

Impact!

ANSWERING QUESTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Answering questions provides another opportunity for you to ensure shared meaning and meet your listeners' needs. Communicating with a listener focus counts as much when answering questions as at any other time during your interaction.

Consider it a good sign when your audience asks questions. From questions your listeners tell you what's important to them and seek clarifying information so they can "buy" your idea, product or service. Follow these three steps to answer questions effectively:

1. LISTEN TO THE ENTIRE QUESTION

Many people ask rambling questions which often turn into statements about what is important *to them*. Delay forming a response while the question is being asked. Listen and hear the entire question to enhance your ability to respond appropriately, meet your listener's needs, and create the perceptions of confidence and concern for the listener and his/her question.

D Look at the person asking the question. Eye contact shows you are listening and seeking to understand the speaker.

2. PAUSE, USE SILENCE TO THINK AND DECIDE:

- Do I understand the question?
- Do I need to paraphrase to confirm I understand the question or acknowledge the emotion or meaning behind the question?
- What is the best answer?
- How much detail does the person need in the answer?
- How can I answer directly and prompt another good question?
- Is someone else in the meeting more qualified to answer?

- If I don't know the answer, how can I respond confidently or defer to someone else and maintain credibility?

▷ It is okay to admit you do not know the answer.

▷ Using silence to think gives you time to make your responses genuine and unique.

3. ANSWER ONLY WHAT IS ASKED AND STOP

Focus on the listeners' needs. Too much information is confusing and could be boring. If your listeners want to know more, they will ask for more. Their questions will help you better understand and respond to what is important to them. Use silence, eye contact and your natural energy to be your most authentic self as you respond.

HANDLING THE "LOADED" QUESTION:

Sometimes questions asked are "loaded." A loaded question may appear threatening or contain a hidden agenda. Use silence while you think about the answer. Decide how you can create the most positive perception of yourself.

- Should the answer be deferred? Given outside of the meeting?
- How might I diffuse the question?

When responding:

- Be yourself
- Remain non-defensive. Do this by thinking and breathing before you respond.
- Maintain respect for the questioner; consider every question important.
- Answer the question briefly and directly to show your confidence.

HANDLING RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

A rhetorical question is a question asked solely to produce an effect and not to elicit a reply.

When responding:

- Use silence and eye contact to show you are listening.

- Be comfortable with silence — no answer is expected!
- Consider paraphrasing as a tool to interpret the meaning or value of the rhetorical question and, perhaps, bridge back to one of your Key Concepts.

D Since we know that silence and eye contact invite the next question, you have the opportunity to shift the focus from the person asking a loaded or rhetorical question by shifting your eye contact and using silence to encourage questions from other people.