

## Transcript – Episode 88 – [Media Relations with Antionette Kerr](#)

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Welcome to the Successful Nonprofits™ Podcast. I'm your host Dolph Goldenburg. Today, we're talking about media relations. If you have been around a while, you have undoubtedly had interactions with the media that have fallen on different ends of the WOW spectrum. There's that happy occurrence, the one where you're saying, "Wow, awesome. Thank you so much. You have totally captured our agency and what we're about and the amazing things we do." Then there's this reaction, "Wow, what in the good God's name is this story about? I am a 100 percent certain that I never said that, and why on earth did the report or focus on this one minor issue when the story is so much bigger than that?" All nonprofits need media coverage. Now, how to get the best media coverage is the purview of today's guest, Antoinette Kerr. Antoinette wears several hats that make her an expert in media relations.

First, she's been a journalist, and she was 16 when she interned at the Lexington Dispatch in North Carolina. She still works as a news correspondent for magazines, newspapers, and blogs. Second, Antoinette spent over 20 years working as a leader of nonprofit agencies that focus on economic empowerment. She has dealt with the media from both sides now, and in addition to having experiences on both sides of that coin, she is also the author with our former podcast guest, Peter Panepento of Modern Media Relations for Nonprofits. In addition, Antoinette is CEO of [Bold and Bright Media](#), a faculty member of the nonprofit academy, and the founder of the [Write Folks, LLC](#). So, let's settle in for some sage advice as Antoinette and I talk about how nonprofits can optimize their media relations.

Hey, welcome to the podcast, Antoinette.

**Antionette Kerr:** Thank you for having me, Dolph. I appreciate that nice introduction.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Oh, well thank you. What was your biggest pet peeve as a journalist dealing with nonprofits? Also, as an executive director, what was your biggest pet peeve dealing with journalists?

**Antionette Kerr:** I think that my biggest pet peeve dealing with nonprofits would be boring press releases. I started in this world back in the day, when we had old school fax machines, and they just came through slowly, and my job literally as an intern was to stand over the fax machine and read the press release as it was coming through and deliver it to the proper desk.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** I think I remember those fax machines, and I talked about it recently on a bonus break. We're talking about the old school fax machines with the slick paper and it all curls over. Then you've got to uncurl it like it's a decree from the king so you can read it.

**Antionette Kerr:** Absolutely. And I would take it and deliver it to the right desk. As nonprofits, we noticed a trend with their press releases, and you know, as reporters, we would always sort of roll our eyes and go, oh wow, that's really not as newsworthy as it could be. We found ourselves calling them and saying, what's the story here? You're having the same golf tournament. Well,

what makes it unique this year? So, that was probably my biggest pet peeve as a journalist. As a nonprofit, my biggest pet peeve was that no one could seem to get my organization's name right. They can't mixing us up. We were a community development corporation, and they would mix this up with the city's organization that had a similar name or the housing authority. My biggest media relations struggle with just getting the name right. So, those would be my two experiences that, that somewhat led to working on the book, modern media relations.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** So, share with me what can nonprofits do to make their press releases less boring and less repetitive. So, it's not, oh, it's a golf tournament again this year. Haven't you already sent us this press release 10 times?

**Antionette Kerr:** Absolutely. And that's what people do. I mean, for the sake of time and money and effort, typically media relations for nonprofits isn't one person's job. It might be the executive director. It might be the communications director. I've noticed in a lot of networking with nonprofits that this sort of lands on someone's lap who doesn't necessarily have the training or experience in writing press releases. What some people can do is, number one, don't send the same press release every year. That's a big deal. Just sit down each year, even with the staff or board or committee and ask, what makes our fundraiser newsworthy this year? Do we have a special guest? Is it an anniversary? What can we pitch to a reporter that would make this sound more attractive and appealing?

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Fundraisers, even when you've got a special guest, even when it isn't anniversary, I think many times fundraisers are not actually that appealing for the media because they kind of feel like all they're doing is providing you with an advertisement.

**Antionette Kerr:** That can be the case. Newspapers are different. And we talk about that in *Modern Media Relations*. They need news and so do other media outlets, television and radio. So they need news, and with this 24-hour news cycle that we live in, those of us who are in the reporting role called it feeding the beast, so our editors always looking for something fresh and new, and if nonprofits can provide that and make it newsworthy, they could really help us fill some spaces. On one hand, I understand that you're having the same event or you're having a speaker, but if you can be creative, you can be a media darling. I have nonprofits that I go to all the time because I know they have high-resolution images on their website that I can snag quickly. I know they'll give me great quotes, and their press release feels in the who, what, when, and where in a way that I could just cut and paste in a lot of situations. There is space in the news world for nonprofits to be filling the gaps for desperate reporters who were short on time and short on resources.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** How does that work? Let's say you send a press release to a report; do they then have to pitch that story to their editor or how does that work?

**Antionette Kerr:** Most of the time they do in the news world or in the broadcasting world, same way. They all have to pitch it to a producer, but it's an easy sale if you've got it ready to go. If they're able to work with you quickly, it can be an easy sale because a lot of media sources don't

have beats anymore. A lot of newspapers don't have reporters just dedicated to nonprofit work. It's all about you getting things there in a timely and appealing way. We talk about great media relations in our book, and the A, in GREAT, because everybody loves a good acronym, is appealing. And that's one big thing we talk about as far as press releases.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Okay. Somehow, I feel like we just jumped past the G,R, and E. Tell me what the G stands for.

**Antionette Kerr:** The **G** stands for goal-oriented, and what we want people to do is sit down and actually have a media relations strategy that meets your goals. I worked with an educational institution that decided that they wanted to change the image about who attends their educational facility. They had a goal. They wanted to let people know that they work with what people would consider to be nontraditional students. Their media relations strategy was really built around that. The **R** is responsive, and one thing that Peter Panapento, who's my co-editor, and I have noticed in our media relations is that a lot of nonprofits aren't responsive, so you'll work up this great press release, and you send it to a reporter, but then you're gone at 5:00, and they have a deadline, so they can't get in contact with you. We also talk about the crisis management there.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** You know, it's interesting when you talk about responsiveness. I think with the media that is so critical because you know, almost our reporters on deadline and so oftentimes back when I was an executive director and I'm an interim right now somewhere in New York, and oftentimes when a reporter calls me, I say, Hey, let me work something up. I ask, when is your deadline? And you know, if they say, "Well, it's 3:00 today." I'm like, okay, if it's 3:00 today, when do you need me to get back to you? And if they say 11:00 AM, I got to move heaven and earth to make sure I get back to him by 11:00 AM.

**Antionette Kerr:** Absolutely. And then a crisis management, hopefully you never need a crisis plan, but you don't want to plan for your crisis plan in the middle of it. That's another way we encourage people to be responsive. The **A** is for appealing, and the **T** is for targeted. So, Peter and I talk a lot about, you know, why we shouldn't spray and pray, like send your press release out to every media source that you can find and just pray it gets picked up and it's covered well.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** When you say targeted, like if you were to give me a rough number, what's the number of media outlets that a nonprofit should be targeting?

**Antionette Kerr:** I think it just depends on the region. When you're talking about it at a coverage for something in New York, that's very different. If it's a statewide organization, I'm working with the statewide organization now, so obviously they do want to spray a little bit more, but we also have those reporters that we know that we reach out. They know that we know that they're interested in our topic. We know that they cover nonprofit events. The **E** in GREAT is for empowered. We really feel like they would help us share a more empowered message. One thing I see with nonprofits is when they do have media coverage, you talked about this in the introduction, sometimes it's like, wow, they really didn't get it. We want to have less of those

WOW's and more of the WOW's that you talked about like, wow, that really steals the message, drives it home. We're proud of that message

**Dolph Goldenburg:** I also think when we talk about targeting, I think really also what we're talking about then is building relationships with specific reporters or journalists in the media. How does a nonprofit build a relationship with a reporter?

**Antionette Kerr:** Thankfully social media is around now. I keep saying, I don't know how I did this job reporting before social media fund sources there. I find lots of information there, but journalists have egos to some extent. I mean no one got in the world to be a writer or broadcaster because they didn't want anybody to see them. So, if you're promoting and sharing things, even when it's not related to your nonprofit - say they write another story about another nonprofit - you can just be fans. Start by being a fan, and then if you have something to pitch, I've pitched things to reporters through direct message on Twitter. And that's a legitimate way to communicate with a reporter. I also had sources through direct messages on Twitter. It's something as simple as being fans and sharing their things on social media. I've also noticed that some nonprofits that I've covered don't share the stories about them on social media, and I'll reach out just because I'm sensitive to it because of the work that I've done. I'll ask, Did you like the story? Was there something that needed to be correct? And they'll go, "Oh yeah, we just forgot about it." That's just disrespectful, but okay.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** So, one of the things that I also think it's probably helpful is to set up a Google alert for your organization's name as well as for your key staff members. Then if there's any mention, whether it's in traditional media like a newspaper or TV show or whether it's in more new media like a blog or a podcast, you will automatically see, oh, we were mentioned, and then you can reach out to whoever wrote or produced that piece.

**Antionette Kerr:** That is a very good thing, and you can set up a Google alert for maybe a topic that is interesting to you or relevant. I think that that has been successful for some nonprofits, and I'm glad you mentioned podcast because we interviewed people for our book on both sides of this conversation. One nonprofit told us they spent so much time, money and effort trying to get earned media from traditional sources, and they connected with a podcast with an audience that had a similar interest. This was historic preservation, and they had such a better response to their fundraising because they had a specific targeted audience through that podcast. I think people forget about that. They don't think about that. That's why in modern media relations, we're not talking about just sending out press releases to traditional sources. We're talking about pitching to podcasts.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** I think you're right. The podcasts are such great targeted audiences, and one of the things you know that I often think about is someone, an organization or an individual might not need 100,000 people to hear their message. They might only need the right 5,000 people to hear their message, and if those 5,000 people are not in the broader hit of 100,000 to 5,000-person hit is more powerful.

**Antionette Kerr:** Absolutely. I think that is part of why we tell people to avoid the spray and pray. Look for that audience. Look for that person who already has an interest in your topic and work through those relationships.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Absolutely. Antoinette, we're going to take a short break, and when we come back, we're going to talk about how nonprofits should respond when the reporter gets it wrong.

**Antionette Kerr:** That sounds great.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Perhaps, it's not the media that's driving you nuts right now. Perhaps, just perhaps, it's your very own board of directors. Now, I know I'm only talking to three people who have their board driving them nuts right now, but maybe you're among those three people. Well, let me just say that that's something that I often help organizations with. I often help improve board performance and improve that relationship. It always starts with an assessment of the current board coupled with clear, precise guidance on how to improve. We develop some metrics like attendance, fundraising committee participation, and then with that, we form a foundation for the march forward, for an improved relationship with the board. So, if you think your board needs help, do not hesitate to reach out. I'm at [www.successfulnonprofits.com](http://www.successfulnonprofits.com)

Hey, Antoinette. Welcome back. Now I've got to ask the question because I think all of us have been in this boat before. We have a 25-minute interview with a reporter. We open up the newspaper. Our hands get dirty when we open up the newspaper, and we read the story, and we're like, they got it all wrong. They got our name wrong. They got our mission wrong. They even got the point of the story wrong. What do you do when that happens?

**Antionette Kerr:** First, you have a right to ask for a correction, and the way you do it is important, but the media has a responsibility. And most reputable sources will rush to correct a factual error. If it's just not correct, that is an easy way for you to say, Hey, you know, my name isn't spelled that way as someone who's suppose her name (ANTIONETTE). Asking for a correction is something people should definitely do, but again, the correction is going to run the next day, and your audience might not pick it up because it could be in the corner pocket of the newspaper. Online is great. The great thing about journalism living online is that the editors can correct it immediately now. Online it can show up correctly, but you know, it doesn't change how it went out in print in many cases.

So, asking for corrections is the biggest thing. The other thing is asking for a new story. Several times I've kind of pitched things to a reporter and said, you know, I know you can run a correction, but you know, here's why I really think it deserves a whole new story. That's happened, and that's worked because of those great relationships that we talked about earlier. If you have a relationship with a reporter, and you're continuing to be a good source for them, maybe even connecting them with other organizations with similar topics, then they'll want to get it right for you.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** I think it's really important what you also just said. This is an opportunity to build the relationship even further with the reporter. If you reach out to them and you're like, you're an idiot. You did all of this wrong. You're a horrible reporter. I'm going to go to your editor. You should be fired. Well, that's probably not a reporter who's ever going to call you again.

**Antionette Kerr:** Don't do that. There's an old saying in the industry, never pick a fight with people who buy ink by the barrel so that you know, we're not buying ink by the barrel anymore, but reporters should be your friends. That's really important, that relationship building,

**Dolph Goldenburg:** When we first kind of started our conversation, I asked what your biggest pet peeve was as an executive director working with the media, and it was that they were always getting your organization's name wrong. What types of things did you do at the outset of the relationship with a journalist so that you would not need to ask for a correction?

**Antionette Kerr:** People can do this simply by anticipating what people might get wrong. I anticipate, for example, that people will misspell my name, and so I will just make it, make a point and make a note. You know, hey, by the way, my name is, is I-O. That wasn't a mistake. Just so you know, or I anticipated that they would get the nonprofit's name wrong. I would say, you know, people confuse us with the housing authority and the city's department. I just want to make sure that, you know, we're a community development corporation, and we are a 501(3)c nonprofit... You can also do that with your messaging. So if you know, there's a certain image or stereotype that you don't want people to pick up, you could just say from the outset, you know, we know that you're typically referring to people as the homeless, but we liked more person centered language so, you know, instead of calling out the people that we work with as the homeless, we would rather you say people who are living, you know, in a situation that is unsheltered. Just kind of come at it from that angle because a lot of nonprofits don't communicate that to the media.

They have stories that they're even not proud of putting out to their donors into the universe because it doesn't describe their population in a very positive light.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Now, how do nonprofits make the most of their media hits? So I know you just said putting it out to donors, but you know, in the past types of things that I might have done is we know we might retweet it even if it's a print article, most newspapers now also have an online edition so, you know, we might retweet it, we might put it on Facebook, but how do you make the most in terms of making sure your donors see it?

**Antionette Kerr:** I think that goes back again to the shared relationship and this could be a real home run for you, but because you have an earned media source who's lending credibility to your topic. I think the donors love to see that. They get excited. It's almost like this, you know, popularity confirmation. They're putting their money towards something positive. Share it in your newsletter, even a lot of people do these E-newsletter and E-blasts. Plug that great television spot or segment into your email newsletter and it'll live in it up and not to get into

content and email newsletters, but I mean how many of us received those and actually read them? I'm more likely to do that when there's something cool inside like a video or something that they didn't write. It'll just help kind of liven up I call your *owned media*. Your newsletter is a form of media, and it is a form of communication, and that strategy should couple up with your *earned media*. It should couple up with advertising if you have any advertising that you're paying for, and you should be reinforcing that on your website and through your own *owned media*.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Okay. So, I think I understand what *owned media* is. That as media that you create, and you control like your email blast or your website but *earned media*... I think I know what that means, but I might not.

**Antionette Kerr:** There are three different types of media sources. *Earned* media is the most traditional. That would be what we've been talking about with report interviews with reporters, podcast interviews. Those are earned opportunities, and they tend to have the most credibility in people's mind frame because they're supposed to be objective and unbiased sources. Then you have your *paid* media which would be advertising. Then you have *owned* media which also includes your website in your newsletter, in your Facebook and social media. The wonderful thing that I tell people about Facebook is that you can measure who's actually interacting with your media. Back in the day when people paid for print ads in newspapers, you know, yeah, the pop circulation might be 22,000, but you don't know how many people actually saw your ad on page six.

It's more of that spray and pray versus your own media. What I saw with a nonprofit is they paid a lot of money to do some advertising to change this image of what a traditional student for them looks like. They hired an advertising firm. It was absolutely a wonderful, beautiful campaign. I went to their website, and it reinforced the old image and the old stereotypes. I thought, well, you just missed an opportunity. You're fighting for *earned* media. You're paying for advertising, but you're not reinforcing it on the one thing that you have absolute and complete control over. That's why a good media relations strategy is important.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** I do think most nonprofits probably don't have a paid media strategy, so don't really buy a lot of advertising.

**Antionette Kerr:** That might be the case. For this nonprofit that I worked with, a statewide nonprofit, they paid advertising was an important part of the budget based on what they were doing. I guess it really depends on the nonprofit, but I definitely would encourage people if you are going to pay for advertising, make sure it's coordinated with your other media strategies. Don't just put an ad out there and let it live alone. In crisis management, this becomes important because a lot of times people will pay for advertising on a page just so they can respond to a crisis situation. That's something I've considered to be effective, especially if you don't feel like the reporters are giving you a fair chance to explain your story or your situation.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Antionette, we're rapidly running out of time, and I always want to make sure that we've got time to ask an Off-the-Map question. It's that I asked each of my guests, and it's

an opportunity for people to get to know you a little bit better and maybe tangentially related to what we talked about today. In the intro, I had mentioned that when you were 16 years old you interned at a newspaper. How did that happen? A 16-year-old actually went out and got an internship at a newspaper?

**Antionette Kerr:** That is a very interesting question. It was really the beginning of my love of journalism. I was working for a high school newspaper, and we put our high school paper together up at the big newspaper. I loved everything about the newsroom. I loved everything, so I was pretty bold. I went to the publisher, and I said, I'll do anything. I'll answer the phone, I'll sweep the floors. I just like being in the newsroom. I ended up getting a job in circulation and listening for the fax machine in the newsroom. I'd go in and bug the reporters. That's what I did, and I loved it. I actually did get paid for it. I would've done it for free. I tell them that all the time. I'd tell them that I see the publisher all the time and I'd tell him that. He's now retired, but he was one of my role models and one of the reasons why I ultimately want it to become a publisher.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** I worked on my college newspaper back in the early nineties, and if you worked on the college newspaper, you not only wrote but you also had to show up on like Wednesday night and actually help put the paper together. Back in the days when you would actually print stuff out on cellophane paper, you'd cut it, and then you would wax it onto the actual sheet that got printed. Is that how you did it as well?

**Antionette Kerr:** It was. It was cut and paste. Cut and paste really mixed up. Then, I mean we literally were using it, a little knife cutting and pasting things, and the press was downstairs. So, I actually heard the publisher come up and say, "Stop the press." I thought, this is the life for me.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Stop the press. But now you don't have to ask you, what did the publisher stop the press for?

**Antionette Kerr:** He stopped the press because someone's name was misspelled, and he had a habit of going downstairs and getting the first copy. It was a news story, but it was one of our big advertisers. It wasn't an ad that it was misspelled in, but he was going, okay, we have to fix this man's name. We could not get this wrong. He stopped the press to correct a big advertisers name.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** It's funny because sometimes the Off-the-Map question takes us back to the map, and I think that also speaks to the importance of having some sort of paid ad strategy because media takes you a little bit differently when you're also giving them money

**Antionette Kerr:** And they will think of creative ways to advertising world and the editorial world aren't supposed to communicate, but they do. I get stories pitched me that random off the wall stories, and I'm going, okay, this person must be an advertiser because there's no way that the editor just came up with this story.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** Antionette, thank you so much for being with us today. It has been a pleasure, and I want to make sure that our listeners know how they can find more information about you. You've got a few URL's I want to make sure that I tell folks about. There's the Nonprofit Academy for More on Media Relations, and folks can find that at the [www.thenonprofitacademy.com](http://www.thenonprofitacademy.com). You've also go to Bold and Bright Media, which is your consulting practice, and folks can find that at [www.boldandbrightmedia.com](http://www.boldandbrightmedia.com), and I believe they can also get bulk pricing on your book, *Modern Media Relations for Nonprofits*. Now, if folks don't want to get your book in bulk, and they just want to get one or two, they could probably go to Amazon for that, and they can search for *Modern Media Relations for Nonprofits* or they can search for your name. Just remember that it is not the traditional Antoinette like Marie Antoinette, let them eat cake. It is, as you said earlier, **A n t l o n e t t e**. Antionette, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Antionette Kerr:** Thank you for having me. I appreciate your time.

**Dolph Goldenburg:** We know that pen and paper or virtually things of the past, so stop searching, dear listener. You can find Antionette's, contact information and links in our show notes and [www.successfulnonprofits.com](http://www.successfulnonprofits.com). Now, if you have listened to this podcast all the way through, and you are hearing my voice, it means that you are a hardcore listener because we're in the last 30 seconds of the outro. If you are a hardcore listener, please take a minute to rate and review us on iTunes, Stitcher, Libsyn, or whatever your favorite podcast listening app happens to be. That's our show for this week. I hope you have gained some insight to help your nonprofit thrive in a competitive environment.

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