

5 Strategies For Responding To Questions (especially when you don't know the answer)

Speaking Tip 117

The way you handle questions has a large impact on your credibility. You may be asked questions for which you don't know the answer, you may misunderstand the question, or you may benefit from a small bit of time to consider the correct best answer. Here are four strategies to help increase your credibility when answering questions.

1. Prepare

Write a list of questions you may be asked, write the answers, and practice delivering these answers before you are in front of your audience

2. Remember you are an expert

You know your topic, your job, and your project

3. Buy time (and think)

Use these statements sparingly to help gain focus

- “That is a great question”
- “I am glad you asked”
- “Make sure I understand what you are asking”
- “I am not sure I understand what you are asking, can you give me a bit more background?”

4. Use Your audience

- Invite the audience to respond with their knowledge or opinions
- Turn the question into a conversation

5. Give an answer

If you don't know the answer or don't know the entire answer, you still need to respond in confident manner. Use these statements:

- “Here is what I know about that...”
- “Here is what I don't know...”
- “This is what I will do to find out...”

Keep your answers short and concise, answer only what was asked, and resist the temptation to tell ALL you know about the question. When you are finished, ask to see if you have given the info being sought.

The best way to maintain your credibility as an expert is to prepare. Be ready for all questions, even the ones you do not know how to answer.

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