

- Discipline yourself to listen *till the end*; to take in *all* of what the question's about.
- Ask yourself where the question is leading so you'll follow it closely.
- Analyze what he/she really wants to know.
- Notice how the question is asked: Hostile? Insecure?

This will help you formulate an appropriate answer. (For more on listening skills, see that section in Chapter 9 on Meetings.)

Clarify Questions

People often ask questions poorly: two or three points at once or a rambling statement that never becomes a question. Don't just try to answer part of a question, the part you understand or heard last. Make the questioner clarify it. To make your answer truly responsive, *ask!* Maybe something like:

"Boy, there's a lot to your question! Let me be sure I got it all. Did you mean. . . ?" or, "I want to respond to what you're asking, so let me be sure I'm on the right track . . ."

Be careful not to sound critical when you clarify, as though it was a lousy question, poorly asked, like: "Well, exactly what *is* your question?" Instead, take the blame on yourself:

"I was thinking about an answer so hard that I think I missed some of your question. Let me just recap to be sure . . ." Then rephrase it and ask if that's it.

Compliment the Asker

Nothing feels better than that old saw—"That's a really good question"—when it's said by the august speaker to little old me in front of **the** team. No, it's not corny. It's nice to be acknowledged and affirmed for having stuck one's neck out. It also shows others that you, the answerer, are really relishing this whole experience. Furthermore, it encourages others to get in the game, too.

Treat Everyone Respectfully

Remember: Audience members have much more in common with each other than they do with you. They subconsciously bond with each other. They notice how you treat each member, feeling him/her a surrogate for the group.