

[PDF] In The Line Of Fire: How To Handle Tough Questions...When It Counts

Jerry Weissman - pdf download free book

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Description:

About the Author

JERRY WEISSMAN, the world's #1 corporate presentations coach, founded and leads Power Presentations, Ltd. in Foster City, CA. His private clients include executives at hundreds of the world's top companies, including Yahoo!, Intel, Cisco Systems, Intuit, Dolby Laboratories, and Microsoft.

Weissman coached Cisco's executives before their immensely successful IPO road show; afterward, the firm's chairman attributed at least two to three dollars of Cisco's offering price to Weissman's work. Since then, he has prepared executives for nearly 500 IPO road shows, helping them raise

hundreds of billions of dollars.

Weissman is author of the global bestseller *Presenting to Win: The Art of Telling Your Story* (Financial Times Prentice Hall, 2003).

In this book, you'll find many examples of Q&A sessions and political debates in the public arena. The original videos of these sessions are available on a DVD that you can obtain by visiting **www.powerltd.com**.

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Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. In the Line of Fire Introduction Agility Versus Force

During my 40 years in the communications trade ranging from the control rooms of the CBS Broadcast Center in Manhattan to the boardrooms of some of America's most prestigious corporations, I have heard...*and* have asked...some highly challenging questions. One of the most challenging I ever heard came during Bill Clinton's presidency when he was engulfed in the firestorm ignited by the revelation of his extramarital affair with Monica Lewinsky, a White House intern.

Despite intense public and media pressure, Clinton continued to fulfill his presidential obligations, among them hosting a state visit by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair. On the afternoon of February 6, 1998, after the two heads of state made their customary prepared statements to the press, President Clinton opened the floor to questions from an audience packed with reporters. At that point, he became fair game for nonstate questions on the subject that was uppermost in the minds of the media and the public. One question in particular came from Wolf Blitzer, the senior CNN political correspondent:

Mr. President, Monica Lewinsky's life has been changed forever, her family's life has been changed forever. I wonder how you feel about that and what, if anything, you'd like to say to Monica Lewinsky at this minute?

The stinging question brought a few scattered titters from the other reporters. Looking straight ahead, right at Blitzer, Clinton smiled and bit his lower lip, an expression that had become his trademark.

Then he said,

That's good!

The crowded room erupted in laughter. After it subsided, Clinton continued:

That's good...but at this minute, I am going to stick with my position and not comment.

Blitzer had nailed the acknowledged charismatic master of communication skills at his own game, and the master acknowledged it publicly for all to hear. Fortunately for Clinton, he was able to default to his legal situation and not answer.

Very few people on the face of this planet have the expertise, the charm, the quickness of wit, or the legal circumstances to respond so deftly to challenging questions. Yet very few people on the face of this planet sail through life without being confronted with tough questions. The purpose of this book and its many real-life examples is to provide you with the skills to handle such questions, and *only* such questions. If all the questions you are ever faced with were of the "Where do I sign?" variety, you could spend your time with a good mystery novel instead. Forewarned is forearmed.

One other forewarning: All the techniques you are about to learn require absolute truth. The operative word in the paragraph above, as well as on the cover of this book, is "handle," meaning how to deal with tough questions. While providing an answer is an integral part of that "handling," every answer you give to every question you get must be honest and straightforward. If not, all the other techniques will be for naught. With a truthful answer as your foundation, all those techniques will enable you to survive, if not prevail, in the line of fire.

Challenging Questions

We begin our journey of discovery by understanding why people ask challenging questions. Journalists such as Wolf Blitzer ask these kinds of questions because, being familiar with the classical art of drama, they know that conflict creates drama. Aristotle 101.

Why do people in business ask challenging questions? Because they are mean-spirited? Perhaps. Because they want to test your mettle? Perhaps. More likely it is because when you are presenting your case, which is *just* the case in almost every decisive communication in business...as well as in *all* walks of life...you are asking your opposite party or parties, your target audience, to change. Most human beings are resistant to change, and so they kick the tires. *You* are the tires.

In the most mission-critical of all business presentations, the Initial Public Offering (IPO) road show...a form of communication I have had the opportunity and privilege to influence with nearly 500 companies, among them Cisco Systems, Intuit, Yahoo!, and Dolby Laboratories...presenters ask their investor audiences to change: to buy a stock that never existed. In fact, when companies offer shares to the public for the first time, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission mandates that the companies specifically state their intentions in print. The SEC requires distribution of a prospectus containing a boilerplate sentence that reads, "There has been no prior public market for the company's common stock." In other words, "Invest at your own risk." *Caveat emptor*. As a result, when the companies' executive teams take their presentations on the road, they are inevitably assaulted with challenging questions from their potential investors.

While the stakes in an IPO road show are exceedingly high...in the tens of millions of dollars...the character of the challenge is no different from that of potential customers considering a new product, potential partners considering a strategic relationship, pressured managers considering a request for additional expenditures, concerned citizens considering a dark horse candidate, or even affluent contributors considering a donation to a nascent, not-for-profit cause.

The inherent challenge in these circumstances is compounded in presentation settings where the intensity level is raised by several additional factors:

- *Public exposure*. The risk of a mistake is magnified in large groups.
- *Group dynamics*. The more people in the audience, the more difficult it is to maintain control.

- *One against many.* Audiences have an affinity bond among themselves and apart from the presenter or speaker.

The result is open season on the lone figure spotlighted at the front of the room, who then becomes fair game for a volley of even more challenging questions.

How, then, to level the playing field? How, then, to give the presenter the weapons to withstand the attack? How, then, to survive the *slings and arrows* unleashed in the form of questions?

The answer lies in the David versus Goliath match, in which a mere youth was able to defeat a mighty giant using only a stone from a slingshot. This biblical parable has numerous equivalents in military warfare. History abounds with examples in which small, outnumbered, under-equipped units were able to combat vastly superior forces by using adroit maneuvers and clever defenses. Remember the Alamo, but also remember Thermopylae, Masada, Agincourt, The Bastille, Stalingrad, The Battle of the Bulge, Iwo Jima, and The Six-Day War. All these legendary battles share one common denominator: leverage, or the use of *agility to counter force*.

Martial Arts

For our purposes, the most pertinent modern equivalent is the martial arts, in which a skilled practitioner can compete with a superior opponent by using dexterity rather than might. Bruce Lee, a diminutive kick boxer, became an international star by virtue of his uncanny ability to prevail over multiple and mightier *armed* opponents using *only* his flying feet and hands. Evolved from Asian philosophy and religion, the martial arts employ these critical mental and physical skills:

Concentration

Self-defense

Balance

Agility

Discipline

Self-control

A solitary presenter or speaker facing challenging questions from a hostile audience can deploy these same pivotal dynamics *against a sea of troubles and, by opposing, end them*. This book will translate each of these martial arts skills into Q&A techniques and then demonstrate how you can apply them in your mission-critical encounters. The objective is to put you in charge of those sessions and enable you to win in your exchanges when it counts.

This objective can be stated in one word, although it will take 168 pages to present them in full. That one word is *control*. When you are confronted with tough questions, you can control

- The question
- Your answer

- The questioner
- The audience
- The time
- Yourself

Effective Management Perceived

A synonym for the verb "control" is "manage." Therefore, the subliminal perception of a well-handled question is *Effective Management*. Of course, no one in your target audience is going to conclude that because you fielded a tough question well, you are a good manager. That is a bit of a stretch. But the converse proves the point. If your response to a challenging question is defensive, evasive, or contentious, you lose credibility...and with it the likelihood of attaining your objective in the interchange. If your response is prompt, assured, and to the point, you will be far more likely to emerge unscathed, if not fully victorious.

This concept goes all the way back to the first millennium. In *Beowulf*, the heroic saga that is one of the foundation works of the English language, one of the lines reads: "Behavior that's admired is the path to power among people everywhere."

In the twenty-first century, that same concept as it relates to tough questions was expressed by David Bellet, the Chairman of Crown Advisors International, one of Wall Street's most successful long-term investment firms. Having been an early backer of many successful companies, among them Hewlett-Packard, Sony, and Intel, David is solicited to invest almost daily. In response, he often fires challenging...

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