

# HANDLING Q & A

By Geoff Kashdan\_

1. While practicing for a talk, think of related issues which baffle you. Those issues will probably baffle audience members as well and some will pose them as questions. Find answers to those questions.

2. When you reach the Q & A part of the presentation do not announce that it is time for questions and answers. You can say:

*A. Q & A suggests that the audience has all of the questions and that the speaker has all of the answers. Neither of those assumptions may be true. There are answers in the audience and questions that I still have. Let's learn from each other.*

*B. Now it is your turn. Let's hear your comments, your concerns and what impacted you the most. OR*

*C. (Redirect) At this time I would love to hear what specific issue is of interest to you or how this topic impacts your thinking/life.*

3. If someone is aggressive in the questioning, you can say,

*A. I understand your passion but I am doing my best to explain. I am a speaker, not an expert. Your question really requires an expert.*

*B. Yes, you definitely have a point.*

*C. Well, we can certainly respectfully **disagree** on ..... but we most certainly agree that this is a problem which needs more research/discussion/debate.*

4. Do not allow a questioner to drag you into a rat hole. It is acceptable to say,

A. *I understand your concern but I am not able to address that matter...*

B. *While you raise an interesting point, it is not what I am addressing today.*

5. If you are going with questions, set the stage by saying,

A. *Please limit your question to one minute to give others a chance and please ask a question, not make a statement.*

B. *We will now have a **ten minute** Q & A or comment period. After the ten minutes stop the program with*

*We could go on and on but our time is up so we cannot go on and on. Thank you for your interest in this topic.*

5. If you are using a mic with the audience do not give the questioner the mic. When an audience member has the mic he/she is in control. Not good.

6. If you get asked a question for which you have no information with which you can craft an answer, you can say,

*Wow! That is an interesting point. Thank you for bringing it to my attention so that I can research it and be prepared to deal with it in my next presentation.*

7. When an audience member interrupts during the presentation to ask questions or challenge you can say,

*I'd really like to get on with the presentation, otherwise I will not have time to finish. Many of your concerns will be addressed later in the talk.*

IF THESE SUGGESTIONS DO NOT DEAL WITH YOUR CONCERNS PLEASE BE REMINDED TO CONSULT THE ALL-KNOWING INTERNET.

## SUGGESTIONS TO HANDLE A HOSTILE AUDIENCE

1. If the topic is controversial, set the stage by saying something like,

*This topic has been hotly debated. What is needed is for the topic to be **rationally examined**. That is what I am here to do today. We may not find total agreement on the specifics but let's give opposing opinions respect and an opportunity for rational examination.*

2. If the audience is getting testy, you can say,

*As with most topics, a **calm discussion** works best. Let's return to a calm discussion.*

Or shift the discourse to shared values.

*We may not be able to resolve the Second Amendment's meaning but we can certainly agree that leaving a loaded gun where children can get it does not represent responsible gun ownership.*

3. Use your silence as a tool. You do not have to respond to a personal attack or an attack on the League. If someone attacks you, you can say,

*I prefer not to comment on personal attacks. If you have a question about the topic I will try my best to address it. Otherwise I will respectfully wait until you finish and then move on.*

4. Especially with potentially hostile audiences, stick with the organizational message. Do not wander into personal opinions nor answer the question, What do YOU think? You can respond with,

*A. I am not here today to discuss what I think but what the LWV's research has concluded. The League has experts who have researched the issue and provided the League with legally-tested conclusions.*

*B. I am sorry that you find the League problematic for you. I can assure you that there are others who find the work of the League admirable and necessary. We can agree to disagree without being disagreeable.*

5. Some audience members are dedicated to provoke the speaker. If you suspect as much it is important to keep your cool and not go there. You can say,

*A. I do not understand why you feel the need to attack me but I am sure that most people here will understand my reluctance to react. I thank you for your comments. Next.*

*B. I respect your right to say what you think you need to say but you need to respect my right to decline to respond to what you say when you say it that way.*

**6. If you lose control, you lose, period!** When under attack focus only on handling the situation, not finding a content-based reply. Speak slowly and firmly about what is happening and what you, as manager of the event, are going to do or not do. *You seem to want to create conflict but I have no interest in engaging in that. If this continues I will stop my presentation simply out of respect for my rights as a human being.*