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Put Life into the Q&A Session!

Many speakers are good at catching the audience with interesting and memorable messages. Many are also equally clever spoiling it all, by introducing a question & answer session (Q&A below) at the end of the presentation. A presentation should never "end" with a Q&A! Such sessions frequently begin and end in silence, also if there has been some activity in between. That is not the way you wish to end a fine presentation. Silence at the start and the end of a Q&A are boring moments which can destroy even the best performance and should be avoided! But, if not at the end, when are we supposed to introduce the Q&A session, and what can we do to put life into it? Here are a few tips which can be used separately or in combination:

Activate the questioner! "You are now welcome to pose questions" you or your moderator may announce. "Does anybody have a question?" total silence! It is now so silent that you can hear a needle fall. Why? Well, normally there is no lack of will or need to pose questions, but it is often as nerve wrecking for questioners to speak loudly in an audience, as it is in front of an audience. If you want to put life into the Q&A session, you will therefore have to give it a start. Instruct the listeners to write down possible questions during the presentation in order to pose them during the Q&A Session.

Pose a question yourself! There is a critical period of silence, after which questions are unlikely to pop up at all. If a question has not been posed within say 10 seconds, the silence has become so compact, that it has even put off the few brave ones who might have planned to ask something (count to ten and find out)! Therefore, prepare some questions yourself and use them to break the ice. "I can imagine that you have wondered about...." . Then you give the answer followed by ... "don't you think?" or ... "isn't that right?" or ... "does anybody have an other opinion?" Try in this way to worm reactions out of the audience and start a conversation!

Plant questioners! You only need one who starts asking questions. Others are likely to follow. Therefore give one or two persons in the audience written questions and ask them to pose them during Q&A. Don't hesitate to choose questions to which you have gallant answers.

Encourage with recognition! Always recognize the questioner with comments like "good question" or "interesting comment". That will in turn encourage others to pose questions. Also try to always repeat the question loudly and clearly. It gives you a little time and ensures that the audience understands the question. Don't ask if everybody heard it. Repeat it!

Close with your message! It is the message that should close your presentation and not the Q&A session! The audience remembers your last words. A Q&A session ends when there are no more questions, which means, in silence. If the presentation ends with such emptiness, all that the audience remembers is emptiness. Your final conclusion should come as a roundup immediately after the Q&A. That will not only compensate for a possible thin Q&A, but also make the audience remember your message.

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