



HANDLING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS & QUESTIONERS WITH CRAIG HARRISON



ARE YOU ON THE FRONT LINE OR FIRING LINE?

Are you forever on the hot seat at work? Are you forced to handle difficult questions from difficult questioners?

In today's litigious environment you've got to know what to say, what not to say, and how to say it...or not!

Your ability to think, listen and speak on your feet could save your job, your boss's, or your company's reputation. Are you ready when pressed into service?



HANDLING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AND QUESTIONERS is designed to fortify you with proven strategies to respond to hostile questions, hostile questioners and volatile situations you will inevitably encounter.



Learning Objectives

- ▶ Learn to anticipate questions and deliver prepared answers in seemingly impromptu fashion
- ▶ Develop the ability to gauge your questioner and tailor responses to fit their needs, speaking their language
- ▶ Learn to pre-empt difficult questions... framing them to your benefit
- ▶ Master techniques for setting expectations, ground rules and adhering to protocol
- ▶ Master the art of disengaging and diffusing
- ▶ Develop successful coping techniques for fielding questions from irate, hostile and difficult customers
- ▶ Transform rejection into redirection when saying No.



How The Presentation is Delivered

Through use of scripts, role playing and coaching, you'll become adept at handling the unexpected, learn to put a



good face to bad situations, practice remaining in control, and become a calming influence



on others when the going gets tough.

Ways This Presentation Can Help You

You will gain confidence in impromptu speaking situations through physical and mental exercises. You will also develop the ability to acknowledge the speaker's question, establish rapport and engender trust, and adeptly respond to a variety of difficult questions.

About Your Presenter

CRAIG HARRISON has faced hostile audiences for over 20 years! He has chaired contentious board meetings, presided over acrimonious council meetings and walked through corporate mine fields. He is expert at using honesty, tact and humor, when appropriate, to find common ground with opponents and treat them with dignity and respect, regardless of the animosity present.

To schedule a presentation, contact:

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Hecklers, Hardliners, and Heavy Questions

Handling Difficult Questions and Questioners with Facility and Ease

By Craig Harrison

Does your job place you on the front line or firing line where you are forced to handle difficult questions from difficult questioners?

In today's litigious environment you've got to know what to say, what not to say, and how to say it...or not! Your ability to think, listen and speak on your feet could save your job, your boss's, or your company's reputation.

Whether you're in investor relations, customer service or technical support you're often expected to dance through verbal minefields. Say the wrong thing and you may never recover from the damage. But how does one know what to say, what not to say, and how to avoid escalating hostilities when the going gets tough?

With mental and physical preparation you can handle the most difficult questions and questioners with ease and eloquence. Understanding some basic strategies can help you think on your feet, speak on your feet, and avoid putting your feet into your mouth. By understanding your responsibilities and options you'll be better able to handle difficult questions and difficult questioners with deftness.

Physical Strategies

Situations abound when we're forced into impromptu speaking situations. Just because you're speaking extemporaneously doesn't mean you can't prepare yourself. Here are some basic physical tips to employ when you speak "off the cuff" in business situations:

Breathe:

Oftentimes when we feel pressure we tighten up. Breathing brings vital oxygen to the brain, and calms you and your body, and also relaxes your voice and your vocal chords.

Smile:

When you smile you loosen your jaw, reassure yourself and also relax your audience, predisposing them to receive you better and letting them know you're in control and confident. You shouldn't smirk or laugh, since you want and need to be taken seriously. Yet tensing up and furrowing your brow will only induce more tension.

Think:

Think before speaking. There's often a tendency to speak first...DON'T! Collect yourself and your thoughts. You're entitled to reflect before to speaking. Don't shoot from the hip. Take careful aim before speaking. We're conditioned to avoid silence at all costs, yet skilled negotiators know of the value of a pregnant pause. It's prudent to pause, underlying the care with which you're weighing the question and your response. It's a

sign of respect that you pause to consider the question, even if you know the answer and have given it many times before.

Eye Contact:

Eye contact helps your persuasiveness and ability to engage an audience, whether one or many. Use it to lock in different parts of the room, or to address the questioner directly. In our society looking someone in the eye reinforces our honesty and sincerity. It's a sign of respect which can help diffuse mistrust or distrust.

Exude Confidence:

This is done through body language, your delivery, posture, assuredness. Take control of the situation. Speak with authority. Deliver your message calmly and thoughtfully. Speak in measured sentences.

Strong Opening Statement:

The best way to establish yourself as an authority or knowledgeable about your topic is to begin from a position of strength. It's your one chance to make your first impression.

Structure:

Don't be over-ambitious. Make two or three points only. Enumerate them if possible. Just as in a prepared speech, offer an opening-body-conclusion structure. Give your overview, make your key points, and summarize.

E-A-R

Empathize with the questioner, *Acknowledge* their point, and only then *Respond* to it. This lets them know they were heard and understood.

Stop!

Know when to stop. Be succinct. Better to say too little than say too much!

Mental Strategies

It is a given you at times you will encounter tough questions, tough questioners and hostile audiences. Your responses can either disarm or antagonize them, depending on your preparation, coolness under pressure, and understanding of human dynamics. Here are some mental strategies to employ when faced with difficult questions or questioners.

Gauge Your Audience Prior To & During Your Presentation

Know their educational level, disposition, political orientation, etc. Monitor their reactions to others. Are they restless, antagonistic, confused, angry? Put yourself in the shoes of the questioner: are they fearful, pained, feeling taken advantage of, ill-informed or misinformed? Consider their motivation in asking their question. That will help you understand what will soothe, salve or satisfy the questioner.

Anticipate Questions

Prepare answers for the questions you may encounter. Spend time anticipating the most likely or troubling questions and fashion your response ahead of time.

It's OK to pause before delivering a prepared response in impromptu fashion. Don't rush to respond.

Diffuse Hostile Questions By Answering Them Before They're Asked!

Disarm your opponents by anticipating and answering their questions in your own remarks before they pose them to you. You've just taken the wind out of their sails. You've quelled their fire, and appeased them prior to their challenging you. Then, if a hostile question persists, you can refer them back to your previous remarks, or inform them their question has already been answered, and move on to new questions.

Set Expectations, Ground Rules and Protocol

You can announce that questions will be taken at the end, that they must be submitted in writing, or that they must pertain to a certain subset of topics. You can also defer some questions smoothly if you pre-announce your limited expertise in certain areas. When challenging questions on those topics ensue, remind them those are outside the scope of your expertise...but that someone appropriate can respond to them (later). Defer to experts on your team. DO NOT speak out of your area of expertise. You will lose points and credibility. Instead, gain points by knowing your limitations and not speaking beyond them.

Restate the Question to Your Liking

Their question may be problematic, a two-part question, or one that leads you down a path you don't want to go. Put your best spin on it by modifying it when you restate it, removing charged language, then answering with the message you wish to share.

Turn the Tables

You can answer hostile questions with your own questions such as: Why do you ask? Please identify yourself, your company, qualifications and reason for asking? Alternately, you can ask, "what do you mean by that?"

Avoid Escalating Hostilities

Try to either empathize with the questioner or find some common ground. In a group situation you will appear to be more sympathetic and a hostile questioner will appear to be the problematic one.

Don't Take it Personally...and Don't Tolerate Personal Attacks

Separate the message from the messenger. Don't take it personally even if the question hits close to home. But, recognize that ad hominid attacks (attacks against your person) are deemed out of bounds. Label them as such and refuse to tolerate them. Stick to the facts and insist that personalities be ignored.

With practice comes confidence. Consider joining a Toastmasters club or other organization which gives you experience speaking extemporaneously in low-stakes situations. There you can try out different techniques and observe others' speaking styles.

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Craig Harrison is a professional speaker, corporate trainer and communication coach who helps others communicate with confidence and clarity. To book Craig for a speaking engagement contact him through his website: www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com, e-mail him at Craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com or call (510) 547-0664.