

10 Simple Rules to Make Responding To Questions Easier

By Peter Dhu



If you plan properly for your Q and A sessions and if you manage the expectations of the audience, most times Q and A can be successful and a credibility building task. Here are some rules to consider.



Corporate Communication Experts

10 Simple Rules to Make Responding To Questions Easier

If you plan properly for your Q and A sessions and if you manage the expectations of the audience, most times Q and A can be successful and a credibility building task. Here are some rules to consider.

1. Do as much preparation as you can before your Q and A session.

Are you delivering bad news (downsizing, budget constraints, organisational realignments, take overs, drop in productivity, environmental issues, safety breaches) If so, you can anticipate what questions you will be asked, and you can prepare for them?

For example:

(Downsizing)

- Is my job safe?
- What will happen if I lose my job, will there be a redundancy package for those who lose their jobs, will anyone be forced to go? Will you be retraining us?

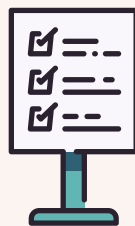
(Budget Cutbacks)

- How will I be able to deliver my services?
- I need some new equipment now. Where am I going to find 5% in my budget?
- Can we reduce service delivery to save money?
- My department is already the most efficient within the organisation? Why my department?



2. Set the rules around how and when you will manage your question and answer session up front as part of your introduction and housekeeping.

Tell them if you want questions as you go at any time, or if you want them to wait towards the end. With short presentations it is best to wait towards the end; otherwise you may get side-tracked and not finish your content.



3. Set the scope of your question and answer sessions.

Let the audience know what you will talk about and what you will not talk about. If you are not going to talk about budgets and financial implications, as it is not your domain, mention this up front. That way you can manage those questions that are outside of scope.



4. Knowing your topic and knowing your audience (walk in their shoes) what questions are they likely to ask you.

This is preparation and planned spontaneity. You need to put yourself in their situation and anticipate all the questions. Include the questions that would make you struggle, the questions you do not want to be asked, the tricky questions and prepare answers for all of these questions.



5. Using point 4 above, build a bank of questions that you are likely to be asked (FAQ's) and learn the answers to these questions.



Keep the bank of FAQ's current and broad and add new questions as they occur. My rule is never get caught out on the same question more than once.

7. Take the question on notice if you do not know the answer.



If during a question and answer session you are asked something that you do not know, you can agree to find out and get back to the audience.

Often you will have a colleague or work partner who is working, teaching, or researching in that particular niche area and you feel that they would have a more exact answer to the question.

So, agree to find out and get back to them. Our parliamentarians take questions on notice and have 72 hours to get back to parliament with the answer on difficult questions. But as in point 4. You now need to add this to your bank of questions and answers.

9. When you take a question on notice, get back to the entire room.



It is frustrating when you hear a great question, which the speaker then takes on notice, asks the questioner for their business card and says let me find out and get back to you. But what about the rest of the audience and me. We also want the answer.

6. Your question and answer session should not be the final part of your talk

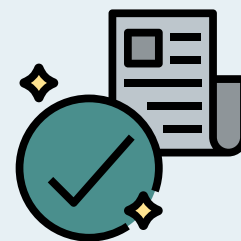


You may need to summarise or repeat your conclusion, take home message or call to action. If you allow the questions to be last, a difficult and contentious question asked by an unhappy audience member, that you struggle to answer, could unintentionally become your take home message.

People could walk out thinking that you do not know your topic as well as you should. So have a Q and A session towards the end of your presentation but always allow 2 to 5 minutes to sum up and reiterate your take home message.

8. Don't make answers up.

This is not the time to bluff or "fake it until you make it". People will have access to mobile devices and can check statistics and facts quickly. If you do not know, say so and get back to them.



10. Paraphrase or repeat the question back to the audience.

On occasion the audience does not fully hear or understand the question, so repeating it back in a similar, shorter fashion provides clarity for the audience.

