

QUESSIE Newsletter June 2017

Dear **QUESSIE** Member

Thank you to Informa, Swissotel Sydney and conference participants for an amazing two day Special Educational Needs Summit last month. The first day was focussed on improving outcomes for students with disabilities with the second day targeted at supporting gifted and talented students.

As a presenter, panel member and Chair, I was blessed to be in the midst of enthusiastic conference participants for the entirety of the conference....for that, I am truly grateful. An enquiry I fielded by a teacher during a meal break at the event was how I encourage people to ask questions about my topic(s) at conferences. Renowned author Olivia Mitchell has outlined a number of the more popular strategies related to this subject, some of which I occasionally use to enhance my presentation offerings.

I hope you enjoy the read....

Tips for encouraging questions in your presentation

Most of us would like people in the audience to ask questions. A lively Q&A session is stimulating and engaging for the audience. But sometimes you ask for questions, and you're just met with blank gazes back from your audience. It's a let-down and your presentation ends on a sour note. Here are some tips that may assist:-

1. Pitch your presentation at the right level for your audience

The first stage of questions is birth – they have to be born in your audience's mind. If your presentation is too simple for the level of knowledge in your audience – it's all material they've covered before – they won't have any questions. Conversely, if it's too complicated for them, they'll turn off rather than risk asking a question which might make them look stupid.

2. Don't cover every aspect of your topic in the presentation

If you cover everything there is to know on the topic – you won't leave room for questions. So don't be exhaustive in your coverage.

3. Let your audience know you would like questions and when to ask them

Near the beginning of your presentation let your audience know that you welcome questions. Then let them know when to ask them. There are a number of options:

Take questions throughout your presentation

Tell people they can interrupt you throughout the presentation to ask questions as they come to mind. This has several benefits:

- people won't have to remember their question till later
- if they're uncertain about something they can get that clarified at the time
- questions on a particular issue are dealt with at the same time that you're discussing that issue.

The downside to this strategy is that it can take you off track if people ask irrelevant questions or questions that you're going to cover later in the presentation. If you find it tricky to get back into the flow of your presentation after an interruption it may not be the best strategy for you. Finally, it can throw the timing of your presentation if people ask a lot of questions on a particular issue. This strategy is best used in longer presentations and training courses where timing is less critical.

Take questions at defined points of your presentation

Tell people you will have an opportunity for questions after you've finished each part of your presentation. This option is a useful halfway point between having questions throughout and leaving them till the end of the presentation. You can also decide how long to take questions for during each break in your presentation, and so control the timing better.

4. Let them ask a question as soon as they have one

If you're serious about ensuring that people get their questions answered, invite people to interrupt you and ask their question. It's the only way to ensure this. That's when the question is burning for them. The longer you make people wait, the less likely they are to remember it.

Questions aren't to be feared. They're to be embraced. There's no better way to connect with an audience than to allow them free rein to ask as many questions as they want.

5. Invite people to write down their questions as they think of them

If you don't want to take questions throughout, you can help people remember their questions by suggesting that they write them down.

6. Validate every question

It takes courage to ask a question. It's public speaking – just not from the front of the room. People are held back by wondering if their question is stupid or did they miss something and you already answered it. So you need to do your bit to make it a safe environment for people to ask questions. Do that by responding warmly to all questions that are asked.

7. Have people discuss in pairs any questions they may have

If your audience seems a little shy, give them an opportunity to discuss their questions with one other person before they ask them in front of the whole of the audience. Here's how to do this:

"I'm going to ask for questions in a moment. Please turn to the person next to you and discuss together any questions you have. Then I'll answer those questions."

This has several benefits:

- It gives people the opportunity to try out their question in front of one person before risking humiliation in front of the whole audience.
- Any questions that are answered by material you've already covered can be answered by their partner.
- It gives people the opportunity to rehearse and fine-tune their question so that it will be shorter and clearer when they ask you.

8. Answer questions clearly and succinctly

If you answer every question with a long-winded and incoherent ramble, people are going to be reluctant to ask you another one. They'll conclude they're unlikely to get a useful answer from you. Nor do they want to subject the rest of the audience to another ramble.

Have you tried any of these strategies in your presentations? Do you have others? Let us know.

Until next month, best wishes

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