

Speaking off the cuff

Sometimes speaking your mind, especially when you are in the public eye, is not a good idea. Media trainers really hate the idea of their proteges saying whatever comes to mind, and for good reason. President Obama may have just learned this the hard way. Yesterday, prior to talking about the economic stimulus package, he “joked” with reporters about how Washington, DC is not as tough as Chicago when it comes to snow. I saw the exchange on live television, and I thought to myself that some people (namely Washingtonians) would be insulted by this. Sure enough, the comment was carried on tons of Internet sites like DCist, WJLA.com, and even on the network news. Some people did not see what was so funny about icy, slippery sidewalks, especially when they figured the President does not have walk outside to get to work at all.

Of course, of all the things that Obama could have said, this was not close to being the worst. However, it should teach him that nothing is off the record and that joking comments are not always seen as such. Obama has been in such a bubble of adulation that it was almost refreshing to see people bristle at this comment. He will have to adjust to the idea that people will be listening to his every word, and many will be looking for missteps and mistakes.

So to wrap up PR 101—don’t speak off the cuff, ESPECIALLY if there are journalists in the room.