

YOU ARE AN EXPERT: Becoming a Spokesperson

A spokesperson is an individual who speaks on behalf of a group or cause in the media, public forums, or community. He or she is a mouthpiece for members of a movement, and sometimes the personification of a cause. No one can make you a spokesperson for medical cannabis; it is a role you must choose. But consider your aptitudes and motivations carefully. Being a spokesperson is an important role that carries a lot of responsibility. Your words may be the only ones some people hear about medical cannabis, and in this modern media environment your words can go further than ever before.

You have probably already seen professional spokespeople in the media. Political parties, community groups, and corporations all have spokespeople to tell their stories. The best of these professionals have well defined messages and connect with their audience. Take a minute to think about those spokespeople that you find particularly effective in the media. What is their demeanor? How long do they speak? What attitude do they project to the listeners? Do they persuade you?

Do not be intimidated by the idea of being a spokesperson. Almost everyone has the capacity to act in this role at some time. Your opportunity may be as brief as a sound bite on the evening news, or it could involve engaging the public on an ongoing basis. Regardless of the scope of your role, you can learn skills to be effective and influential. Do not worry about being polished. That comes with practice. This chapter contains an exercise to help you tell your personal story, create effective messages, and frame your comments for the given setting. These are all important steps on the way to being a medical cannabis spokesperson.

As a spokesperson you are a messenger and you are using your point of reference to deliver a message. Unfortunately, most people in

this country have an opinion about marijuana in general and have created stereotypes for who they think we are. You have an additional burden of breaking through those stereotypes to be heard which means being mindful of terminology and appearance. We all have other interests aside from medical cannabis but don't let those interests such as personal freedom get in the way of educating people about the topic at hand.

Remember that acting as a spokesperson is not the same as giving a testimonial, even when your personal experiences are part of what you communicate. A spokesperson's primary goal is represent the message or the group of cause. This means focusing on the messages that are inclusive and bigger than you. An effective spokesperson will not let ego, personality, or pride crowd out the message. Always remember that being a spokesperson is not about being a celebrity. It is about communicating a message that brings us closer to our goals.

Roles of a spokesperson:

1. Put a face on the issue
2. Speak to peers
3. Bring urgency to issues
4. Educate public and elected officials
5. Speak out against injustice

Challenges for Spokesperson:

1. Avoiding stereotypes
2. Avoiding opponents' terms and frames
3. Not putting yourself in jeopardy
4. Not letting ego, personality, or self-interest get in the way

