

Ladies and Gentlemen, hello and thank you for having me here tonight. Now in order to earn my meal and pay off three years worth of debts to my friend Spencer Baretz, I am going to try to give you some frank pointers on how to deal with the legal press; in particular, how not to piss them off.

Now, it's probably most appropriate that I should be the one making this speech. I'm notorious for my acrimony with the public relations industry. The crazy reporter with the phobia for phones. The petty nutcase who will have a near murderous fit over an e-mail typo. I know what everyone says about me.

So let me clear the air now by admitting that, yes, I am a pain in the ass. Furthermore, as the esteemed Mr. Peck has informed you, I am leaving this profession in two days.

I strongly urge you to clap and whoop up this delicious development. (Please, a little hand to all of you right now.).

Now here is the bad news. By far, I'm not the reporter who hates you the most, merely the one who is amongst the most vocal. While my retirement, so to speak, removes me as your headache, you still have to deal with numerous migraines quickly emerging within my profession.

In short, ladies and gentlemen, journalists are getting sick of the legal marketing profession and this will lead to a shakeout in your profession.

To illustrate this point to you, let me repeat to you a quote I heard twice in the course of six months, from two different journalists who were not in the same newsroom (indeed one wasn't even employed by the paper the first time this quote was uttered) when the other said it.

"Tommy, the law firm beat has got to be the most flacked in this city. Damn!" The second time this comment was uttered to me, the explicative sounded like "Firetruck."

This perfect storm of public relations is the result of a number of factors: some of which are the fault of reporters. Others of your clients. Indeed, some things are beyond your control. Then there are some things that fall squarely within your ability to change.

Undoubtedly, many of you will take the following criticisms personally. I am sorry for that. But it is my hope that before you completely blow off what I am saying as mere steam, you will at least consider the points being raised. I can assure you that just a little forethought on these issues will go far in your future successes with reporters.

It's not a question of just being annoying, or pushy or whatever. Many of the strategies, the assumptions and certainly the attitudes guiding the way firms conduct their legal marketing can actually endanger the jobs of reporters. And in turn, that is leading reporters to adapt strategies that will ultimately cost some of you your jobs and businesses.

Many of you have already experienced this trend. As time goes by, your jobs are getting harder to accomplish with one or more reporters. "Oh, so sorry," says one reporter, "just no interest in your pitch this week." "I don't know what to say," says another, "you've just had no luck with my editors so far." Others will simply tell you, "never call me again."

As time goes by, it will become easier for many of you to lose total access to some reporters, and thereby lose the capacity to ply your trades. I can't overemphasize the damage of a reporter's boycott. Clients and partners push you. "Where is our ink? We need brand awareness. What's with this reporter at this newspaper? Those morons across the street have already gotten their names in three articles this summer." Desperate, you sweet-talk, apologize for whatever the hell might have insulted this flaky reporter, hire another PR firm or other in-house people. Or you make that lethal mistake; throw money at the reporter in the form of gifts or wining and dining. But you get nothing, and in this fiendishly ferocious legal market, this silence quickly becomes fatal.

Let me give you an example of how such a boycott emerges, and why it is so easy to accomplish.

I had the misfortune of encountering one law firm and its outside PR agency during my first three months on the job - a very crucial and delicate period for any reporter at most newspapers, especially now.

The law firm was based elsewhere and was looking to expand its presence here in the bankruptcy realm. It's not the ones you're thinking of. During my sixth week on the job I believe, their PR agency approached me with the idea of doing a story on the bankruptcy cycle. The premise was reasonable, that banks were devoting too much attention protecting the big troubled borrowers, and not enough time with the small and mid-size companies. Their argument was that this strategy would lead to a flurry of mid-size and small bankruptcy filings within the next six months.

Not a bad idea for a story, actually quite interesting.

The problem was that I needed proof. No self-respecting editor is going to allow a reporter to run with a story unless she or he has proof to back it up: preferably three freight trains full. Preferably enough proof that if you were to stand on it, you could shoot spitballs at the office windows at the top floor of the Empire State Building.

Proof.

Now at that time, I was green enough to go with the PR agency's assurances that they would get me proof, and that more importantly, their clients would be available for me when needed. I went to my editor, pitched the story, and committed myself to writing it.

The problem with this particular law firm was that the two bankruptcy partners who had egged their PR agency to pitch to me were unavailable, continuously, for three weeks.

This is a very important issue for a reporter: committing oneself to writing a story. In essence, it is like saying to an editor, "OK. Here is the rope by which I plan to hang myself. I am now officially declaring this a situation which will help decide the future of my employment here."

This is especially the case during the first three-to-six months.

These three weeks come and go. My editor presses me. "Where is the proof? Where is the proof?" I promise that I will get it. I promise that they have it.

My editor gets so frustrated with me that we set up a do-or-die editorial meeting one Monday. I still have not heard from the partners at all - despite repeated assurances from the agency. After I threaten to cut the story, the agency finally calls me - five minutes before I am supposed to sit down with my editor to present him reasons for not firing me, mind you - to declare that the lawyers don't have any proof now, but that they feel I should write the story anyway.

One enormous red mark is placed against me, nearly tottering my fragile, feeble attempts to hold onto my fledgling job.

I refuse to take any calls from that agency again for nearly a year. I have never written about that law firm, and have only written about two clients of that agency (once each) over the course of my nearly four-year career at my newspaper.

I have more than a dozen other stories relating to various PR jams during my first three months at the paper, all of which had led editors to rethink my employment at the paper a little. Such jams, for various reasons, will convince me that one PR agency or one law firm is simply too dangerous to work with. And I often take action.

In fact, I can say with confidence that at least 30, perhaps 40 of the top law firms in New York City have never been featured by me in my stories, and perhaps never will.

No forgive me, let me correct myself. These law firms will never be featured by me in a way that the law firms will want. The only time I will write about those firms will be in stories where the only thing they would want to say to me is "No Comment."

One of the many rules you should appreciate about general interest newspaper reporters: never assume that a reporter needs you or your law firm for anything they will ever need to write. Never assume you have any weapon in your arsenal powerful enough to compel them to write a positive story about you.

How can a reporter get away with such an un-American travesty in public relations?

Simple, the explanation lies in the first reason why reporters hate you.

1) The first reason why reporters hate you is simply because there are too damned many of you.

There was a time when reporters only called lawyers to get the "We decline comment" quote for stories about their naughty clients. Then something wondrous happened some five or so years ago: law firms discovered the general press.

At about the same time, they also discovered New York City. Over the past three years, more than 100 out-of-town law firms set up offices here in the city, in addition to the 300 or so major law firms of varying sizes, shapes and neurotic issues already in operation here.

And so, like a flotilla of seagulls swooping down to take a poop on a convertible, all of these law firms send down their in-house marketers and PR agencies to the three-or-four dozen New York journalists who are paid to regularly give a damn about what law firms do.

"Hello, we've arrived! Did I tell you about our new white-collar partner? Our attorneys are ready to speak and advise you- on absolutely anything you can imagine. Did you get our press release?"

"I don't understand why you did not receive our press release. Did I mention our lawyers went to law school?"

And you all swoop down on these outnumbered reporters at the same time.

This creates two problems for you.

One, it wears the heck out of reporters.

I will use myself as an illustration.

I can get more than 100 calls involving law firm story pitches each day. I also get more than 40 invites to meets and greets. Every day.

"Hello. I just want five minutes of your time. Can I ask you for insights on how to get ink at Crain's? I really don't understand why you don't have the time for a 30-minute walkthrough of our new Caribbean maritime practice. Can you help me out? Can you please, please just write about us?"

These are calls from major PR firms, little PR firms, desperate freelancers, in-house people at every conceivable shape and variety of law firm. Solo-practicing, but not so media savvy, attorneys. People from Pittsburgh. People from Minneapolis, Boston, Rhode Island, both Washingtons, Long Island and

California. There is one idiot from Beverly Hills who after four separate arguments still doesn't understand why Crain's "NEW YORK" Business doesn't have a bleeding Beverly Hills bureau.

Now let us do some math.

I am able to write slightly more than 100 stories a year. I am allowed only two meets-and-greets with sources each week, but frequently do up to six behind my bosses' backs to honor promises and keep track.

If I were to satisfy the pushy demands of every PR person who called me on the first day of the year, I would be booked for meets-and-greets for the next six weeks, and won't need to take another story pitch until the next year.

If I were to give the requested five-minutes to each and everyone one of these callers, that would take roughly 8 1/3 hours. Now due to other delightful elements of my job, which I will outline just a little later, I work between 10 and 12 hours each day. Giving everyone those five minutes ("Please oh please, just five minutes") will leave me less than four hours to do my job.

But even if I were so inclined to honor the request of every single caller on one day, I still would not be able to write 100 stories. And that is tied to the second problem that comes from the fact that there are so many of you.

It's getting nearly impossible to tell your pitches apart.

Assuming this speech lasts an hour, I would have received 10 calls in that time, and will have already heard the same stupid joke twice. You name the latest rhetorical sales gimmick, buzzword and dopey voice inflection, and I'd have heard each new trick two or three times before lunch.

"Oh, but we're different. We offer a winning platform. White-glove service. We have the best legal talent in New York City. Our lawyers have been quoted in The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and Business Week." *If that's the case, then why the hell are you bugging the crap out of me then*, is my usual thought to that last one.

I'm going to hit you with a couple of harsh realities about legal marketing: the first is this. Outside of the courtroom, lawyers can only say very little about cases, clients or issues - and that little which they can say is already public knowledge in readily accessible court documents.

So there is nothing interesting you can pitch to me that won't be pitched to me by 20 of your competitors in the same day. No legal nuance or interesting development that won't be e-mailed or described to me by phone in spiels that are carbon copies of each other. I'm sorry. That's not quite right. One of you might use the word "absolutely." Another might use the word "completely."

There is no trend you can imagine that I have not heard several times today. There is no wrinkle you have thought up that the person sitting next to you at the table has not thought of and already pitched to me.

Over and over and over again.

Because there are so many of you, common sense rules about etiquette and courtesy can't apply. I can't talk to every single one of you. I can't send you return e-mails or calls for every single pitch. I can't give a 15-minute introduction on what I'm about to every law firm that blows in. I can't stop what I am doing every time one of your partners learns a new trick on his unicycle.

Another harsh reality: general interest or even general business newspapers can't publish every new detail about the legal industry. Specialized legal publications, like American Lawyer or the National Law Journal, must. And God bless them, they do a wonderful job. For years, I've read with envy the breathtaking depth and acumen of the multi-page analytical pieces published by these magazines.

But not all papers have the same mission or needs of a specialized legal publication. The American Lawyers and National Law Journals must record, or at least must do their very best, to record every new fact, every new development in the industry – because they are the papers of record for the legal profession.

General interest or general business newspapers can't. Our readers simply wouldn't be interested enough in such a level of detail. So we must always choose what we think our readers will want. Many things will never get published, and many law firms will never get noticed simply for that reason alone.

Now you may respond to these declarations with something along the lines of either "This has nothing to do with me. I only care about what's happening with my firm," or you may say that "My law firm is better than that. My clients are so intrinsically interesting that we will naturally get chosen to be featured in a story."

My response to the first is that these declarations have a very direct impact on your success as a marketer – and that has everything to do with your law firm and your job.

My response to the second is simply this. Maybe, just maybe your law firm is indeed that special one. But there are more than 300 law firms vying for each journalist's attention – and the competition is far too fierce for you to hobble yourself with overly bold assumptions of your effectiveness.

One thing you should never do is ignore the psyche of a reporter, which just for laughs I will outline for you right now.

Reporters are neurotic, overly-stressed compulsive blokes working for neurotic, overly-stressed compulsive taskmasters who used to be neurotic reporters themselves. They've gone to the same schools you and your clients attended, but make a third to a fifth of your salaries, and one-tenth that of your clients. They've gone through family disappointment, climbed over barbed wire fences, gotten death threats and suffered stalkers - and let me tell you stalkers and death threats stink- to get their jobs. They have several hundred if not a thousand or more people vying for their jobs. And they can't clear spinach out of their teeth without their toothpick technique being micro-analyzed by the aforementioned masochists, families and thousands of job competitors and, for some reason, the five most obnoxious hogs-future investors in freaking Essex County, New Jersey.

Now tell me, what the heck is so special about your law firm that I am going to risk my job for you?

Wait, let me make this harder, what is it about your law firm that is special AND hasn't also been bragged to me by two other people about their law firms in the past hour?

It's getting to the point that the only way you stick out in our minds, the only way you can differentiate yourselves from your competitors is by making our jobs more difficult. And that is lethal in this legal market now, because if I decide you are a disaster to work with, I am going to the person sitting right next to you at the table. And if not him or her, the next person, and the next person.

I can afford it. I have more than 350 law firms to choose from.

2) The sheer numbers of you become a dizzying threat to reporters when combined with the second reason why reporters hate you: You don't listen.

Here is a portrait of a migraine moment.

I come Wednesday morning ready to have an editorial meeting over my mid-week short story. A simple one, a veritable no-brainer, say 15 to 17 inches on some new trend in intellectual property law suits.

My deadline is noon, 1 p.m. tops. It's 9:30 a.m. now, but I'm not worried. I had great conversations with six great PR people who understood perfectly, *perfectly*, and guaranteed me everything I needed by this morning.

One person promised to e-mail me stats on the trend.

Another promised to e-mail me some pithy quotes and an explanation of why this practice has become profitable.

Another promised a quick phone interview on the basics of the laws involved.

Another interview was going to outline some new popular strategies in these suits. And the last was going to give me some information on how this trend had affected law firm hiring.

I open up my-emails and start going through my voice-mail. Got plenty of messages - it almost feels like Christmas. Then I find out what these messages actually say.

One phone message was from the PR person who promised to e-mail me my stats. "Hello, Timmy? Mr. Timmy Rodriguez? I did exactly as we had agreed and have e-mailed the stats to your e-mail address at the Global Gotham Business Gazette and was wondering why you had not alerted me to your receipt of this e-mail. I'm thinking you can develop a 2-page graphic on these stats. I'm starting to think it's kind of rude of you not to call back."

I get an e-mail from one independent PR person, whose code name I frequently give as the Eager Beaver, who decided that one person wasn't enough for me. So he set up interviews with six people, with all the scheduled times enclosed. Apparently, I was already 25 minutes late calling the first one.

Another says, it turns out, that none of their IP people are available as she had thought, but instead she had arranged an interview with a senior partner in their biomedical practice because, you know, biomedicine is really close to IP and they probably have loads of things to say.

One guy wondered, was the deadline really today. He thought he had heard Friday.

The lady at the major, major New York firm who was absolutely certain she'd have somebody on this by 11 a.m. said she talked to her partners and they said this story really wasn't worth investigating for another month, and that instead they wanted me to write a story about cross-border trends in international pro bono work.

Another voice-mail proudly declares that she has the partner ready to speak to me, just like we agreed, on intellectual and social privacy and how it relates to equal rights, romance and employer spying at the workplace.

I also have a slew of phone calls from various international attorneys, all clients of Mr. Eager Beaver. Apparently, he had called them ALL ahead and had them calling me ALL now. One from Canada, one from Togo, another guy who had a baby crying in the background and said he was from Lichtenstein,, was wondering why the hell I was bothering him.

Dumbfounded, I explain my situation to my editor, who is himself speechless at my gift for turning a three-hour no-brainer into what looks like will be a two-week international space odyssey.

Infuriated, and on cue, my editor summons out of the clouds a flying house, actually a three-bedroom Queen Anne complete with widow's peak and garden, to gracefully plummet precipitously towards me

now. Just as the stone basement of the house crashes down on me at Mach 3, I think to all the PR people who put me in this situation.

Wish you were here...and your little dog too.

One common joke amongst reporters is gauging how much one PR person will mess up this request or that request. We do it because this is so common and it is often lethal to what we are trying to accomplish.

Now, in the past, there may have been reporters who made crazy requests to seem important or all powerful. Most of these schmucks have been laid off - those that remain suffer continually taunting by their colleagues. I've been known to make an insufferable reporter or three miserable myself.

The rest of us make seemingly crazy requests because these things are exactly what we need to keep our story from being cut and having a chair thrown at us. We don't have time to feel important, especially not with you guys calling us every few minutes with unsolicited pitches. Not listening, not paying attention to these requests is a very easy way to make our lives hell.

Another example is taken from some choice moments in my life as the phone receptionist for the entire legal marketing industry.

I know, I know, I know. I'm going to be whining now, shamelessly, but I think the record should be cleared on why anyone would be so freaking phobic of phone calls.

Let's go back to the subject of their being so many of you, and the number of calls you often make to me: up to 100 each day.

I get one call, then maybe 10 minutes later, another call. Five-minutes later another call: When I stand up to go to the bathroom: three calls.

Concentration is a joy, productivity a dream.

And then the absolute bogey of them all: when I am waiting for a call from a scheduled interview, or when I have to call someone. That's when I get hit by the all star defensive line of the law-firm marketing profession.

Here's how I sound many times trying to field calls to make myself available for a scheduled interview.

Brrrring. "Hello! Actually, I'm waiting for a phone interview. As in right now. Sorry I can't write about Anchorage-based law firms. Send me an e-mail." *Brrrrng.* "Hello. Actually I don't write about air conditioners. No, actually sending me a press release or talking to you for 10-minutes is not going to make me want to write about air conditioners any more than I do now. Very likely it will make me want to do that even less. Send an e-mail." *Brrng.* "Hello. So, who is Sarah Amazing? OK. OK. OK. Very impressive. I still have no idea who you are. Oh. I don't know of you because I don't read the legal press. Well, technically, I am the legal press and I still don't know who you are and I'm pretty sure I don't want to. Sure, Take a chance, Send me an e-mail. I could use the laugh." *Brrng!* "Hello. Actually, I'm 15-minutes late for an interview and my source is probably pissed off at me. Now, this has nothing to do with my lack of interest in edifying myself in the top, top legal trends of the industry. Wait, I'm sorry, did I miss a top? OK. It has nothing to do with my lack of interest in the top, top, top legal trends of the industry. I just like to keep my promises to people who don't annoy me. Do you annoy me, as a matter of fact - oh, you're going to tell ALL my editors and my publisher on me. Take a number."

Brrng. "Hello? Yes, yes. I know. I was supposed to call Mr. Wonderful 20-minutes ago. Yes, I realize it is incredibly impolite not calling someone on time. Oh. He's no longer available for interview. That's marvelous. Thank you."

This happens to me at least three times a day. Very often by repeat offenders. If they had listened to my request, I'd have more time to do my phone interviews.

Look folks. I may make you huffy when I push you off the phone, but I'm pushing off other people in order to honor my appointment to you when your client is on the phone.

What goes around comes around folks.

Woo. Those last two were kind of long. Let me rattle off a few of the reasons more expeditiously so I can concentrate on the more interesting ones at length.

3) Reporters hate you because you treat them like your social worker.

Don't you hate it when you are on a train or rushing to work on the sidewalk and you get essentially a homeless person asking for a donation, a street market asking for you try their sample of deodorant or someone from a political party (or someone who wants to be normal enough to be considered part of a political party) getting in your way and asking for you to listen to them for 10-minutes? Or when a really smelly and ugly co-worker starts to hit on you?

You know that deep-down cringe that makes you go Euuuuuu!

Well this warm sentimental kind of feeling is exactly what a reporter experiences when a PR person applies any wunderkind pitches involving guilt, desperation, or heavy-handed appeals to courtesy.

I get at least a dozen calls and scores of e-mails from people who beg me to write about them, to go meet their managing partners, to consider the importance of specialized video games for training rainmakers. They all leave messages like, "Please contact me to help me understand how I can help you. Please, please come to our event. I really don't understand why you won't call me back. Common courtesy demands that you call me, impress my partners and write about me and compliment my wardrobe."

Euuuuuu!

Here are some harsh realities.

I am not here to help you. I am not your social case worker. I am not here to protect your job, make you feel good or help your clients. I am not obligated to acknowledge your existence, and none of you have a God-given right to get ink from me. The sooner you accept that reality, the better off you'll be.

The best way to look at me in this issue is like a short-order cook. I'm just looking for raw materials for my chicken soup. The good chickens, I'll cut up and skin for my soup, the lame-o dumbasses will be left to run crazy in the woods and out in front of traffic.

Remember one other thing. Besides the subject of making money, business journalism is primarily about two things: winners and losers. If you keep trying to get attention via pity and guilt, guess which side your firm will ultimately be assigned to?

4) Reporters hate you because you treat them like a social trophy.

Some examples of exchanges I've had over the past three years.

"Hello. Mr. Fernandez, I am the new Vice President of Communications at this thriving pretentiously European Ad agency, and I am sooo eager to please. I would like to take you out to lunch, drinks,

breakfast, dinner and some retro-European bowling. We advertising people just love making strikes when listening to Abba!"

"Mr. Rodriguez. I know this is short notice, but three executives from Technicolor Yawn have flown in this morning and would like to meet with you this evening, over drinks and Suuuushi, to discuss the latest developments in document flow management software."

"We want to come in tomorrow to talk about the exciting developments in office air conditioning."

"We have this celebrity coming over to dinner at the law firm. Our managing partner will put on a dress, dance the conga and allow other celebrities to make fun of him."

"What do you mean you don't want to spend three hours with our managing committee to educate us on every single aspect of your editor's wardrobe needs? The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Post did this. Surely, you don't want to revel in your own ignorance (that last one folks, was not an exaggeration. Someone actually said that.)

Now I realize, during the course of your work week, you have to deal with the rabid needs of your partners to assuage their egos and feel important. What better way to do that and generate ink than forcing a reporter to come in at gunpoint. He comes in, impresses the partners and discovers the inherent brilliance of these lawyers and the firm.

Let me let you in some realities on the subject of meets-and-greets. They are the easiest way to permanently turn off a reporter from you and your clients. They take a lot of time that could be spent doing something useful. And there are reasons why your clients are hated by their spouses and children. You also act like 6-year-olds. "Uncle Tommy, we want you to play with our managing partner noooooow."

Let me repeat some of the stats I laid out to you earlier in this rant: I get invites to over 40 meets-and-greets each day. Because of this, I am NEVER available for a cold meet and greet for at least a month to six-weeks in advance. I'm never in the mood to piss off people who actually waited six-weeks to see me just to satisfy your need for immediate gratification.

Further, I am not going to go to a meet-and-greet cold without first testing the source out in a phone interview. If your client passes the I-Am-Not-a-Dumbass test, then I'll make the invitation to meet with you.

It gets even better: the more money you spend with these things, the more effort you put into these things, the more I'm going to freak out. Say I've been invited to meet with four partners, the flak, at an expensive new French restaurant that is going to feature belly dancers and Polynesian fire-eaters. The first thing that goes through my head: these people must really suck as sources. Two, they're really desperate for press, so they must also suck as lawyers.

Let me make the invitation, and if I do, I am going to pay.

Say your partners don't screw up as sources and actually get quoted a few times. Enough that I figure it won't be too torturous to attend one of your parties. Be careful how you parade me amongst your lawyers. You're walking around thinking "Wow, I'm getting so many brownie points."

I'm thinking "Eeeeeek! I'm being gloamed!"

5) The issue of meet-and-greets is a great segue into the fifth reason why reporters hate you: Your clients are dumbasses and you don't tell us.

Here is some of the fun shit your lawyers pull during interviews.

- A. "I can neither confirm nor deny that ice cubes are refreshing in beverages."
- B. "Where is this story going, Mr. Fernandez? I don't know if I want to be quoted. Let's go along and I'll tell you what to quote. 'This law has...'. Actually that's pretty good. Put that down Mr. Fernandez. Wait, actually, Mr. Fernandez, write 'This law should have...'. Yes. That should do it. Wait, actually I meant 'could have...' and you could make laws plural, unless I just want to go with the spirit of these laws."
- C. "Is that really the right question to be asking? Is this really the right story to be writing? I'll tell you a story you should be working on, although it won't really be a story until the winter, but that's beyond your deadline, isn't it?"
- D. "Come on, I want to be quoted in this story. Ask me something that I can be quoted on!"
- E. "We're not comfortable talking about the specifics of corporate governance lawsuits. We cannot give you any examples or even deep explanations of the law because it might reveal our thinking on our clients' cases. We can only say on the record that we believe such suits are mostly yucky."
- F. "What do you mean I said something interesting, Mr. Fernandez? I purposefully intended for this interview to be as uninteresting as possible! What do you think I said? What are you going to write? Actually, I think this should be all off the record now."

AAAAAAAAAARGH!

I understand completely that you are under pressure to get your lawyers in the newspaper, and sometimes, if not most of the time, these lawyers are not quite-ready for prime time.

But if you push an attorney onto me who has zero social skills and you don't tell me, or you push an attorney onto me who really has nothing useful to say to me about the subject I'm writing on - you're not helping anyone. You're going to disappoint your client. You're going to tick me off by blowing another 30-minutes which I'm never going to get back again.

If you have nobody who fits a particular story, just pass. I won't hold that against you. If you streeeeeeetch and give me a goober, that is going to piss me off.

Even if the attorney is a celebrity. I can't tell you the number of times PR people have arranged interviews with me with major case-winning attorneys, major politicians, government officials and sometimes actors, etc. (The whole gamut of Oh-My-God you're so-and-so.) They give me a wonderfully famous-sounding piece of dreck, which my editors then have me throw away.

Here's the basic rules on this:

My job is to collect information that, in the judgment of my editors, would be useful and interesting to my readers. My job is not to be awed by your client, whoever they are. My job is not to make them feel good. My job is not to make you feel good. For that matter, I am not paid to feel good myself.

All I want are quotes that are the following:

1. Useful. They contain information my readers can use, preferably to make money, or otherwise, make decisions that do not suck.
2. That contain details that actually enlighten my reader. No "Financial law is actually very important legally,...in a fiscal sort of way,..." Don't laugh, I'm only barely exaggerating that quote.
3. The quotes have to be on time. By deadline. They can be the most brilliant quotes in the world, but if they come to me three hours after that page has been shipped to the printer, it's the same as me getting no quote at all.
4. The quotes must have low migraine factors.

The only problem is this: Most of your clients would rather die than say anything interesting. And sometimes they can be their own worst enemies. Many can go from zero to dumbass in under five-seconds.

This is why I have to interview at least 12 lawyers each day, because most of them are so bad. I have to go by the 5% rule, where I'm hoping at least 5% of them are not doofuses. (OR is it doofi? I always get my Latin wrong.)

For example, there is the source I call the uppity purveyor of crap.

The man or woman who refuses to say anything interesting. "I really can't talk about that. I really can't talk about this. No. I'm just not comfortable on this subject."

But then, once the interview is finished, they get all uppity about how I quote them, and how many times I quote them and whether or not I include the fact that not only is she the head of the firm's Macaroni and Cheese practice, but that she is the vice president of the National Association of Macaroni and Cheese Eaters.

DUDE. You haven't said enough for me to even decide whether or not I like or dislike you. Although I have a strong inkling as to where I should be headed.

Then there is the retroactive Wuss:

The one who mistakenly gives me an interesting quote, and when I send the person back the quote, proceeds to painfully suck out every piece of fun from said quote.

Example:

"It's a rigged game. You can't win."

New quote:

"The dynamics of the scenario can be such that the risk exposure outweighs any fiscal incentives for entrance into this paradigm. "

Now I see why your kids don't talk to you.

Then there is the source whom I lovingly call Commodore Jackass.

These are sources that push or try your patience, screwing up deadlines, creating headaches and then generating every reason they can to make you not want to quote them at all.

Example: There was this securities law partner who was playing phone tag with me for three days straight. "Sorry. Too busy. Can't talk now. I'll talk to you tomorrow." Twice on e-mails he was correcting my questions and asking whether this story was worth doing. Not like that was burning out his interest in getting quoted himself.

It finally gets to be deadline. He still doesn't call. I'm late for handing in the story. He finally calls me. I start asking my questions and again he starts asking me where am I going? Why am I asking these questions? How long have I been at the paper?

I tell him that I have ten minutes before I have to hand in this story.

He tells me snippily, "Well, I have five."

My response was simple, "Don't let me keep you then."

I hung up on the guy and never featured him or his law firm in squat.

The moral: when you encounter a gift horse, don't shove your egotistical risk-management tools down his throat or he'll give you a horse-kick to the privates.

Plain and simple: Your attorneys are a means for filling a two-inch hole in my story and find one or two details to justify writing said story.

Nothing more.

I'll absolutely, positively need them for one story, and if they blow that, I'll never need them again.

Over 350-law firms anyone?

6) Reporters hate you because you don't understand this simple reality: Reporters are addicts and Editors are their connection.

I realize this reason will kind of repeat some points I made previously, but I think it's so important that it needs to be redundant.

You have to look at reporters one simple way: as addicts. What are we addicted to? Whatever the heck it is our editors say we're addicted to.

It could be a quote saying this. Statistics indicating that. A document explaining this. Nothing else matters. Period.

Now there are times, a rare few times in one's career that you encounter something so life-shatteringly important that you are willing to stand up to an editor, tell him to go jump in a lake on principle, and you quit.

These moments are satisfying, very satisfying, but they are also rare – especially in corporate law. There is no life-and-death, at least not when it comes to your clients, because they're too scared of risk to ever reach that level.

Another thing to bear in mind, we want whatever it is we are addicted to BY DEADLINE. You'd be amazed how many law firms and PR people throw conniptions over deadlines.

First example, there was this law firm that could never get their data ready for me on time, and I only did puff stories about them. Stats on some kind of hiring, etc. One time, I pushed them for two days, got nothing, pushed them another day. "Our management committee is examining the issue." Still nothing. Finally,

The PR person at one top 20 New York law firm never understood this. More than twice, I would make my story request on whatever; say trends in accounting law suits. She'd moan and complain about the deadline, and would tell me "Please, please wait. We'll have something for you."

And then fall through.

But here's the fun part, she would then call me the following week saying that her lawyer was free now and wanted to talk to me about the story I just wrote. AFTER I WROTE IT.

Yeah, like I want to even know you after the story is done.

7) Reporters hate you because you act like used-car salesmen

I present for your examination, a study in Nausea.

So one Saturday I have my parents over for a day out in Manhattan. We're Bronx-bred New Yorkers, but they now live in the New Jersey boonies and occasionally need a reminder of how obnoxious the city can get.

So we're in one of my favorite Asian Fusion restaurants (Yes, Dad. That's the entrée, not the appetizer. They cover up the rest of the plate with sauce to hide the fact the meal is so small. Yes Dad, they think we're idiots.).

When to my utter surprise, a PR person for a small-to-midsize law firm sees us.

"Well, Tony, Tony Gonzalez, how are you? How is everything? Is this your family, blah blahbiiddity blah blah blah. I can't see whether I can get you to come over to meet our partners, heh? Blah blahbibddity blah blah blah."

My Dad is dumbfounded, a spot of fusion rice drops out of his chop sticks onto the table right near his hubcap-sized designer plate. My Mom, used to the ways of the corporate world, has that knowing smile which says to the world "Yet another idiot."

I chat it up a little more with the PR guy who then goes off to make the world safe for legal obfuscation.

My Mom shakes her head. My Dad picks up the errant piece of rice and jumps right off into expletives.

"Who the (blank) was that?"

"That's a PR guy."

"You work with these people all day?"

"Yep Dad."

"You know, I used to beat up guys like that in high school."

"There you go again, Dad, making me jealous of your juvenile delinquent youth."

Don't get me wrong, we understand your pressures. We do. But you guys drive a lot of us nuts with what I like to call "a used car salesman" mentality.

That I have to do this and that, use this mega-targeted marketing strategy so I can get Tommy Fernandez to write 3 and ½ stories about us that would rate an 85 or higher on the Puff-Piece-o-meter.

Drop your fantasy. There is no spiel, there is no gimmick you can use to compel me to abandon my common sense.

This attitude of reaching sales goals is actually one of the easiest ways you can shoot yourself in the foot.

"I must get this press release in, I must get Tommy Fernandez on the phone to I can use spiel Number X19SA, so I can win over this guy and prove to my client that we're seeing PROGRESS."

You call me five-times in one day and send me that same number of e-mails. You stalk my colleagues to ask them about me or to broker five-minutes face time with me. Oho! You finally catch me on the phone, as I am desperately trying to get free for my scheduled interview, and you use your Patented Extra-Amazing Pitch.

I'm not interested in the pitch, but I ask you if you can work on providing me something on X and Y in the coming weeks.

You wave off my question. Yeah, yeah, yeah is your attitude. Whatever Mr. Fernandez. You've done your job, you don't need to listen to me. You have completed your bombing run. So what if you missed. You did your pre-defined task.

Congratulations Scooter, you just lost an opportunity to become a long-term source with me.

This Go-Team, 3-point shoot, get it through the End-Zone mentality makes you guys do the craziest things.

The top example: Offering of Scoops.

Now, I know what you're thinking. What is this twit talking about?

Scoops are great. We offer a reporter an exclusive, get good will and probably some other things as well. Who could hate it?

As matter of fact, some of us do - especially those in the smaller press.

The bottom line is this: everybody in the industry knows that the really good stuff is going to get leaked to The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Business Week, what have you - the major newspapers that have immediate access to millions, or at least close to millions, of readers across the country.

No one in their right mind is going to leak their biggest, greatest sell-the-children announcement to a paper that is smaller than that or to a regional paper, like us. Media market forces would deem you a fool if you did.

So instead, you try to craft middling-important announcements to a reporter like me, with the promise that absolutely no one else will get it, only in return I have to have it published by Date X, that I have to spend 15-minutes with the managing partner and do the Chicken Dance at the news conference.

Here's the thing though: If it's not as valuable as the news you'd be willing to pitch to the WSJ, odds are nobody else will want it.

Let's face it: the only news that really interests us reporters, and our readers, is the news you don't want us to know. The naughty stuff, the embarrassing stuff, the stuff that gives your clients ulcers and conniptions.

I know, I know, you're going to tell me, Oh the American Press, so obsessed with bad news. Seriously, before you got into Public Relations, how many times would you pick up a newspaper that said "Go Lawfirm Go!"

Don't offer scoops, especially with all those crazy rules. And I'm offered scoops with ALL the crazy rules you can think of. "I'll only give you this scoop if you promise to pick up my calls by the second ring, write a sonnet about us and hop backwards!"

Just offer us information. If we use it, we use it. I know, it's scary giving up that control - but that's the reality.

One other thing about spiels: they can cause MUCH more trouble than you know.

I know you're thinking: How can this be so bad? I work my marketing magic, show the reporter some smooth and win my law firm some love.

"I'm certain that you'll find our law firm is in a class by itself, snoot snoot snoot."
"And which law firm has not four, not five, not six federal prosecutors, but 3 and ½!"
"You know, we're the law firm that Leona Helmsley almost used."

A little secret, just so you know, your patented dumb salesmen chitty chat is viciously and cruelly mocked behind your backs.

People: Know this. Reporters read Dilbert and we have no problems eviscerating you amongst ourselves when you're not around. My favorites are the code names.

"Hey, Two-Conversations-in-Search of a Point on line one."

"Mr. Screw-you-before-Deadline just sent me an e-mail."

"Hey, John, guess who's on the phone, and she wants to get your little dog too."

So, you may be strutting around, thinking you got your thang going. Kicking ass for your client, but behind your back my entire profession is making fun of you.

Something to think about.

8): And this is the perfect segue to the eighth reason why reporters hate you: You forget that you are not the message, only the medium.

I can't tell you how many PR people for Law and Accounting firms want to tell me about their PR Awards. I won second prize from the Association for Greater American Flakking. I've been featured twice in the Greater PR Roundtable of Long Island.

Bragging about oneself. Tooting one's own horn. When it comes from PR people, it's a harmless distraction. At worst, it can get to be an incredibly annoying, time-consuming distraction.

Don't get me wrong. You have to justify your existence. To do that, you have to prove to your clients that you have done something wonderful. And putting up daily with a pain-in-the-neck like myself isn't enough. You also want to impress a Scrooge like me with all the wonderfulness that is you.

Fine.

Just be sure it doesn't do two things: First, get in the way of your job, and two (and more importantly), get in the way of my job.

It could be a matter of talking incessantly about your accomplishments, about yourself, about your family, whatever. It could be something so subtle as not knowing when to simply shut up and let your client talk. It could be something like being married to a particular press release, being married to a particular story idea, or wanting to assert some kind of master-of-the-universe dominance over a reporter.

Here's the reality: The story isn't about you. The story will never be about you. The story is about the story and will, if you are lucky, say something about your client. Getting too involved in tooting your own horn can hurt you, sometimes massively so.

Here are a couple of examples:

1. There is a PR person (actually several, but this one annoys me to the point of migraines) at a top-30 New York law firm. This person, I won't reveal the gender, etc., always produces reams of brochures, specially-developed reports, lists of contact names and numbers; quotes of partners from other newspapers as well as two-page bios of every person I may or may not want to talk to.

This work is wonderful, truly deserving of the Pulitzer Prize for media relations.

The problem is that for my reporting needs, it's a colossal, galaxy-shattering pain in the butt. I can't devote two hours going through 200-pages of assorted law firm literature, especially when all I need is a three sentence quote for my story by the end of today.

The first few times, this was when I was still new to the job, I politely implied that I did not have the two-days needed to peruse all of this highly enlightening material. Among the responses I received: "All of this material is ALWAYS considered highly useful and has been praised by reporters at the Wall Street Journal, New York Times and blah bah bah bah bah bah."

And there you have it. Have I quoted people from this law firm? Yes, I have. But I certainly would have quoted many people from this firm if the marketing staff had enough sense to make my interviews with them less of a chore.

2. This is something that almost EVERYONE in the marketing industry seems to do to me at one time or another. I get frustrated with a marketer and yell at them for some harebrained misunderstanding or mistake that costs me several hours of work.

And the response is always the same: "Well, I've been in this field, X-years, you know,"
It could be 10-years, 12-years, 25-years. What have you.

And I know what you're thinking. Mean old Tommy made me feel bad, and if I showed him exactly how long I've been toiling in this field, a light is going to shine in his head, and he is going to appreciate me and apologize for hurting my feelings.

This is what really happens.

Before your declaration, the reporter hated you disinterestedly, in abstract. After, the declaration, you've given the reporter a benchmark for hating you.

Think about it:

Issue 1: Precisely outlining for me how long you've been the mongoose to my snake is just going to make me want to give you crap more. This guy has been a mongoose for 25-years, time to bring out the club.

Issue 2: You've been in this field for how long, and yet you still did that dum-dum thing I just yelled at you for?

Folks, I'm not paid, such as it is, to make you feel good. I'm not paid to feel good about you.
Hell, I'm not paid to feel good about myself.

9 and 10) Now, I spent A LOT, A LOT of time working on these last two sections, which are centered around these two rules:

Reporters hate you because you think they work for you.

Reporters hate you because they are paid to hate you.

Some of my previous versions were outright scary, even for me, and I'm downright mean sometimes.

One of the things I wanted to say was that for the following pitch, my responses is and will always be the same.

"Hello! I'm from A VERY IMPORTANT PR AGENCY, and we want you to meet with our client today, attend his book-signing party tomorrow, write a story about another client next week and for you to inform us, in triplicate, every story you're planning on working on for the next six weeks."

For such requests, I can say proudly that my response will always be brought to you by the letter F and the letter U. Journalists are not juke boxes, period.

I had thought about this section a lot. I had wanted to harrumph against nitpicking PR people, against PR people who want to know what I'm writing, where I'm writing it and who I'm interviewing. About all the migraines that come up what we call the Muppet Syndrome with companies or law firms that want a story just so.

I also wanted to make foreboding declarations about PR firms that try to get me fired. Everybody tries to get me fired - and I know who most of them are.

But then I'd be just be blowing steam on this matter, because it doesn't really matter if you try to get me fired or not. I'd be sore about it for a few days, but I will call you back if you have something useful. On the flip side, trying to get me fired is not compulsion enough to me to write about you if you have nothing useful.

I go where the information is - and that is the key behind these last two reasons why reporters hate you.

That is also the reason why you are trying so hard to get ink with us in the first place.

Seriously, how many of you race to read the newsletters of other law firms. Gripping read, eh? I am going to try to get the information I need for my story any way I can.

You are going to do everything you can to protect your client and promote their interests. The reality is that certain things will never be possible though - and you have to communicate that to your clients.

You'll never really have a relationship with me, because I won't let it happen. No reporter worth their pen and notebook will let it happen out of fear of losing objectivity.

And there are few things we fear more than losing that.

Any and all of your risk management goals with me: the establishment of media agendas, PR strategies, marketing goals, all of those things must mean nothing to me. We cannot write something because you feel or need or believe we should. We write what we feel, need or believe we should.

Any PR person who makes a client believe that any of that risk mitigation, press control stuff is possible, is committing a grave injustice to their clients. We have the control over our stories and we are willing to fight wars to protect that control.

That's not to say we don't have friends. I'm proud to say that there are five of you I will always know, always worry about and always help in the years to come.

They are in alphabetical order: Spencer Baretz, of you-know-where; David Brooks of Beckerman PR; Joy Martini, formerly of Lovell's; Tom Orewlyer, formerly of Bingham McCutchen, and the ever crazy and brilliant Peter Shankman.

If you ever have a chance, I suggest you talk to them, buy them meals; hire them; listen to them. They're worth knowing.

The rest of you, I'm certain, would be all great friends, personally, but journalism is a crazy dance, that doesn't allow for too much laxity. I'm ready to admit that I probably broke more than a few rules just by becoming friends with these people.

That's OK. I'm leaving the field and friends are worth the risk.

In conclusion, I'll pay you this compliment; reporters ultimately hate you because you do your job. You protect them and their interests from the Fourth Estate – and we can be scary sometimes.

Jeez. If I had someone like that mean-old Tommy Fernandez writing a story about me, I'd be proud to have any of you watching my back.

Thanks for making the past three-years fun.