Then go into *your* explanation instead of staying on someone else's track. Speak only of the points you want to mention, actively taking the conversation to another plane without sounding defensive.

Give the Context

Often questions are asked based on a false premise or insufficient data.

"In order to answer that, I need to give you some background (or additional information) so we're all on the same wavelength."

Then fill in the gaps, setting the proper context, etc., and turning the question into a platform. You will sound responsive and informative, yet you'll go where *you* wanted to go.

Cutting People Off

Always tricky, the obvious caution is not to look rude or like you're trying to escape. Be *very* careful to apologize as you interrupt: "I'm really sorry but," "This is very difficult," "Forgive me for interrupting ..."

Time or Group Constraints

"I'm sorry, but others are champing at the bit. I'm going to have to ask you to tighten your question." Blaming it on an objective outside source saves face for everyone, something you must be keenly aware of.

Ask for Their Help

"Look, I need your help. I have a real problem. I need to be fair and democratic and not look like a bad guy, but I also have to move on to someone else. Please forgive me." After such an exchange, ask *everyone:* "Listen, folks, I know it's hard when you get wound up" (saving face for all), "but could you *all* try to focus your questions tightly and be really succinct so **I'll** have time to answer everyone?"

Getting the Audience on Your Side

A tricky play, but necessary when things aren't going well and someone has just attacked or asked a stickler of a question. The idea is to come through as human, vulnerable, trying to do a good job.

Be Real

After a tough exchange, the best thing to do is to comment on what just happened. Humor is the very best antidote: "Well, you didn't know