

Learning points from the episode #3 *Interviews with Enni Saikkonen*

Podcast in Podcast

Introduction

The third episode of our podcast series goes deep into the theme of interviews and introduces interviewing as a method to carry out one's podcast episode. Interviews are a great way to make your podcast episodes interesting and alive, and it might be easier for a listener to follow the episode in the form of dialogue rather than monologue. The most important advantage in making an interview is the expertise of the guest of the episode, which makes the episode more professional in the best case. Also, it can be a relief to the host of the podcast since the host does not need to know then everything about everything in order to dig deeper to otherwise interesting themes.

As you have noticed, this podcast series is also based on interviewing experts in their own field. In this episode, the guest will be the expert of interviews, journalism and communications, who works as a communication specialist with Fingo (Finnish Development NGOs), Enni Saikkonen.

Enni has worked previously as a journalist in several newspapers and as a communication consult, so she is greatly familiar with both making an interview and preparing someone to be an interviewee. Hence, she is a perfect match for this podcast episode!

What is the purpose of an interview?

There are plenty of different types of interviews and so they can have plenty of different purposes. There can be interviews for newspapers, radios, research, jobs – you name it. Also, one can run the interview on different platforms or with various tools – such as by calling, writing an email or meeting in person.

– In any of these cases, the purpose for the interview is to gather new information. So, it is a method for data collection. In that purpose, the format of the interview can vary depending on the purpose for the data, Enni defines.

When one decides to do an interview and prepare for that, there are several things to consider.

– First of all, you should think about what kind of knowledge or information you need to gather. Then, you can explore the field of knowledge and think of the adequate persons to answer your questions. So, first you need to recognise the need for the knowledge and then find the right person to ask for that knowledge. It might be something that you cannot find in the books.

It requires source criticism from the interviewer to choose the trustworthy person or direction to look for the information one needs. It must be a careful choice.

In the media, there is a tendency to always meet the same faces and names connected to chosen subjects – which means that the media interviews always the same persons who then will be identified as the one and only expert for the subject.

– When someone makes a good impression on an interview, he or she will probably get more easily requests for following interviews. And it is natural: when you start looking for an expert in certain field, you will usually check who have been interviewed before, Enni says.

The fact that someone has been interviewed several times is a sign for a reliable source for the knowledge, but it creates a tricky bubble.

– I would encourage to look for less known experts as well, because they might not get a chance to shine if they are never asked for an interview. Also, it would improve the diversity of the discussion to hear different voices, Enni cheers.

One way to find new faces and voices is laying the need for the knowledge bare.

– Dare to let others know that you need an expert in certain field! Ask for it from your contacts or from social media groups, there is nothing to be ashamed of. Be brave in the process of looking for the interviewee!

What can the interview situation be like?

The atmosphere of the interview can differ hugely whether the interview is run in person or with the help of a device. The real situation itself – how the interview is done and the roles for the interview – has a great impact on the tone of the interview.

– Usually the interviewee has chosen to attend by free choice and is pleased to be interviewed. Those situations are usually quite nice and a good opportunity to get to know the interviewee and learn a great deal from them. On the other hand, especially as a journalist, I have had to call people who do not want to be interviewed, and that is difficult. The topic for the interview can be delicate or troublesome, which makes it difficult. The topic and the procedure of the interview affect the atmosphere a lot, Enni explains.

A podcast interview is done live, usually face to face or through remote access, and proposes one of a challenge in that way. Should one focus only on the questions or also react impulsively to the answers one is getting?

– There are, of course, different options, but as a podcast listener, I enjoy mostly the interactive conversations. During the interview, there might pop up totally new aspects for the subject that would be fascinating to dig deeper on the fly, Enni reveals.

The interviewer can catch a new interesting topic for the discussion by proposing new questions or asking the interviewee to specify his / her answer. This might be the case especially with scholars who are very deep in their own area of research and might not detect that everyone cannot follow the discussion on the same level.

– The aim for interviewing scholars is usually to produce some kind of popular knowledge that is somewhat understandable. So, dare to ask for examples and explanations for complex things, Enni suggests.

Sometimes the interview situation can turn out to be challenging if the interviewee is very nervous or stressed about the interview. Enni has a few tricks for that:

– I usually try to open up myself and give a personal example on the topic, so that the interviewee would feel comfortable too. Usually it works, but sometimes it can be only awkward, Enni says amused.

– You have to remember not to take it too seriously. The interview is a situation you can never write a perfect script beforehand. Your attitude has to be trying your best but not to be afraid of failing. There are rare situations in life where everything goes as planned, Enni reminds.

How to be prepared for an interview as interviewer?

It is highly important to do the background research well before the interview. It can appear quite unprofessional not knowing the very basics of the topic or of the person who you are asking the questions.

– When you prepare yourself well, you also prove gratitude and appreciation towards the interviewee, who is spending time on the interview and ready to share his / her thoughts for you, Enni considers.

The usual social norms and manners are valid in the interview situation too, according to Enni.

– Be polite and kind. You might also consider beforehand whether to address the person formally or not, depending on age and status.

– It is your responsibility to make the interviewee feel comfortable, confident and appreciated. In that case, the discussion during the interview will flow nicely.

Enni would recommend to all the ones doing podcast interviews to think ahead of the main questions to ask from the interviewee.

– You can never predict completely how the interview will flow, so it is good to have a frame for the interview that you can lean on if things are not going that smoothly.

– Also, you have to have a goal in mind why you are doing the episode. If you cannot imagine any questions for the interview you might as well not do it, Enni points out.

One way to come up with the questions is to think of the listeners of your podcast: what do they want to know?

As Enni says, it is usual to send the questions beforehand to the interviewee so that she / he can prepare oneself to the interview as well. It offers a possibility to check facts for the interviewee, which decreases the risk for mistakes during the interview.

– It can be that the interviewee reads the questions and realises that she / he is not the right one for the interview, and might suggest another colleague instead. It is better to find that out before you press the record button.

What is special with doing the interview for a podcast?

Compared to other forms of interviews, such as for newspapers, you need to be more prepared with podcast recordings. Since the recording itself is basically the product itself, so you want to make it as high-class as possible in the first place.

– If the format you produce the interview into is text, you can filter the spoken answers into a carefully written text. In podcast, the recording is all you have, Enni states.

This means that one should have instructions for the interview: what to do and what not to do during the recording. One could instruct, for example, not to talk too fast or not to knock the table or rub one's hands together.

When talking about mistakes or fails in a podcast interview, luckily one still has an option to delete the failed parts in the editing phase, since the interview is not streaming live.

– Still: be sure that you are familiar with the technology and that it is working. It would be a shame to record a long interview and then realise afterwards that it was not working, Enni reminds.

How do the journalism ethics and standards apply to podcasting?

The journalism ethics and standards are good to be familiar with – even if just for one's common knowledge. They are the basis on which it is defined what is right to do and what is not.

The core instructions for the interview apply to podcasting as well.

– You need to be honest to the interviewee about what is the podcast about and what is the role of the interviewee in the episode. You need to tell where the podcast will be published or in which circumstances the recording will be used. The result of the podcast episode needs to align with the interview – one cannot, for example, record new questions and connect them to the wrong answers, Enni lists.

However, the interviewer is not the only person who has the responsibility of the interview. The interviewee has certain responsibilities as well.

– The basic rule is that everything you say in an interview can be used in the final product, whether it is a text or a podcast episode. So, as an interviewee I would suggest to be careful with what you say, Enni adds.

After all, finding the agreement between the interviewer and the interviewee would be the best solution for both.

– If the interviewee asks kindly afterwards not to use some parts of the interview, it could be a good idea to consider following that request even though due to the journalism ethics and standards you have every right to use the material.

Conclusion

All in all, there are plenty of possibilities to succeed in an interview and making it interesting to others. Also, there is no right personality that would be more suitable to the role of interviewer than others.

– Trust yourself, one can learn to be a great interviewer with practice. Know your strengths and weaknesses – that will help you to develop yourself!

Enni has a few tips for the future podcast interviews:

- 1) Surprise the listener. Try to find out something new of the topic with the help of the interviewee. If you get an expert to the studio, do not ask all the same questions as has been asked before.
- 2) Plan the concept of your podcast carefully. What is the twist or trick that will make someone eager to listen to your podcast? That concept will help you to run the interviews as well.
- 3) Remember to create a title for the episode that equals the content of the interview. Do not let the listener down in that sense.