

*Ask for Further Clarification*

Often, when someone is hostile, they will vent spleen but not be very coherent about just what's troubling them. Try to get your opponent to focus on the exact objection he/she has. Ask for it. "To help us come to some understanding," or, "To help me respond to exactly what your anger is about, please tell me the essence (or the basic source) of your disagreement."

Taking the question or issue apart is by itself a cooling-off process, pushing everyone toward logic and reason.

*Have Faith in the Facts*

Use demonstrable evidence, practical explanations, and specific examples as your argument. Stay out of global statements and large abstract concepts. The latter sound like you're being unresponsive and will weaken your position in the eyes of the audience.

*Settle for Disagreement*

Be willing, when all avenues are exhausted, to end up still on opposite sides. The key here is to end on a positive note, no matter what. Show your logic; recap your position with some salient argument about why. Then show compassion and understanding for someone else's point of view.

"Well, I think we need to come to some conclusion here. I hear you and what you believe in. I hope you can hear me and my points too; the point that . . . etc. Let's just agree to disagree for now and know that eventually the facts (or history) will bear out the correct position."

If it suits your personality, you might end it with a bit of humor:

"Well, you think that you're right and I *know* that I'm right..." or,

"The audience has heard us both. I think we've exhausted the subject for now. Before we exhaust, and lose, *them*, let's call a moratorium. And when you change your mind, which I hope I've helped you do, please call me."

To conclude: Handling yourself during an audience question-and-answer period is complex because of all our years of conditioning and automatic question answering. It requires handling not only the question but also the audience. Yet it's a valuable process and should be done.

It requires some understanding of what audiences want from you, hearing clearly what is being asked, and finding ways and time to think