

# Facing the Music Handling Q & A Sessions

by Mohamed Isa



In 2007, I gave an entire workshop on how to effectively deal with Questions & Answers (Q&A) sessions. Before delivering my final remarks, I opened the floor for the questions. I had to face the music. I had to practice what I preached.

A delegate asked me: "How do you address tough questions?" I replied instantly: "Thank you for the great question, your question requires a lot of response time and answering it would deprive the other delegates from the opportunity of to ask. Let's meet after I end the workshop to talk about it. Next question please." As the microphone was being handed to another delegate. I looked back at him and continued: "That's how you address tough questions." The audience erupted with laughter as this was totally unexpected!

It was that simple. I acknowledged the delegate, thanked him and promised him that I will address his question later on. This is one of the techniques to temporarily escape the hot seat.

For the purpose of this article, let's assume that you are an investment banker who is about to launch a roadshow to raise funds for a mega project and you will do various presentations for prospective investors. Here's how I would suggest you prepare for facing the music using the Before, During & After (BDA) Formula.

The B deals with the old adage: Preparation prevents poor performance. Before hitting the road with your slides, reports and your expensive black suit; start a War Game. Invite your colleagues and other trusted advisors to a demonstration presentation with one purpose in mind: Gathering what questions did they have about your presentation assuming that they were an aggressive audience. Once you get the questions, prepare possible answers and practice them diligently. When you get

them during your actual presentation, you will be able to answer with poise and confidence.

Let's move to the D part of the formula: Addressing the questions from the audience. The first thing to do is to set the expectations of the audience. Tell them that you will have a dedicated session for Q&A so that they do not interrupt you during your presentation so that you remain in control and do not lose your chain of thought. In addition, you could say: We have time for three to five questions and if you do not get the chance to ask during the session, I will be around after the presentation to address your questions.

Secondly, listen attentively to the questions from the audience. You must get the questions right to give the right answers. If with all the attention, you did not understand the question; ask the delegate to paraphrase the question to get it right. Then, thank him or her, repeat the question for the benefit of the audience and give your answer. Be brief and do not ramble on because you might trigger more questions from the audience.

Thirdly, be patient with the audience. No matter how you try to simplify the answer, they may not get it. Once, I was speaking in an Initial Public Offering (IPO) Roadshow, a business journalist asked me a question. I answered him in three different ways and he just could not get it. Ultimately, I told him: "We will have a private session to discuss the matter." And he never followed up. Perhaps, he likes speaking in public!

Fourthly, here is how you answer back when the audience throws two or more questions. First, answer the first question, briefly. Then, turn to the audience member, point at him and say: "You had another question." By doing this, you tell the entire audience that you care about

them and their questions and that you're in full control of the session. The delegate will immediately repeat his or her second question.

Now, before we move to the last part of the BDA Formula, let's address dealing with tough questions. When the going gets tough, I need you to get going. You can use an escape strategy just like the one I used above to move on without answering the question especially if you know that the audience member is trying to corner you. Or else, you could admit the fact that you don't have the required details to answer back with a promise to communicate with him or her at a later stage.

Sometimes, you don't have to answer at all. For example, I once was asked a very sensitive question regarding the company I used to work for as a Chief Financial Officer. I retorted: "I can't give you any answers because I will violate the disclosure requirements of the Central Bank." He simply couldn't come back because he was an investor.

The last part is A. It deals with what you should do after you're done with your presentation and the Q&A session. Here are two suggestions for you. First, review your entire performance in the Q&A session. Did you address the questions of the audience effectively and adequately? How could you answer better next time? To take this to a higher level, record your presentation and listen to it again and again to uncover the areas of potential improvements. Moreover, you could ask your colleagues who are attending with you to provide you feedback about your performance. The bottom-line, what gets measured, get improved.

Now, with the application of the BDA Formula, you will be better equipped and prepared for facing the music. You will dance easily and build your credibility as an effective speaker. I wish you all the best in your next presentation. @



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