



Ace the Q & A Using the VIPP Process

The question-and-answer period of a presentation can really end everything on a high note, or it can turn the energy way down and destroy what was a well-organized and persuasive presentation.

It is a given that you will encounter tough questions and hostile questioners. Your responses can either disarm or antagonize. Being mentally and physically prepared will help you handle those difficult questions succinctly, so they don't interrupt the flow of your presentation.

An effective approach to handling a hostile question is the following four-step process, called the **VIPP Process**:

Vent: Ask the person a question and let him or her vent. Antagonists often deliver broad condemnations of what has been presented. If you try to guess what the person is specifically upset about, you're very likely to assume incorrectly. Get the antagonist to tell you why he or she is upset. Ask a question such as, "What is it about this proposal that concerns you?"

"I" statements: As soon as the person finishes venting, you respond with, "I hear what you're saying," or "I can imagine how frustrating that would be." You are acknowledging the person's views and emotions. Your empathy will take away some of his or her hostility because you are really listening.

Probe: Ask questions. Start to get to the root of the matter. "So, let me ask you some specifics about the situation you are referencing . . ." or, "Would you agree that this technique would work in certain situations?" You are looking for more information or a point of concession.

Once you learn enough, or the person concedes something, move to step four.

Problem Solve: When you know what the specific issue is, you can respond in any one of three ways. You can:

- Disprove the person's point and restate your point,
- Agree that his or her views and yours have merit,
- Agree to "take it off line" (i.e., discuss it later) and continue with the presentation for the sake of the group.

The goal in this process is to give the antagonist a fair hearing, and to have a professional discussion about his or her concerns. This process takes the emotion out of the equation.



And remember ...

Before answering questions, listen carefully and paraphrase the question before you respond. Think before you speak! Collect yourself and your thoughts. We're conditioned that silence is bad, yet skilled negotiators know the value of a pregnant pause.

Look at the questioner while paraphrasing (you can also include the question in your answer), but be sure to look at the entire audience when answering. Remember to smile. It relaxes your audience members, letting them know you're in control and confident.

Don't tell a lie by speaking out of your area of expertise. You could call on experts in the audience when appropriate, but take back control after they have responded – be aware that an expert can easily turn into a stage hog if not controlled. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and offer to get the information for the questioner.

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