

and strength as well as much more credibility than you went in with.

So step one on the road to feeling comfortable and becoming competent answering audience questions is to get convinced; to know what's good about answering them.

Step two is learning how to prepare for it.

### **Preparation for Q & A**

Going into a Q&A session without a background of what they'll probably ask about, why people ask, and how we usually feel about this exchange is like walking into the lion's den without a chair. Here's how to prepare:

#### *Understand Your Audience*

- *Who are they?*

The same research you did in preparing for your speech needs to be reviewed as you prepare for the question-and-answer period: Who's there; why they're there; what they expect to hear; what they already know; how your topic fits in their lives; as well as something of the basic demographics. This tells you about your audience's basic needs, interests, and concerns, and becomes the bedrock of predicting what they'll ask about.

- *What to expect*

What additional issues and anxieties does your speech bring up for them? Is your presentation threatening to the status quo? Does what you said make them rethink a common belief?

Analyze where the hostility or rejection could come from: Are there pockets of resistance represented in your audience?

What about your peers? Who's competitive with you and needs to show off before the group by sticking you with a tough question?

Is this a disparate group who could be asking you questions on different levels about different aspects?

Still another issue is *will* they ask questions? Anticipating that you might have to live through that agonizing silence after the "Any questions" invitation will help you either plant a couple to get the ball rolling or prepare a humorous comment that breaks the ice and gets it started (something I'll illustrate in a moment).

The important message here is to *anticipate*: to imagine and think through your question-and-answer period in advance so there are few surprises.