

Relax Your Style

Be warm, curious, direct, open, informal. Remember, answering questions is chatty and conversational. It's not lecture time. Your guard should be down, at least externally, and you should sound like you're sitting down having a cup of coffee with the people you're talking to. It's really a rather intimate exchange. Your mental set should be that, for the moment, you're one of them.

Avoid Debates

How often have you seen it or gotten sucked into it yourself: the derailment of the question-and-answer period into a one-on-one exchange about an ever-narrowing subject? This bores your audience in about two minutes and stops the good flow between you and everyone else. The problem is how to cut a debate off without sounding like you're running away or being rude. Try this:

"You know, this is a great subject, and I know we both have more to say on it. Let's meet after the program to continue it," or:

"Listen, you've got me on the horns of a dilemma. I'd like to keep talking about this but there are lots of other eager questioners who want to get the floor. Please see me after the program." Still another way:

"That's a really complex technical point. Let me send you X's article (or whatever) on that. Please give me your address after the program."

Speak personally and informally, being sure to save face for the nerd who keeps badgering you. This makes you come off as a thoughtful person, sensitive as well as knowledgeable. They *know* he's a nerd . . .

What If You Don't Know

Say it! Tell the truth. Nothing else ever really washes. You're a much bigger hero for admitting fallibility than bluffing and transparently letting us know (and we *will* know) that you're too shaky or embarrassed to tell the truth; that you'd rather lie and fool us than give us the straight dope. What this does is to make us suspect everything else you've told us to date. So—how to say it?

"I wish I could rattle off that answer for you, but I can't. I'd need to go back and look at some data" (or, "I don't really know that but I could probably find out"). "If you want to know, call me at my office (or, "I'll send you a note on it"), etc. "

Sound bad? Dumb? Unprepared? Surely not. It sounds honest and sensible about how much detail *anyone* carries around with them. It