

Change the Rhythm

Don't automatically respond. Stop the action if it's going too fast. It's in your power to handle not only how but *when* to respond. Slow down. "Let me take a moment to think about that."

Avoiding the Question

The tactic suggested for "What if you don't know?", above, works equally well here. Any of those responses about answering later will give you time to go back and check; to formulate a carefully worded and thought-out answer, or to check with the powers that be about what the company policy is. Humor works very well here, too:

"I knew someone would ask the *one* thing I don't know the answer to offhand!" It's also very acceptable to say:

"I'm not at liberty to discuss that right now. We're working on it," or, "No public comments on *that*. We sure don't want our competitors to know the answer!"

Turning Questions Around

Sometimes a question has something in it you'd rather avoid. You need to make a stab at answering it, but then you should take the question off to another realm.

Make It Bigger

"Actually, this affects the whole industry, not just our shop . . ." works well. Enlarging the perspective lets you share knowledge about how others are also struggling with the problem. It dilutes problems by making them not so unique or awesome.

Focus It Much Tighter

Similarly, go down to a much smaller example and get specific instead of trying to stay with an abstract, all-encompassing view.

"Look, I can't speak for all of it and where it's going, yet. I can only speak about the work we've done and what we've found so far."

Seize the Opportunity

"I'm glad you asked that. It gives me an opportunity to straighten that out . . ." or, "I have heard that," or, "You may have read about that. Here's the way it really is."