



Controlling Your Audience/Q&A

Make sure you have finished speaking before your audience has finished listening.

—Dorothy Sarnoff

Controlling Your Audience

As a presenter or facilitator, you are responsible for the flow and feel of your presentation or meeting. Hostile audience members, personality clashes and inattentive participants can all threaten to derail your presentation and the successful delivery of your message.

Below are some tips on how to effectively control an audience:

1. Set specific ground rules at the outset; shut off cell phones and email.
2. Establish and stick to an agenda to keep the presentation on track.
3. Stay attuned to all verbal or nonverbal cues from audience members.
4. Treat all ideas and questions respectfully.
5. Ask questions of audience members to keep them engaged.
6. Use specific illustrations or anecdotes to show relevance.
7. Use volume, eye contact, spatiality and intention to stay in control.
8. Call a time-out if ground rules are not being followed.
9. Finish within the allotted time you have been given to speak.
10. Build in breaks when necessary to give participants a chance to refresh.



According to research, after _____ minutes an audience's ability to retain information diminishes significantly.

Handling the Question and Answer

Whether handling questions during your presentation or afterward in a question and answer session, the way you handle your audience during this interaction is every bit as important as the way you delivered your actual speech or presentation.

Below are some tips on how to conduct a successful Q&A:

1. Utilize the **Relevancy Tree** to control the flow of your presentation.
2. Make sure the entire audience has heard the question and repeat it if necessary.
3. Take a moment to prepare your answer before answering. Never begin your answer with a verbal virus.
4. Ask for clarification if the question is not clear to you.
5. If you don't know the answer to a particular question, be honest and say so. Offer to research the answer or suggest a resource where the answer could be found.
6. If a questioner is hostile or challenging, remain cool and in control and answer carefully.
7. Have questions ready and answers prepared in case no questions are asked.
8. Engage full audience with your answer and not just the questioner.
9. Utilize a checkback (verbal or nonverbal) to confirm the question has been answered sufficiently.

A correct answer is like an affectionate kiss.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



Relevancy Tree



*Expect the best, plan for the worst,
and prepare to be surprised.*

—Denis Waitley

Handling Difficult Questions

Nearly every person working in a corporate environment has, at one point or another, had to handle a difficult question. This type of communication is reactive, in that you have not had time to prepare your answers ahead of time and are simply reacting in the moment. These questions can come from superiors, team members or clients and can arise during a one-on-one communication or in front of a large group.

Handling a question and answer session is a form of impromptu speaking. Unless you know what questions are going to be asked ahead of time, you have to be ready for anything that might come at you from an audience. This means anticipating challenges, skepticism, resistance or push back to the particular plan or strategy you are presenting.

Write down some of the difficult questions you encounter in your present role:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

When confronted with a challenging or confrontational question from the audience, the way you handle yourself while answering is equally as important as the answer itself. If passions or emotions are running high during a question and answer session, it is important that you remain calm and in control. Be respectful of the questioner, even if the person's question seems to be loaded or includes an embedded statement or accusation. If possible, use the questioner's name as you begin your answer.



*It's not the situation...it's your
reaction to the situation.*

—Robert Conklin

Tips when handling difficult questions:

1. **Maintain a confident presence.** Utilize a strong home base position and neutral facial expressions to appear solid and steady.
2. **Reflect and answer carefully.** Take a pause before speaking and carefully consider what you are about to say. Remember: once the words come out, you can't put them back in.
3. **Defer the answer until later.** Don't be afraid to ask for time to research a question that may be out of scope or would require you to investigate more fully.
4. **Deflect to an expert.** If you get stuck and there is another person in the meeting or presentation who would be able to answer the question more effectively, feel free to engage him and solicit his expertise.
5. **Repeat the question back.** If you need a second to gather your thoughts before answering, you can repeat the question back to the person asking it. Use this technique sparingly, to avoid the appearance of simply stalling whenever you are asked a tough question.
6. **Answer the question with a question.** This can be effective as it will generate discussion and it immediately engages the questioner and allows you to glean more information about his thoughts and feelings regarding the topic.
7. **Present the question to the audience and facilitate a discussion.** Before answering the question, throw it out to the group to answer. This keeps your audience engaged and involved.
8. **Answer succinctly.** Keep your answers short. Period. The longer you speak or the more detail you go into, the more likely it will be that you misspeak, ramble or say something you wish you had not said.
9. **Rephrase hostile questions in neutral terms.** If you feel a question is too emotional in the way it is phrased or includes an embedded statement, rephrase it in a way that takes some of the heat off of it. Choose words that are more neutral and less negative, accusatory or demanding.



A sudden bold and unexpected question doth many times surprise a man and lay him open.

—Francis Bacon

Connector Statements

Eliminating verbal viruses

Often we feel blind sided or thrown off when confronted by a difficult question, and this is when verbal viruses (such as “ahs” and “ums”) sneak into our communication. These verbal viruses can create a perception of us as uncertain or unsure, causing us to lose credibility with an audience.

Below are some opening phrases that you can use when beginning your answer to a difficult question. Familiarize yourself with them. They will allow you to stay calm and in control. They will also help you appear more empathetic to your audience and more credible in your delivery overall.

- I appreciate your question...
- I've asked myself that same question before...
- It's interesting that you bring this up...
- This is a topic that's very important to me...
- I can certainly relate to your concern about...
- I'm glad you asked that question. Let's discuss this...
- You've raised a very interesting point here...
- Frankly, this is not the first time I've been asked this question...
- I've given this a lot of thought...
- I can certainly understand why you would ask that question...



EXERCISE: Murder Board