The Presentation After the Presentation

By Stephen D. Boyd, Ph.D.

Many speaking situations really involve two presentations: the formal presentation and the question-and-answer period. You can ensure success with both presentations by using these techniques for the question-and-answer period.

Allowing the audience to ask questions after your presentation is an excellent way to reinforce your message and to continue to sell your ideas. In addition, because listeners can ask for clarification, audience members are less likely to leave your presentation with misconceptions about the concepts you delivered. Because of these benefits, the question-and-answer period is actually another presentation and vital to most speaking situations.

Here are some suggestions to more effectively handle the question-and-answer period. Create the right mental set among your listeners by telling them early in the presentation that you will have a question-and-answer period at the end of your speech. If you have an introducer, tell that person to mention your willingness to answer questions at the end of the presentation. People are more likely to ask questions if you tell them at the beginning that they will have this opportunity.

Show that you want queries. Say, “Who has the first question?” Look expectant after you ask the question. If no question is asked, “prime the pump” by asking a question. Say, “A question I’m often asked is....” Ask the question and then answer it. If there are then no questions, you can finish with “Are there any other questions?” Some of the enthusiasm for your presentation is lost if you have no questions from the audience. Usually, “priming the pump” will motivate audience members to ask questions.

Look at the person asking the question, and repeat it, especially if there is a large audience or if you need a moment to think. By repeating the question you also ensure you understood what the person asked. However, do not continue looking at the person once you start to answer the question. Remember that you are still in a public speaking situation and that the whole audience should hear your answer—not just the person who asked the question. In addition, continue to stand where you are equally distant from all members of your audience. Avoid the temptation to move directly to the person who asked the question. Visually this will make the rest of the audience feel left out. As you end your answer, look back at the person and his/her facial expression will tell if you answered the question satisfactorily.

Keep your answer concise and to the point. Don’t give another speech. The audience will be bored if you take too long to answer a question. In addition, possibly the only person interested in the answer is the one who asked the question! If you can answer with a “yes” or “no,” then do so. This keeps the tempo moving and will help keep the audience’s attention.

One of the toughest challenges is the loaded question. Don’t answer a loaded question; defuse it before you answer. Before answering a question such as, “What are you doing with all the money you are making from increased prices?” defuse it by saying, “I understand your frustration with the recent rate increase. I believe what you are asking is, ‘Why such a sudden increase in rates?’” Then answer that question. You only get into arguments when you allow yourself to answer the loaded question. If the person is not satisfied with the changing of the question’s wording, tell him or her that you will be glad to talk about it following the question-and-answer period and move quickly to the next question.

Sometimes you will have a listener raise his or her hand and instead of asking a question will make an extended comment — or a speech. This person has no question. A way to handle this is to watch the person’s speaking rate, and when he or she takes a moment for a breath interrupt with “Thanks for your comment...Next question?” Look to the other side of the room and the long-winded speaker is not sure whether you interrupted him or whether you really thought he or she was finished. Do not allow the person to continue with the “speech” because it will deprive other members of the audience of the opportunity to ask questions.
Don’t evaluate questions. Avoid saying, “That was a great question,” or “Good question.” If the next person asks a question and you give no positive adjective, then the person may think you did not approve of the question and that could stifle others from asking questions. If you want to affirm a specific question, simply say, “Thanks for asking that question.” Make everyone feel equally good about asking questions.

Consider having your conclusion after the question-and-answer period. This technique allows you to control the end of your time in front of the audience. Instead of the last question, the audience receives your prepared and planned conclusion. Say, “Before I make some concluding remarks, who has a question to ask?” Then when you take the amount of time you want for the question-and-answer period, go back to your conclusion. Thus you can end in a positive and upbeat way rather than trailing off with, “So if there are no further questions, I guess that’s it....”

Always maintain control of the speaking situation. When you open your presentation for audience participation, there are risks of losing control. Anticipate the unexpected. Plan ahead as much as possible. Look at your content and think about likely questions the audience will ask. Prepare your own questions to ask. Don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know,” and move on to the next question (you might add that you will be glad to get back to them with an answer at a later time). Be up front with a questioner if you think the question is not relevant and, in a kind way, say so. Your response might be, “Actually, that question doesn’t fit the context of our discussion.” Work hard not to lose your temper with someone who is trying to make you look bad by the question asked.

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Supreme Court ruling regarding race as an admission standard at the University of Michigan. Temporary allowances may be necessary regarding race as admission criteria regarding black students in CTE programs.

Lure black teachers from business and industry. Though college CTE teacher education programs offer the best option for increasing the numbers of black teachers and black students, that effort can be supplemented by luring black professionals from the world of work and into CTE teaching. Barriers to formal certification can be removed to this end and alternative certification can be allowed regarding race. Schools can consider providing relocation assistance and other incentives especially for teachers who choose to move into the local school community.

Introduce alternative teaching strategies in pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. A body of knowledge can be developed specific to instructional and learning styles most beneficial to black students in CTE.

These styles can be included in pre-service teacher training programs and explored during in-service professional growth opportunities. Federal funds and grants designated for the research of alternative teaching styles can be developed. Professional organizations such as ACTE can work closely with higher education and governmental bodies in directing this research.

Mission Achieved: A Reflection of Color

By engaging in strategies to attract and retain black students and black teachers in career and technical education, the field can fulfill its mission to provide capable graduates for the world of work. Today’s workplace is multicultural and diverse. So should be career and technical education programs. The inclusion of black students in CTE courses and black teachers in CTE instruction are important to the integrity and vitality of the profession. The strategies presented to realize their inclusion are reactive to the needs of that multicultural and diverse workplace, a mission well suited for CTE educators.

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