Choosing Good Quotes/Soundbites

Good quotes/soundbites are the salsa on the nacho chip of our narrative.

Good soundbites/quotes, by definition, are:
- ✓ Vivid
- ✓ Memorable
- ✓ Emotional
- ✓ Clear
- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Spicy
- ✓ Extra value to the story
- ✓ Usually short (but not always)

Some general principles for choosing good soundbites/quotes:

1. **First, do good interviews to get good soundbites/quotes. (See Top Ten Interview Hints)**

   It's pretty hard to choose good quotes/soundbites if all you have are boring words/sounds.

2. **Avoid routine info for soundbites/quotes.**
   - ✓ Summarize the routine info in narrative. You can tell it faster, shorter and clearer than a quote/soundbite can.

   Weak: "The alarm came in 5:05 a.m. and we dispatched three fire trucks with five teams."

   Stong: "The fire ate through the roof in about five seconds flat."

3. **Listen for the heart of what someone's saying: That's the quote/soundbite.**
   - ✓ People ramble when they talk. But in all those words, there's usually something short and pithy that gets to the point. That's the soundbite/quote.

4. **But don't snap up the red-meat rhetoric just because it's there – Ask for evidence/ examples/ proof.**

   Bad Red-meat Rhetoric: *"Medicare is full of fraud, abuse and waste."*

   Yes, this SEEMS like a great quote/soundbite. It's emotional, controversial, short and pithy. The problem is that it also distorts the reality of Medicare. Some words – like *fraud, waste and abuse* – are meant to inflame emotions and short-circuit our analytical abilities. Don't fall for that. If someone uses those kinds of words, ask for evidence. That is the good – and honest, enlightening – soundbite/quote. Red-meat rhetoric is simply manipulation.

5. **Avoid generalities – Use specifics.**
   Weak: "She's a generous person."
   Strong: "She gave her whole allowance of $10 to the Humane Society."

A good technique is to use the generality as the SET-UP (see The Art & Craft of Setting Up Quotes/Soundbites). *Example:*
Reporter/Narrative: Friends describe her as generous.
Quote/Soundbite: "She gave her whole allowance of $10 to the Humane Society."

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