and still be on air. **Prime Directive -never say anything compromising within 100 yards of a TV studio.**
- Breathe..., smile.

More Resources

Joel Silberman's video tutorial. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-okKQ3ezqSw>) Joel talks about simplicity, stillness and authenticity through your posture and "game face". Joel has nuggets like "27 words, 9 seconds, no more than 3 thoughts" -and more. While you are watching, watch how Joel holds himself and speaks.

More Joel Silberman tips:

<https://blog.lgbthealthlink.org/2012/06/09/being-a-media-star-tips-for-media-appearance-success/>

And these:

[How to Look Good on TV \(http://lrich.wordpress.com/2008/10/26/how-to-look-good-on-tv/\)](http://lrich.wordpress.com/2008/10/26/how-to-look-good-on-tv/)

[For Men: How to look Good on TV](#)

[\(http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshmax/2011/12/14/tv-pundit-shares-tips-on-looking-good-in-front-of-the-camera/\)](http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshmax/2011/12/14/tv-pundit-shares-tips-on-looking-good-in-front-of-the-camera/)

This article shows an example of poor lighting. Though made for video professionals, you'll get an idea of what to avoid and what to seek, so *you* are well lit.

<https://www.tvtechnology.com/expertise/shining-a-light-on-politics>

Special Thanks for this expert insight to Mark Brull, network television writer and producer going all the way back to Barney Miller!