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Five Tips To Handle The Q&A Session Like A Pro

By Renee Houston Zemanski

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So you've finished your presentation and all went well. Now it's time to enter the unknown – the dreaded question and answer session. What if they ask you something you don't know? What if they challenge everything you say? What if they just won't stop asking questions?

Here comes international communications coach and speaker Diane DiResta to the rescue. In her book, *Knockout Presentations* (Chandler House Press, 1998), DiResta shows you how to handle the Q&A session with poise and polish. Here are five of her tips that actually might have you looking forward to your next Q&A session.

1. Anticipate and prepare. DiResta recommends making three lists. The first is a list of all the questions for which you know the answers. Write them down and remember the answers. The second is a list of questions for which you don't know the answers. Research the answers and write them down. On the final list write down the questions you dread. Plan a strategy for answering them in a nonconfrontational and nondefensive way.
2. Listen. "You need to listen, both physically and mentally, during Q&A," says DiResta. "Focus your energy and plant your feet. Listen to the person's entire message before you answer."
3. Repeat or rephrase. If you're presenting to a large group it's important to remember that a question isn't yours – it belongs to the group, says DiResta. You don't need to repeat a question if you're in a small group, training session (unless it's a large group) or if it's a hostile question. If it's a hostile question, don't be defensive; just rephrase the question in a positive way.
4. Answer concisely. Keep your answers short and to the point.
5. Move on to the next question. To keep control of the meeting, DiResta suggests that you answer to the entire group, but end your answer by speaking to someone other than the original questioner.

If you want the audience to know you are ready to close the meeting, DiResta suggests recapping your main points and leaving the listeners with an action to take or some food for thought. You can contact DiResta at diane@diresta.com or visit her Website at www.diresta.com.

60 Seconds: Make your three lists of questions before your next meeting so you'll be prepared for all types of questions.

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