

Handling Client Questions As A Team



Once your prepared remarks are over, it's your client's turn. How your team answers – and how it behaves when answering – can make or quash the sale. Prospective clients often put more stock in things they hear during this part of the meeting than in any other. That's because they're controlling the agenda and flow. So it's very useful to rehearse the pitch Q&A several times.

Some suggestions regarding the post-pitch Q&A:

1. **Questions are 'gifts'.** Tough as they may be, client questions *help* you. They telegraph to you what your client's most salient interests are—what is most at issue and what is top-of-mind. They narrow down the scope, and focus you on what's most likely to result in a sale.
2. **You're there to help.** When clients ask questions heatedly, it's a sign they're passionate (or frustrated) about the underlying issue. Don't take the heat as an attack on you; rather, take it as an invitation to be helpful. By keeping a confident, helpful attitude, you'll avoid sounding defensive.
3. **Prepare for the toughest questions your client might ask.** Spend a moment to write them down, and then ask one another in a group setting as you rehearse.
4. **Agree on a leader beforehand.** A "master of ceremonies" – usually the last person standing when the pitch is over – helps direct client questions to the teammate who is best prepared to answer.
5. **Make sure you understand the question.** It's doubly dangerous to guess, because doing so could not only leave the client's issue unresolved, but also introduce new concerns he or she hadn't thought of. If the client's question is vague or puzzling, politely request a clarification: "I'm not sure I understand the question – could you please ask it again another way?"
6. **Look for the underlying issue.** Why is the question being asked? Address key interests to win sales.
7. **Keep answers short.** A long-winded answer can turn a minor curiosity into a major headache, by putting new issues into play. Stay on track.
8. **Get feedback on your answer.** Ask, "How well did that answer your question?" Find out whether they need more. If not, move on to the next question.
9. **Don't add on to another's answer without their invitation.** Respect your teammates. Even if their answer isn't perfect – even if it's outright wrong (to you) – it may not matter to the clients (who may not know). And "correcting" your colleague undermines his or her authority. That makes the whole team look bad.
10. **If you're not sure you can answer, invite rescuers.** Clearly state your colleague's name (in case he or she is not paying attention), then restate the question: "Jack, I think you may know better than me who the ranking Congressman in this district is..." That shows good team-work and collegiality.

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