

Have Back-Up Material

Don't ask the boss to take your word for anything unless you have data and can back it up. In the case of a performance review, come armed with hard data: comparative figures; completed projects; original self-starter work; letters from satisfied customers; and the like.

Make Sure You Understand the Question

Don't presume too much too soon, a major failing whenever we answer. Both the *form* and the *content* of the question are important.

- ***The form of the question***

This tells you the underlying motivation for the question and helps you know what needs dealing with first. Notice the differing mental sets and how the *form* of the question can give you the clue:

Curious: "I don't understand exactly what these figures mean . . ." This needs a straightforward informational answer.

Suspicious: "Well, exactly *what* do these figures mean. . . ?" This needs some background to clarify the whole issue before you answer the question. There's obviously some feeling, perhaps negative, already present. Give context, then details.

Prejudiced: "These figures aren't very helpful..." Here you need to ask why he/she thinks not, before you start defending. First find out more about why the mind is already closed.

- ***The content of the question***

This tells you exactly *what's* being asked for. Here's where your listening skill is primary, as stated earlier. Listen till the *end* of the question. Make sure you clarify by asking *before* you answer, so you stay on target and don't volunteer too much.

Build a Broader Answer

Take some initiative. Use the question to build *your case* into the answer. Don't only answer what is asked. Add background, comparisons, implications that embellish the answer (keeping connected to the original question, of course). This can shore up your position, giving it more depth and dimension.

Tell the Truth

If you don't know, *say so!* You get extra points for honesty and demerits for lying or faking.