

Making Ground Through The Q & A

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The momentous question is like a fireball in the night - Thomas Jefferson

Handle questions with knowledge, fairness, honesty and clarity to enhance your standing in the eyes of your audience.

- **Repeat the question.** Even though you heard the question, others in the room might not have, so repeat it for their benefit. Repeating it will also give you the chance to clarify the meaning, and extra time to phrase your answer.
- **Practice answers before the presentation.** Think of the questions that most likely would be asked. Then rehearse or outline your answers. This will reduce your nervousness and give you credibility and stature as the expert.
- **Have questions ready.** Often when we reach the question and answer portion near the end of a presentation, no one asks a question. At this point, you can say, "One question I am often asked is ..." This usually breaks the ice and is usually followed by other questions.
- **Control the questions.** It depends upon your ease and whether or not you want to take questions during or at the end of your presentation. If I am giving a long workshop, I tell the participants at the beginning that I welcome questions throughout.
However, make sure that you stay in control. There may be someone in the audience who keeps interrupting. At this point, I usually say something like, "Why don't we come back to that later." Or "Why don't you and I talk about it afterwards?"
- **Admit when you don't know the answer.** You could ask the audience if anyone there might know the answer, or ask the person for their business card and say you'll find out the answer and get back to them.
- **Remember, there are no dumb questions.** Always praise them for an excellent question in order to encourage others.

Sometimes a hostile question triggers an immediate, angry answer that is fuelled in the heat of the moment and then immediately regretted. Belittle the questioner in front of an audience, and you have just lost the audience. Recovery will be difficult.

A perfect comeback is rarely thought of in the heat of passion. The less cool your reply, the less command you have of your audience.

Prepare, prepare, prepare.

If you know the speechmaking situation well and know your potential audience, then you can anticipate potential hostile questions and frame the answers ahead of time. Make your answers short (to stop a wider range of questions), but polite.

On other occasions where you anticipate questions you can frame your answers into your actual presentation itself. *Answered, before being asked.*

Pause, and depersonalize the question before responding. The pause will demonstrate to the audience that you are giving careful consideration before responding, and that yours is not an off-the-cuff reply.

A further way to defuse the situation is to break the question up into parts and with appropriate pauses answer the original question in two or more parts.

Once you answer the question politely and concisely move on to another questioner rather than continuing a debate with the first person. A two-person debate will just leave your audience behind.

If no other questions are forthcoming, then have some prepared questions and say: *"Prior to the meeting I learned of another issue which is important to you, and so I would like to address it now."*

Sometimes you may be asked a question which has an assumption as to your opinion on a subject. For example *"Denis you are an advocate of having an excuse-free culture.....what do you think about....."*

Always respond to the assumption before you address the question. In that way you are not necessarily agreeing with the questioner. *"Sir, there are times when I look to build an excuse-free culture and those are situational. I am not sure that your statement about an excuse-free culture would apply to your question. I think your question is....."*

Final words.... Your answer does not have to be an exact response to the person's query as long as you feel your answer correctly responds to your interpretation of the question.

Now move back in to your **Grande Finale**.....