



# Be Brilliant at Panel Moderation

by Mohamed Isa

**D**uring conferences, panel discussions could be boring or brilliant. They could keep the audience on the edge of their seats or make them leave their seats. The following are essential tips when you act as a Panel Moderator. And please note, when it comes to panel moderation, it takes all to tango!

**Choose them.** If you have an opportunity to influence the organizers of the event, convince them that you will select experienced panelists to participate in the panel. And by experienced panelists, I am referring to panelists who have relevant professional experience to the event and have the ability to convey their thoughts well to the delegates. In September 2016, I attended an event that had two panels. One was so dynamic and insightful while the other was so dull and boring thanks to the panelists!

**Contact them.** Never leave the chosen panelists at the dark until the last moment. Contact them early on to brief them about the event, its objectives, its theme and its topics. And most importantly send them the event's brochure and official website. In 2010, I participated in a panel in an investors' conference. Our panel moderator was

brilliant, she emailed all the panelists and had a phone conversation with us to make sure that we have a brilliant show at the conference. And we did.

**Educate them.** As a panel moderator you have a big responsibility. You have to make your panelists look like credible as experts in their respective fields. Hence, you need to educate your panelists on how to write great introductions for you to use. Educate them that their protracted biographies in the event's brochure are not necessarily their best speakers' introductions. The introduction should be brief, interesting and make the delegates think: I better listen to this panelist and take notes.

**Prepare them.** Nothing beats diligent preparation. Nothing. Ask any professional whether in sport or in business. To be brilliant you have to sweat! Agree on the different themes or angles you will have at your panel discussion. Ask the panelists to suggest questions. They know their subjects best in terms of the latest trends and what should the audience get. Agree who would answer which questions in what order. You should have a staged panel performance without the delegates noticing this. Never start a panel discussion without this agreement. The outcome could be fatal.

**Meet them.** Meet your panelists before the panel to review the themes, questions and staging thereof. Stress the importance of adhering the time allocated to each panelist to give an equal opportunity to all panelists to address the questions

you have and the delegates' questions. Clarify any doubts the panelists may have. And finally, assure them that with all the diligent preparation you made you are bound to have a brilliant show and wish them luck.

**Care for them.** Coordinate with the organizers to provide bottles of water and glasses! You may think this is common sense. It is. However, recently, I attended a conference where no bottles were placed on the table for the panelists to drink from. The organizers only brought them when one panelist started coughing so loud and started looking for water. In addition, ask the panelists whether they prefer handheld microphones or lapel ones. Ultimately, make sure you make them comfortable to give a brilliant show.

**Thank them.** Thank them all the way. First, thank them when they accept to be panelists. Then, thank them for their time to prepare for the panel. After that, thank them when they take the stage. Then, thank them again for sharing their expertise with the delegates before your leave the stage. And finally, give them a call or send them an email to thank them once more. After all of these rounds of thanks, ask them what you could do better to have more brilliant panel discussions. With all the care and thanks, they are bound to share with you their thoughts willingly.

In 2014, I was blessed to moderate a 2-hours panel discussion at a Global Leadership Conference in Dubai with more than 800 delegates from more than 80 countries. I applied all the above essential tips and we had a brilliant show. It was the highest rated session in the entire conference. The delegates protested that we should not end the panel discussion because it was high energy, engaging and entertaining. The delegates were not at the edge of their seats but they were glued to their seats. Go ahead. Apply these tips. Be brilliant! @



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