

ALABAMA JUDICIAL COLLEGE
The Court Leader's Advantage Podcast Training Series

Navigating Public Encounters, Media Pressure, and Smartphone Scrutiny in Modern Courts

Training Outline & Participant Handout

AUDIENCE	DURATION	FORMAT	SCENARIO BASIS
Judges, court managers, frontline clerks, security personnel	3 hours (modular segments for flexibility)	7 modules, each with objectives, content, and a facilitated activity	Confrontational encounters involving judges and court professionals

About this handout

This training was developed in response to the scenarios explored on the Court Leader's Advantage podcast episode “The Court of Public Opinion: Can Courts Survive Trial by Smartphone?” Each module below pairs practical objectives with discussion content and a facilitated activity and can be delivered as a full 3-hour session or broken into standalone segments.

MODULE 1 Understanding the New Media Environment

OBJECTIVES

- Recognize how smartphone culture and independent content creators are reshaping public perception of courts.
- Identify common motivations behind confrontational recordings.
- Review recent scenarios as case studies.

CONTENT

- Short video examples (real or simulated) illustrating confrontational encounters.

ACTIVITY-Group discussion: "What surprised you most about these encounters?"

MODULE 2 Judicial Ethics & Safe Communication

OBJECTIVES

- Reinforce constitutional, ethical, and procedural limits on what court employees can say.
- Practice responding without escalating.

CONTENT

- When to decline comment.
- Sample scripts staff can memorize.
- Why consistency matters: avoiding favoritism or appearance of influence.

ACTIVITY-Roleplay: Calmly disengaging from aggressive questioning.

MODULE 3 Personal Safety & Situational Awareness

OBJECTIVES

- Teach staff how to recognize escalating behavior.
- Provide practical tools for staying safe in public spaces.

CONTENT

- "The grocery store scenario" analyzing an experience that could take place anywhere.
- Exiting safely, seeking help, documenting the encounter.
- When law enforcement should be notified.

ACTIVITY-Scenario walk-through: "What would you do if approached at the mall?"

MODULE 4 Court Media Policies for the New Era

OBJECTIVES

- Help courts define access rules that work for journalists, podcasters, live streamers, and general citizens.
- Shift from affiliation-based decisions to behavior-based policies.

CONTENT

- Transparent, written access rules.
- Handling requests from small content creators.
- Managing courtroom filming and hallway recordings.

- Protecting staff while staying compliant with open records and transparency obligations.

ACTIVITY-Small groups draft a sample “Media Access Quick Policy.”

MODULE 5 Crisis Communication & Misinformation

OBJECTIVES

- Teach how to respond when the court becomes part of the story.
- Differentiate between responding to principles vs. commenting on cases.

CONTENT

- How misinformation spreads after incidents that include a confrontation.
- Institutional vs. individual voices.
- When a response helps and when silence protects the court.

ACTIVITY-Draft a short, principle-based public statement.

MODULE 6 Staff Support & Post-Incident Care

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the emotional impact of confrontational encounters.
- Learn tools to support staff after stressful situations.

CONTENT

- Internal reporting processes.
- Follow-up conversations.
- When to involve HR or EAP resources.

ACTIVITY-Group reflection: “How should leadership support you after an incident?”

MODULE 7 Building a Court-wide Culture of Preparedness

OBJECTIVES

- Encourage proactive planning.
- Normalize these scenarios as part of modern court work.

CONTENT

- Annual refreshers.
- Updating scripts and policies.
- Ensuring new staff are trained early.

ACTIVITY-Courts create a 6-month preparedness plan.