

## **Answering Tough Questions in the Moment**

### **A five-step process for thinking on your feet and saying what you want.**

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Have you ever been asked a question and answered with something you later regretted? Whether it's undercharging, over-promising or inappropriate comments, we can end up losing money, time and credibility. Here's a simple, but powerful five-step process for saying exactly what you want in the moment. It's a proven way to get reconnected with yourself and speak from your core. The next time you're asked a difficult or contemplative question, I invite you to experiment with these five steps. Notice what happens.

#### **1. Listen to the Question**

Sounds simple, but with so many things calling for our attention, it's easy to be distracted and not hear what the question really is. Stay focused on the question, it might be different than what you're expecting. Having the ability to listen at a deep level including tone of voice and body language gives you access to a wealth of information about your client. You'll be able to answer their specific concerns without wasting time.

#### **2. Pause**

The second step is to pause long enough to take a breath from your diaphragm. The breath is how we connect with our Self. Psychologists tell us that most people respond to a question with what they think the other person wants to hear. By taking 2-4 seconds for a breath, you become proactive rather than reactive. The stillness connects us to a greater intelligence.

#### **3. Repeat the Question**

When someone asks you a question that requires contemplation repeat the question back with the intention to align. This serves two purposes. First, it gives you and the person asking the question clarity. Second, it gives you time to think about the question and silently ask yourself about it. Seminar participants say that their answer changes from an initial reactive response to a true answer when they do this step. Check it out for yourself. Use it for the contemplative questions that require a bit more time to feel into it your true response. Use it when your questioner isn't specific. They'll appreciate the chance to clarify their thoughts. And with clarity you can save time and align with the people who are meant to be your customers.

#### **4. Respond Honestly**

We've all been around people (and maybe have even *been* that person) who give the zippy one-liners, the seducers, the clowns or the intellectual type who give us long and profound answer for a simple question. But have you ever noticed who really gets people's attention? You guessed it – it's the ones who

respond honestly. I once asked a seminar participant what she liked best about her job. She answered immediately without taking a breath or repeating the question. Robotically, she replied, "What I really like about my job are the people. I'm a people person." The audience members didn't buy it. I asked her if she'd like to try it again including all five steps of the process. She agreed. Slowly and purposefully, I asked her, "Linda, what do you like best about your job?" She listened, paused, repeated the question, and from a place deep down in her soul she responded, "You know... I really don't like my job at all!" She laughed with relief. The audience felt her sincerity. It was a bittersweet laugh as she revealed, "I can't believe that I've been at this job that I hate for the last 17 years!"

We have to communicate with ourselves first before we can think on our feet and answer in the moment. By responding honestly we make people (including ourselves) feel important again. When we answer honestly, people pay attention and important things start to happen. Communication isn't just words going back and forth, but expressing to another being what really matters.

### **5. Know When to Stop**

This may sound simple, yet it can be difficult for many of us. Haven't we all, at one time or another, given brilliant answers only to diminish everything we've said by adding unnecessary information? We might imagine people will listen to us more if we talk longer but just the opposite is true. Leave them wanting more. Stop, before they stop listening to you.

As simple as this five-step technique may seem, it works and gets easier with practice. It also shines a light on areas in our lives that need attention. Most people find one of the steps more challenging than others. Bumping up the curiosity factor will help if you have a hard time listening to the question. If pausing in the presence of others is uncomfortable, take yourself off overdrive and come back to neutral for a while. If it's a challenge to repeat the question, check out your alignment factor. Do you feel you have to do it all on your own and have all the answers? Can you enjoy the process of working with others toward a mutual goal? How could your next answer be even more refreshingly honest? Clients notice it. It wakes them up.

Many people say the most difficult step for them is knowing when to stop. It's an art form and different with every interaction. Reading the other person's body language is a good place to start. Knowing at your core that you *are* enough also alleviates the need to ramble on.

Feel your confidence improve and watch your business increase as you use the five-step technique for thinking on your feet and saying what you want in the moment.