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Questions: Expose Your Brilliance

Top '7' Tips

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Even the most seasoned leader can feel intimidated when suspecting that their expertise is being questioned.

The mistake too many make is in assuming the person asking the questions, either in a board meeting or casual discussion, is mistrusting or doubting the leader's ability. More times than not, the questioner is simply curious.

Once the feeling of intimidation sets in, clients report a quick downward spiral: palms get clammy, heartbeat races, voice elevates and words fire out at rapid speed and without forethought. The result is frustration, regret, and potentially diminished relationships.

Instead of falsely assuming that someone doubts your expertise, why not say: "Cool, this is an opportunity to expose my brilliance. After all, no one knows my field of expertise better than I. Why ask if they don't genuinely want to learn from me? This is an opportunity for me to educate them on something near and dear to my heart."

As powerful as this insight could be, it typically arrives only as an afterthought. Because this scenario comes up so often in my executive and leadership coaching sessions, I urge you to take it personally.

How might it pertain to you? Does it occur, perhaps, in a personal rather than professional setting?

If you want to shine next time you are questioned, try one or all of my **Top '7' Tips** to meet questions with confidence and authority, not intimidation and assumption.

1. **Anticipate questions.** The higher status you have in your organization, the greater number of questions you'll receive. It's a numbers game. The greater number of people influenced by you, the more questions you'll receive. There is a genuine interest in you and your contribution. Anticipate, even invite questions. Enjoy exposing people to your brilliance and deep breadth of knowledge.
2. **Know your audience.** Whether reporting to a board or your executive team, you have as many different personalities and areas of interests as you have members. Know in advance which aspects of your work are of interest to each, which questions may arise. Honor them and yourself by being prepared, not surprised.

3. **Know your topic.** Preparation is your key to success. Know all aspects of your topic, including alternative approaches, current and future trends, threats and opportunities. Be prepared to answer questions about aspects irrelevant to you but not others.
4. **Anticipate your most-feared questions.** Prior to your engagement, ask *yourself* the tough questions that may be arise. What do you hope they will not ask you? How will you respond? What will substantiate your response? What don't you know that you really should know?
5. **Be respectful.** We've all had the experience where a person asks a question just to be heard (ego) or pertaining to something you've just covered because they weren't listening. Remember, all eyes are on you. Though it's tempting to downplay the inappropriate question, treat it and the person awaiting your answer with utmost respect.
6. **Create graphics.** A confused audience will respond to complicated issues more openly with the ease of simple pictures, graphics, charts, even in-the-moment white board drawings rather than more confusing words. Fill your mind with patience and creativity prior to beginning the interaction.
7. **Take a breath.** When caught off guard with a challenging question, allow time to get your blood and oxygen flowing back to your brain. People respect your honesty in saying: "Great question let me think about it for a moment." "I want to do a little research to provide accurate information rather than guessing in this moment."

Let your brilliance shine!

These tips are intended to strengthen your confidence and understanding that questions are a good thing. You can shrink with assumptions and fear or stand boldly in your expertise and let people know the depth of who you are, what you stand for, and why you're in the position you're in.

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