

# Nine Top Questions @ Communication Skills

## **Q : How do you stay organized when answering a question?**

**A:** Use the pros-and-cons approach. When you must think quickly on your feet and sound organized, imagine what's good and what's bad about your issue. There is nothing on this God-given earth that does not have positives and negatives. Begin your answer with, "There are pros and cons to this situation." Then briefly discuss the advantages and disadvantages. End with one summary sentence such as "All in all, the good news is the great weather and the bad news is the traffic." People give more credit to those who appear prepared.

## **Q. What is the stealth bomb of communicating?**

**A:** Not meeting the needs of your audience. You can be completely credible, know your subject, and command everyone with your presence, but if you do not target your message to meet the listener's specific situation, you'll walk out the door empty handed. Here are some examples of when you blow it:

- ❶ You're pitching a job to 7-Eleven and say, "Yes, let's do an all-day workshop. We can bring in lunch from a deli."
- ❷ While giving a presentation to Disney, you say, "Let's don't Mickey Mouse around."
- ❸ You are in Cincinnati and you exclaim, "It's great to be in Toledo."

## **Q. What's the most important word to your listener?**

**A:** His or her name spelled and pronounced correctly. Before you say, "I'm horrible at remembering names," here are some easy ways to ingrain names into your brain.

- ❶ Ask listeners how to spell their names.
- ❷ Repeat their names in conversation, but not too often.
- ❸ Write their names down if your interaction is on the phone. This applies to everyone you talk to, especially your targets' gatekeepers: their administrative assistants.
- ❹ Get their business cards and jot some notes on the cards that will remind you of what they look like and the details of your conversation. Do not do this while they are with you. Once, a person actually scribbled notes about me while I was standing there!
- ❺ Try to associate their names with something permanent about them rather than their attire, which will change. Examples include their stature, facial features, and mannerisms. The lewder, the cruder, the better, but be careful not to divulge your imagery outloud.

❻ Refrain from writing names in the body of a form letter or e-mail. It's contrived and you also run the risk of using the wrong name. I once addressed an inquiry letter to "John" and wrote "Jim" in the letter. I blew it. No job with that company.

## **Q. How can you make yourself the most approachable?**

**A:** Smile. Emotions are contagious. Think about those people in your world who look permanently miserable. It's as though they're constipated for life. These are not the people you want to sit beside at the next corporate picnic. I'm not suggesting that you grin like the village idiot, but put an approachable and pleasant look

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on your face. Other positive people will want to connect with you.

**Q. How do you maintain great eye contact?**

**A:** Confident people look at people. Said another way, “In America, nobody buys from lidded eyes.” Four problems happen with bad eye contact:

① Eye dart: You look at the other person but for only half a second with each glance.

② Eye favorites: You look at the VIPs around the boardroom conference table or only at active participants.

③ Eye coma: You don’t know where you’re looking.

④ Eyes that mow the lawn: You sweep left to right, back and forth.

Try to look at everyone for an entire thought or phrase. No need to count to four; it’s already hard enough to remember what you want to say next. Vary where you look so you won’t mow the lawn. And don’t play favorites. Sometimes the final decision-maker is the passive, silent one.

**Q. What’s the most valuable nonverbal indicator?**

**A:** Touch in the form of a firm handshake. Men to men, women to women, men to women, and women to men, please begin and end your conversations with a strong handshake. Nothing is worse than half a shake, when your fingers meekly grab theirs. The web on your hand, that area between your forefinger and thumb, should touch your recipient’s web. On the other hand, use common sense. No karate chops necessary at any time. And lighten your grasp if the other person has arthritis or is in failing health.

**Q. What’s the key to getting your point across?**

**A:** Use three main points/reasons/categories. Our brains are more like sieves than sponges. In this age of information, we are overloaded with data, drivel, and downloads. The best way to retain information is to distill it into three main categories. These bullets become your anchors in getting others to remember the information and you. Take, for example, the good, bad, and the ugly; features, functions, and benefits; and Larry, Curly, and Moe.

**Q. How can you help your listeners retain what you’ve said?**

**A:** Use metaphors and analogies. We are all sieveheads. One hundred percent of the

information goes in, and 75 percent goes through those invisible holes in our brains. What 25 percent do you want your listeners to remember? And how can you ensure that your valuable information sticks? Try using metaphors and analogies to get your message across. Compare your idea to something universal that everyone can grasp. For example, I’m using the example of a sieve so that you can have a clever mental image that’s easy to remember. Here’s an example from the New York Times:

“Treating cancer with radiation or chemotherapy is a bit like firebombing a house to get rid of pests: it can do the job, but good stuff is going to get damaged in the process.” The New York Times has taken a scientific concept and compared it to something everyone understands.

**Q. How do you answer the question, “What do you do?”**

**A:** You need a short answer to this unpredictable query. The length should be about as long as an elevator ride. I suggest defining your work as a benefit statement rather than a noun that will inevitably have societal connotations (such as lawyer, consultant, insurance agent, speaker, housewife). “I create stunning smiles,” or, “I help clients reclaim financial losses,” or, “I teach professionals to speak with power,” or, “I am raising my family.” Make your answer more unique and interesting than the question. ■

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