

# Sarah Sanders Set Spokesperson Standard (#6 Trending Article in 2019)

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You may neither have liked what she said or how she said it, nor for or to whom. But on the eve of her departure, it's difficult to deny Sarah Sanders' effectiveness as President Trump's trumpet. In 23 months as White House Spokesperson, Sanders, 36, gained prominence as one of Trump's most loyal and longest-serving top officials.

Whether out of Divine ordinance (["God wanted Donald Trump to be President"](#)) or human obstinance, Sander's relentless—often disingenuous—advocacy of the President's policies and her dogged defense of her boss certainly deserves his praise and affection... as well as the grudging admiration of fellow Spokespeople.

While many people (including this author) will have difficulty separating her performance from her politics and her loyalty from her likeability, an objective look at *what* she did and *how* she did it—instead of for whom—can reveal a lot about Spokesperson "do's" and "don'ts".

Beyond the community of professional communicators, there's some confusion regarding Spokesperson duties and responsibilities. Indeed, the title itself has many variations: Media Relations Officer, Public Affairs Officer, Press Secretary, Chief Communicator, etc. Regardless of title and detailed duties, the position requires a suitably qualified professional to:

- Serve as "the voice" of an organization
- Clearly communicate and represent the organization's

priorities

- Defend and uphold the organization's policies and/or programs
- Reflect the organization's and/or leader's philosophy



By these standards, Sanders' performance wins a Gold Medal: She consistently reinforced the President's messages; she tenaciously deflected criticism of his policies; she unfailingly promoted his priorities. And as we witnessed in her infrequent press conferences, she enthusiastically reflected his disdain

for, and mistrust of, the media.

During her tenure (taking cues from her boss), Sanders successfully squelched media engagement with, and access to, the White House. According to [The Washington Post](#), "In January, the White House set a record for the longest stretch in modern history without a news briefing, 41 days. It set another record, 42 days, in March, followed by a third streak that reached 94 days on June 13th." Under Sanders, *The Post* opined, "The principal function of a press secretary—representing the White House in media briefings—all but ceased to exist."

Led by her boss' example, Sanders energetically eschewed formal media interaction, preferring brief "gaggles" that happened when and where she wanted. When compelled to engage, Sanders played a savvy shell game, shrewdly redirecting reporters' attention by pushing back on their questions, publicly embarrassing them, and threatening to revoke their access.

Sanders' lack of accessibility and controlled interactions generated a smokescreen within which POTUS operated. Deftly diverting, distracting and discounting the media whom she was supposed to serve, the smooth-talking Southern storyteller

defined the narrative and dictated the pace of White House [media relations](#).

If you have the stomach to strip away her dissembling, her smugness, her sarcasm, and her self-righteousness, you could concede that Sarah Sanders had a virtuoso performance as White House Spokesperson. She did precisely what the President required: Engaged in media machinations to alleviate his tribulations.

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**About the Author:** Bruce Mendelsohn is Principal of [The Hired Pen](#), a award winning communications, branding and messaging firm based in the Boston area. Specializing in integrating and measuring the effectiveness of digital marketing, content development, PR and social media campaigns, Mr. Mendelsohn has promoted brands including [McGruff the Crime Dog](#), researched and developed content for Congressional reports and testimony, helped launch a [digital marketing firm](#), and raised millions of dollars to fund construction of the [National Law Enforcement Museum](#). A Top 100 Branding Expert to Follow on Twitter, Mr. Mendelsohn has been [quoted in the New York Times](#) for his social media expertise. A native Washingtonian and U.S. Army veteran, Mr. Mendelsohn was a [civilian First Responder at the Boston Marathon bombing](#) and serves on the Executive Board of the BSA's [Heart of New England Council](#). You can reach him at [bruce.mendelsohn90@gmail.com](mailto:bruce.mendelsohn90@gmail.com)