

Tips for Handling Questions

The following tips were derived from the American Bar Associations' publication "Countering the Critics." This is a tailored and shortened version for your convenience.

1. Prepare and Practice

- Prepare for your session as much as possible, becoming comfortable with the content. This will help you stay "on message."
- Contemplate what specific issues might arise in your session based on the potential make-up and/or interests of your audience, events in the news, etc.

2. Always plan a "second close" for your presentation.

- Most Q&A sessions end because the speaker's time runs out, not because the last question gives the speaker an opportunity to finish on a powerful note.
- Re-take control of the presentation after you've answered that last question, and re-end the presentation with the core message.

3. Think of the Q&A session as a one-on-one conversation with a reasonable person.

- Respond to tough questions with the same approach you would take if you were talking with someone you knew and with whom you want to maintain a cordial relationship.
- What is likely to make it harder is that the rest of the audience is listening and you don't want the question to overshadow the presentation.
- When you're addressing the question, talk to the entire audience as you have been doing. Make eye contact with several members of the audience. Don't talk only to the person who asked the question.

4. Stay cool. Let your body language signal confidence.

- **Smile.**

Not a smug or belittling smile. And not one that suggests that the question is funny. But a kind smile that shows you're relaxed and happy to have a chance to address the issue.

- **Maintain eye contact and take a step towards the questioner.**

Signal that you're happy and willing to address the question.

- **Start shifting away from the questioner.**

Move toward the rest of the audience. This will make put the focus on your response to the question rather than on the person who asked the question.

Find other faces in the audience so others will feel that you're including them in the conversation.

Be open and honest.

- **Avoid alcohol or caffeine** in the hours before you speak.

5. Focus is on the audience; its needs, interests and values.

- Find out as much as you can about your audience before you give the presentation.

- If you know the audience is generally liberal or conservative; management or labor; rich or poor; well- or poorly-educated, you'll be able to get on their wavelength—and avoid missteps—if you're sensitive to their needs, interests, concerns and values.

- Everyone in every audience is different, but most audiences have many things in common.

- Use **plain language** so everyone will know what you're talking about.

6. Think before you speak—a pause can be your best friend.

- Take a few seconds to think about what you're going to say.
- The audience won't mind the silence—in fact it will alert them that something important and interesting is coming up.
- Use the time to plan how you'll get from the specific attack to the core message.

Bridging

Use the question as a starting point to get to the core message. The thing the audience needs to take away is that **America needs fair and impartial courts.**

Pause to decide how the question or comment relates to that point. When you start to talk, spend a little time talking about the questioner's specific issue, then broaden the point to bridge to the core message and finish with confidence.

Handling the Hardball Question

Hardball questions are usually asked in a confrontational manner. Everyone in the audience knows you've been challenged; they'll be eager to see what will happen next. Here's what to do:

- **Break the tension.**
 - Stay relaxed.
 - Smile (don't smirk) while the questioner is still talking.
 - Welcome the question. It's a chance to "counter the critics."
- **Don't debate the question.** Instead, address the questioner's topic in a way that bridges to the core message.
- **Don't disregard the question or comment.**
 - You want to "bridge" to the core message, not "leap" to it.
 - Show respect for the questioner by addressing the issue.
- **Pause to identify the link between the question and the core message.**

Other Questions & Issues

Our Courts Arizona anticipates that you may be asked questions related to current Constitutional and public policy issues.

However, speakers are reminded that *Our Courts Arizona* presentations are non-partisan and informational. That is, we do not take positions for or against issues such as abortion rights, gay rights, same sex marriage, the death penalty, or court decisions and opinions in particular cases.



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