



The following is excerpted from *THE MILLION-DOLLAR TOOLBOX: A Blueprint for Transforming Your Life and Your Career with Powerful Communication Skills* by Ty Boyd.

The Coach Speaks: Question & Answer Time!

Some presenters dread question-and-answer time, but it's actually one of my favorite times in any presentation. I love the interaction with the audience. I love to hear what's on their minds. I especially love it when I get a question I've never heard before.

Of course, the better prepared we are, the better able we are to handle questions. I've already mentioned that I practice Q&A time, asking family and friends to fire questions at me, giving me the opportunity to think on my feet.

A couple of quick thoughts on Q&A sessions:

- ***Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."*** Remember our earlier discussion that being vulnerable adds to the effectiveness of our communication? Here's the perfect time to remind the audience that even the most knowledgeable expert doesn't have all the answers and doesn't mind saying so. When I'm faced with this situation, I always promise to find the answer. Then I follow up with a call or note to the questioner, without fail, and without delay.

Another technique that works when you don't have the answer is to ask for input from the audience. This generates tremendous enthusiasm, and often teaches me something that will prove valuable to me, as well.

- ***Answer a broad question with a specific answer and a specific question with a broad answer.*** Here's an example of what I mean. If someone asks what you believe will happen in the stock market over the next ten years, that's a pretty broad question. Try to zero in on one area, such as tech stocks, or the impact of e-trading. If someone asks how you think the break-up of Microsoft will affect the stock market, pull back and talk in broader terms about how other anti-trust rulings have affected us.
- ***Remember that this is Q&A, not inquisition time.*** You've agreed to answer questions, not be interrogated. And if you're uncomfortable with what's happening, chances are the audience will be, too. So if I'm getting grilled by someone in the audience, I respond not just to that questioner, but to the entire audience. I also try to keep in mind that there is a difference between a tough question and a hostile question. If I think of a question as hostile, I may respond with hostility. So I maintain as pleasant a demeanor as possible in responding to unpleasant questions. I often say, "I'm glad you asked that." For more on tough questions, you'll find everything you need in Chapter Eleven.

- ***Don't be distracted by inappropriate questions.*** An example. Alice May, a friend who has written a book on marital problems, was recently asked in a forum if she was a Christian. Now, this was not a religious presentation, but some of her responses to other questions had revealed a reliance on spiritual solutions in healing troubled relationships. Of course, answering the question with either a yes or a no was bound to put off someone in the audience, and thus detract from her ability to provide helpful guidance to everyone there. One alternative would have been to suggest that she and the questioner discuss that matter later, in private. Another, and the response Alice chose, was to explain that she found it to be most helpful if she didn't discuss her specific religious beliefs, so that all listeners were free to identify how her suggested solutions worked within the framework of their own personal beliefs. Her response was well-received and she moved on quickly to the next question. Don't allow yourself to be pulled off track by questions that don't fit your message.
- ***Always repeat the question.*** And it's a good idea to paraphrase it as you do so. This clarifies the question for both you and the other members of the audience, making sure everyone is on the same page. It also gives you the chance to think about your answer. Another way to pause and consider is to take a drink from your water bottle.
- ***If the question is important, there's nothing wrong with planting it.*** Ask someone ahead of time to bring up a certain point if you want to make sure the question gets asked.
- ***Keep the energy level high.*** If questions aren't coming quickly, wrap it up. Don't linger, trying to drag out the last question on someone's mind. Instead, draw things to a close while the questions are still coming in strong. Comment that there is time for one more question, but that you'll be available after the session for further discussion.
- ***Prepare a second close.*** Craft another powerful closing comment or two to follow a question-and-answer session. This brings the energy level of the meeting back up, leaving the audience feeling enthusiastic, charged up.

Pat Boyd

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Web Site: www.tyboyd.com Email: information@tyboyd.com