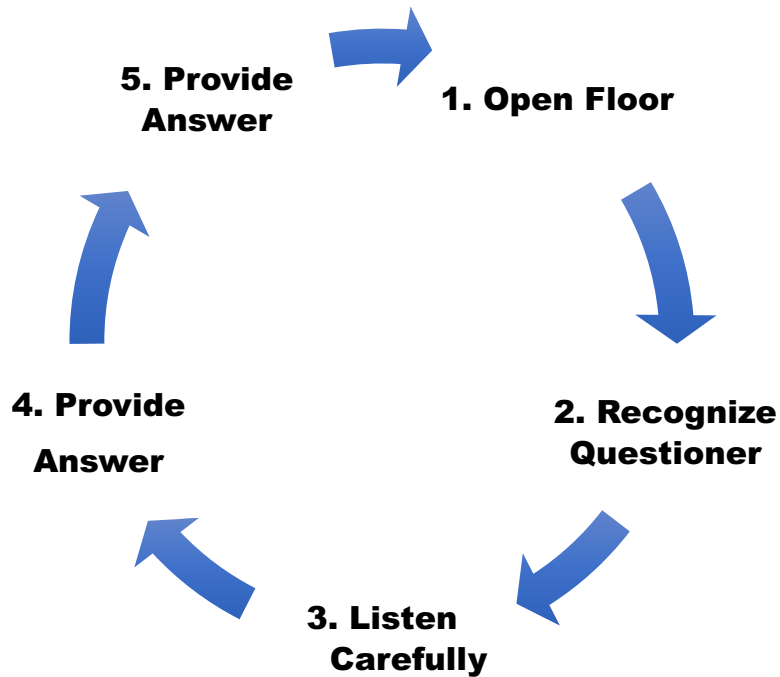


## Handling Questions



### 1. Open the Floor



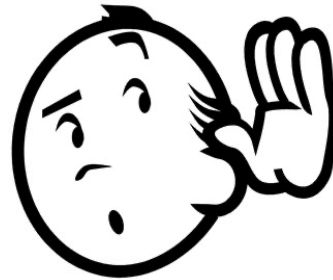
- How to invite questions
  - Ask for questions by stepping forward with my hand raised and say, “What questions do you have?” (This is a visual sign for questions and an announcement of an orderly format for being recognized before speaking.)
  - Allow **at least seven seconds** of relaxed silence for people to raise a question.

- Control the time
  - However much time I have, state it up front
  - As I get closer to the end, begin counting down (“**3 more Qs**”; “**2 more**”; “**Last Q.**”)

## 2. Recognize the Questioner

- Don’t point at questioner. Use open hand.
- Be consistent with calling by name—either everyone or no one.

## 3. Listen Carefully



- Listen carefully to the question
  - Keep a balanced stance. Do not lean back on one foot
  - Maintain eye contact. Give head nods. Utter a few “**Uh-huhs**” or “**Mm-hmms.**”
- If I do not understand the question
  - Do **NOT** say:
    - “**Let me see if I have this right...**” It gives the questioner the opportunity to say, “No, you don’t have it right!” The message is “*You weren’t listening!*”
    - “**Could you repeat the question?**” This is known as the Deafness Ruse: The presenter hears the question. Everyone else in the room hears the question, but the presenter, in an innocent tone of voice asks to have it repeated. *The pretense is transparent.*
  - **DO** say:
    - “**I’m sorry. I didn’t follow, would you mind restating the question?**”
    - I take the responsibility for not understanding, rather than pointing out that the questioner asked an unintelligible question.
    - Question will usually rethink the question and state it in simpler terms.
- Do **NOT** proceed until I am sure I understand the question.

## 4. Use a Buffer

- Before answering, insert a Buffer.
  - If you repeat the question, do not repeat it verbatim; use a buffer.
    - Paraphrase Buffer (It differs from a question because the voice *drops* at the end.)
      - First, determine the “key issue” of the question.
      - Then, begin with an interrogative word (E.g. What, Why, How, Does, Can, Is)
      - An Example:
        - Challenging Question  
Wait a minute! You tell me that your product is going to save us money, and then you give me a sticker shock price that’s twice as much as your competition asks! That’s outrageous! Where do you get off charging so much?
        - Determining the Key Issue  
“Overcharging,” “High Price,” “Expensive,” or “Costly” are the outer wrappings of the question—the questioner’s feelings are *about* the price.
        - Possible Paraphrases
          - **What is our *pricing* rationale?**
          - **Why have we chosen this *price* point?**
          - **How did we arrive at the *price*?**
    - Key Word Buffer
      - First, determine the “key issue” of the question.
      - State a Key Word that you’ve identified as the Issue, and continue into your answer.
      - An Example (Using the same challenging question in the example above)
        - **Our *pricing* rationale is...**
        - **The question is about *price*.**
        - **Your question is about price.**
- Get the “nod” before you move to the answer.
  - If I have identified the key issue correctly, the questioner will involuntarily nod.
  - If I don’t get that nod, I’m not ready to move to the next step.

## 5. Provide an Answer

- Do not preface my answer by saying **“That’s a very good question.”** (This may discount other questioners if I do not say the same thing to *everyone* else.)
- Involve the whole audience in my answer by directing 25% of my eye contact to the person who asked the question and 75% to the rest of the audience. (This is especially important in a hostile question and answer situation.)
- When I *know* the answer
  - Keep my answer to the point. Do not belabor the issue. Make my answer long enough to cover the subject, but short enough to maintain interest!
- When I *don’t* know the answer
  - Be honest. Admit that I do not know the answer, but say that I will find out and get back to them. Take their business card and then follow through on my promise. In a large group setting I can reserve a flip chart for questions I am going to follow up on. (This demonstrates sincerity to my audience.)
  - Turn to my *colleagues* for assistance. (Be sure to announce that I will be asking for their help before I repeat the question. This insures that they hear the question.)
  - Turn to the *audience* for assistance. I can say that, before I respond, I want to give others an opportunity to respond. (I have the option to agree with and/or build upon what they say.)
  - Ask the *questioner* for clarification. Ask him/her to define a term. (I can still say I do not know, but I may think of something in the meantime, or the questioner may partly or completely answer their own question in the process.)
- Loaded Questions
  - When I get a loaded question (E.g. “Have you stopped selling drugs?”), I can disagree with the implied premise. (E.g. **“I have a different view than your implied premise.”**) I can then say, **“Therefore I can’t answer your question as stated. If, however, what you mean is \_\_\_\_\_, then my answer would be \_\_\_\_\_.”**
  - Another approach for a loaded question is to expand the options. If the question asks me to choose between A and B, I can expand the options to include C and D. Then my answer would be choice C or D.
- Hostile Questioners
  - Hostile questions sometimes have hostile words imbedded in the question. Words like *rip-off*, *sneaky*, *hedging*. I can defuse these words by rephrasing the question when I repeat it.
  - If it is a truly hostile question that is loaded with emotion I should *not* repeat it. Instead, I can say, **“I can’t answer your entire question. If, however, what you mean by \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ then my answer is \_\_\_\_\_.”**

Or, “If what you would like to know is \_\_\_\_\_, then my answer is \_\_\_\_\_.”

- I can let hostile questioners destroy themselves by answering hostile questions with a question of my own. “If you feel that way about the situation, then what do you think should be done to correct it?” The answers to these kinds of questions tend to be recognized by the audience as more emotional than well-thought-out, logical answers. The longer they talk the more these troublemakers hurt themselves. It starts to become apparent that they have an ax to grind.
  - *Always* avoid personally attacking or reprimanding negative audience members in front of their peers. Even if they deserve it, I will probably be the one who looks bad. I may feel like I won the battle, but I am likely to lose the war.
  - If I attempt to use humor or sarcasm to diffuse a negative situation, be sure to direct it against myself or a neutral object/concept rather than against the person who is being negative.
- After your answer, do **NOT** say: “**Does that answer your question?**”
- Questioner has the opportunity to say “No.” Message: “*You weren’t listening!*”
  - Another very common response → Another question. I may end up having a dialogue with just one person.