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Article Title: "How Savvy Presenters Can Ace The Q&A"

Author: MOREY STETTNER
Section: Managing For Success
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You can give a great speech. But if you blow the question-and-answer part, you're sunk.

You can bond with the audience more easily in the Q&A. By conversing with them, you break down barriers and build rapport.

But the Q&A can work against you if you fail to answer questions forthrightly or you improvise your way into trouble.

If you let slip just one faulty or inappropriate comment in answering a question, it can sabotage your whole speech.

Many speakers don't know when to stop answering a question, says T.J. Walker, author of "Presentation Training A to Z." They may babble or over-explain.

It's better to give a concise answer and then tie it to the overriding point of your speech, Walker says. If your goal is to persuade employees at your company to make wage concessions and a worker asks about the status of other cost-cutting moves, give a brief update of those expense-reduction steps and add, "Along with those moves, wage concessions are a huge part of our survival plan."

Limit each answer to about two minutes so that you save time for lots of questions. Give simple responses. Skip complex details and don't drown the audience in statistics.

Listen to the entire question. Don't think about what you're going to say next while the person is still speaking - or you may miss the most important part of the question.

Look directly at the questioner. As you begin to answer, remain focused on that person. But after your first sentence or two, look at other audience members.

End your answer by returning your eye contact to the questioner, says Walker.

Don't start by declaring, "Good question" or "I'm glad you asked that." Listeners don't care about your opinion of the question; they simply want an answer, says Walker. And don't wrap up by saying, "I hope I answered your question." That suggests self-doubt.

If a questioner uses negative language, replace it with positive wording. For example, mentally translate "Why did you screw up the Jones account?" to "What happened with the Jones account?" That prevents you from sounding defensive.

If someone asks a string of questions, answer the one that helps you link to your main theme, says Walker. Don't choose the most interesting or intellectually challenging one.

"Your job is to get people to remember what you want them to remember, not to be a college professor," Walker said.

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