

Encouraging and Handling Questions in Presentations



Purpose

Encouraging questions is a great way to engage people in your meetings and presentations. However, many managers find it intimidating to face questions. Many people are uncomfortable asking questions.

This resource aims to provide some quick practical tips for both encouraging and handling questions to improve engagement in meetings and presentations.



Encouraging questions

You should:

- specify when you would most like to take questions – during the presentation or afterwards
- ask for questions in a presumptive and open fashion – “What questions do you have?” or “Who’d like to ask the first question?”
- avoid using a closed question to ask for questions – “Does anyone have a question?” or, even worse, “Any questions?”
- beware of changing your non-verbal behaviours when asked a question –

going from this, whilst presenting...
question...

to this, when asked a
question...



...might make people think you don't welcome their question

- the way you handle questions will encourage more questions if you use the tips on the next page

“Constant and frequent questioning is the first key to wisdom ... For through doubting we are led to inquire, and by inquiry we perceive the truth”

Peter Abelard 1079-1142

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Handling questions

You should:

- thank the person or praise the question – “That’s a good question, thanks for asking”
- clarify or summarise the question if necessary
- answer briefly, avoid too much elaboration
- address the asker but give eye contact with the whole group or audience
- check with the questioner whether you have satisfactorily answered the question
- “read” people’s facial expressions - if someone looks confused they may have a question, if they look disbelieving you may not have won them over



Use the “4Ds” of questions handling

1. **Deal** with it- give an answer there and then
2. **Defer** it- for instance,
 - “I don’t know the answer to that- I’ll find out and get back to you tomorrow.”
 - “That will be answered in a moment when I cover X”
 - “Perhaps you could see me afterwards and I’ll explain”
3. **Deflect** it- for example,
 - “I think that maybe John would be the best person to answer that, would you like to contact him after the meeting to ask?” Or
 - “John might like to take that one. John, are you able to deal with that off the top of your head?”
 - “What do **you** think the answer is?”
 - “Let’s throw that open and see what others think...Pat, what is your opinion?”
4. **Decline** it- for instance
 - “That is not a question that is covered by the topic in hand”
 - “The answer to that is outside my remit, I’m afraid”