

QUALITY Q & A SESSIONS

For most of us, sweaty palms and butterflies occur before we deliver a presentation. But seasoned presenters know that the scariest part of a presentation can occur after your concluding remarks – in the Q & A session.

If your audience has even the vaguest interest in what you're presenting, you should be prepared for questions. While lots of people will simply listen to your spiel, clap and head off on their merry way, there's bound to be one or two audience members waiting to inundate you with questions.

As with every aspect of a presentation, the trick to dealing with questions is to be prepared. The following tips will help you sail through your next Q & A session with flying colors

- ▶ If someone asks a question that you were planning to address later on, say so. Don't try to answer then and there – you risk losing the flow of your presentation.
- ▶ Never interrupt an audience member. If you know the answer, let her finish and then reply. It's basic good manners.
- ▶ When someone asks a question, acknowledge his presence. Look directly at him and nod your head. But when you answer the question, shift your focus to the entire audience. Then refer back to the question-asker in your closing.
- ▶ Unless the question is crystal clear, rephrase it before you answer. This gives the rest of the audience an opportunity to hear the question, and lets you clarify the question. If you're at all confused, ask the question-asker to rephrase the question. Never attempt to answer a question you don't understand.
- ▶ Whenever possible, use the audience's questions to reinforce your message. Refer back to slides, reiterate your arguments and repeat case studies. In an ideal world, a Q & A session is extra time for you to present.
- ▶ If you don't know the answer, be honest. Offer to research the topic and get back to them at a later date. Don't lie – if someone catches you, you'll lose all credibility. Alternatively, throw the question out to the audience. If someone is an expert in the field, she'll appreciate the chance to speak. But remember, you're still in control. If an audience member launches into a 20-minute monologue, it's time to move on.