

So, Susan, your report indicates you support forging ahead with the expansion but have you considered the impact this will have on our customers? Surely you remember the fiasco in Dallas last year when they tried the same type of project?"

Yikes! If you're Susan, you're likely feeling under pressure! You have to answer the question and allay the CEO's concerns about the disruption to customers. What do you do? What do you say? How do you say it? What if you can't think of anything to say?

This is not an uncommon situation. Whether you are put on the spot while attending a meeting, presenting a proposal, selling an idea, or answering questions after a presentation, articulating your thoughts in unanticipated situations is a skill. Thinking on your feet is highly coveted skill and when you master it, your clever and astute responses will instill immediate confidence in what you are saying.

When you can translate your thoughts and ideas into coherent speech quickly, you ensure your ideas are heard. You also come across as being confident, persuasive, and trustworthy.

Confidence is key when learning to think on your feet. When you present information, give an opinion or provide suggestions, make sure you know what you are talking about and that you are well informed. This doesn't mean you have to know everything about everything, but if you are reasonably confident in your knowledge of the subject, that confidence will help you to remain calm and collected even if you are put unexpectedly in the hot seat.

The secret of thinking on your feet is to be prepared: learn some skills and tactics, and do some preparation for situations that might put you under pressure. Then when you do find yourself faced with unexpected

questions and debate, you'll be ready to draw on these tactics and preparation, and so stay poised while you compose your thoughts and prepare your response. Here are some tips and tactics:

Relax

This is often the opposite of how you are feeling when you're under pressure, but in order for your voice to remain calm and for your brain to "think", you have to be as relaxed as possible.

Take deep breaths

Take a second and give yourself a positive and affirming message

Clench invisible muscles (thighs, biceps, feet) for a few seconds and release.

Listen

It comes as no surprise that listening is critical to thinking on your feet.

Why do you need to listen? To make sure you fully understand the question or request before you reply. If you answer too soon, you risk going into a line of thinking that is unnecessary or inappropriate. To help you with your listening remember to:

Look directly at the questioner

Observe body language as well as what is being spoken

Try to interpret what is being suggested by the question or request. Is this an attack, a legitimate request for more information, or a test? Why is this person asking this and what is the intention?

Tip

Remember that the person is asking a question because he or she is interested. Some interest is positive - they simply want to know more - and some is negative - they want to see you squirm. Either way they are interest-

ed in what you have to say. It's your privilege and pleasure not to disappoint them!

Have the Question Repeated

If you're feeling particularly under pressure, ask for the question to be repeated. This gives you a bit more time to think about your response.

At first glance people think this will only make them look unsure. It doesn't. It makes you look concerned that you give an appropriate response. It also gives the questioner an opportunity to rephrase and ask a question that is more on point. Remember, the questioner may well have just "thought on his or her feet" to ask the question, so when you give them a second chance, the question may well be better articulated and clearer to all.

By asking to have the question repeated you also get another opportunity to assess the intentions of the questioner. If it is more specific or better worded, chances are the person really wants to learn more. If the repeated question is more aggressive than the first one, then you know the person is more interested in making you uncomfortable than anything else. When that's the case, the next tip comes in very handy.

Use Stall Tactics

Sometimes you need more time to get your thoughts straight and calm yourself down enough to make a clear reply. The last thing you want to do is blurt out the first thing that comes to your mind. Often this is a defensive comment that only makes you look insecure and anxious rather than confident and composed. Repeat the question yourself. This gives you time to think and you clarify exactly what is being asked. It also allows you to rephrase if necessary and put a positive spin on the request. "How have I considered the impact on customers in order to make sure they have a continued positive experience during the expansion?"

Narrow the focus. Here, you ask a question of your own to not only clarify, but to bring the question down to a manageable scope. "You're interested in hearing how I've considered customer impacts. What impacts are you most interested in: product availability or in-store service?"

Ask for clarification. Again, this will force the questioner to be more specific and hopefully get more to a specific point. "When you say you want to know how I've analyzed customer impacts, do you mean you want a detailed analysis or a list of the tools and methods I used?"

Ask for a definition. Jargon and specific terminology may present a problem for you. Ask to have words and ideas clarified to ensure you are talking about the same thing.

Use Silence to your Advantage

We are conditioned to believe that silence is uncomfortable. However, if you use it sparingly, it communicates that you are in control of your thoughts and confident in your ability to answer expertly. When you rush to answer you also typically rush your words. Pausing to collect your thoughts tells your brain to slow everything down.

Stick to One Point and One Supporting Piece of Information

There's a high risk that, under pressure, you'll answer a question with either too much or too little information. If you give too short an answer, you risk letting the conversation slip into interrogation mode. (You'll get another question, and the questioner will be firmly in control of how the dialogue unfolds). When your reply is too long, you risk losing people's interest, coming across as boring, or giving away things that are better left unsaid. Remember, you aren't being asked to give a speech on the subject. The questioner wants to know something. Respect that and give them an answer, with just



enough supporting information. This technique gives you focus. Rather than trying to tie together all the ideas that are running through your head, when you pick one main point and one supporting fact, you allow yourself to answer accurately and assuredly.

Tip

If you don't know the answer, say so. There is no point trying to make something up. You will end up looking foolish and this will lower your confidence when you need to think on your feet in the future. There is (usually) nothing wrong with not knowing something. Simply make sure you follow up as soon as possible afterwards with a researched answer.

Prepare some "what ifs"

With a bit of forethought, it's often possible to predict the types of questions you might be asked, so you can prepare and rehearse some answers to questions that might come your way. Let's say you are presenting the monthly sales figures to your management team. The chances are your report will cover most of the obvious questions that the management team might have, but what other questions might you predict? What's different about this month? What new questions might be asked? How would you respond? What additional information might you need to have to hand to support more detailed questions?

In particular, spend some time brainstorming the most difficult questions that people might ask, and preparing and rehearsing good answers to them.

Practice Clear Delivery

How you say something is almost as important as what you say. If you mumble or use "umm" or "ah" between every second word, confidence in what you are saying plummets. Whenever you are speaking with people, make a point to practice these key oration skills:

Speak in a strong voice. (Don't confuse strong with loud!) Use pauses strategically to emphasize a point or slow yourself down

Vary your tone and pay attention to how your message will be perceived given the intonation you use

Use eye contact appropriately
Pay attention to your grammar
Use the level of formality that is appropriate to the situation.

Summarize and Stop

Wrap up your response with a quick summary statement. After that, resist adding more information. There may well be silence after your summary. Don't make the common mistake of filling the silence with more information! This is the time when other people are absorbing the information you have given. If you persist with more information, you may end up causing confusion and undoing the great work you've already done in delivering your response.

Use words to indicate you are summarizing (i.e. "in conclusion," "finally") or briefly restate the question and your answer: So - what did I do to analyze customer impacts? I reviewed the Dallas case files in detail, and prepared a "What if" analysis for our own situation."

Key points

No one enjoys being putting on the spot or answering questions that you aren't fully expecting. The uncertainty can be stressful. That stress doesn't need to be unmanageable and you can think on your feet if you remember the strategies we just discussed. Essentially, thinking on your feet means staying in control of the situation. Ask questions, buy time for yourself, and remember to stick to one point and make that one point count. When you are able to zoom in on the key areas of concern, you'll answer like an expert and you impress your audience, and yourself, with your confidence and poise.

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RISE TO THE TOP WITH NAMAL

Recognized as professionals in fund management and a pioneer asset management company in Sri Lanka, National Asset Management Ltd (NAMAL) is a licensed unit trust fund management company which currently manages the funds, portfolios and up to Rs. 6 billion of its client's assets. Widely acknowledged as one of the leaders in its field, NAMAL is known for managing investments in

equity and debt securities and introducing many innovative investment schemes to the public.

NAMAL is currently seeking results oriented individuals of a high calibre to strengthen its team and contribute to the forward moving momentum of the organization.

FUND MANAGERS

Selected candidates will report to the CEO and be responsible for the management of portfolios based on research done on underlying securities.

Requirements :

- CFA full qualifications / degree in finance or equivalent professional accounting qualifications
- A proven track record with minimum 3 years experience in fund management and research
- Strong analytical skills
- Ability to identify strategies and make decisions about asset allocation policies
- Strong written and verbal communication skills in English
- A team player with the ability to work with our investment team, and other teams within the organization

ANALYSTS

Candidates chosen for this position will be required to participate in macro and corporate research projects.

Requirements :

- Full or part CFA qualifications / degree in finance or equivalent professional qualification
- Minimum 2 years experience in equity research
- Strong analytical skills
- Strong written and verbal communication skills in English
- A self motivated team player with the ability to work both independently and with our investment / other teams within the organization

ASSISTANT FUND MANAGER

The primary responsibilities of the selected candidates will be to support the Fund Managers by doing research, portfolio analysis and reports while also assisting in portfolio management based on research done on underlying securities.

Requirements :

- Full or part CFA qualifications / degree in finance or equivalent professional accounting qualifications
- Minimum 2 years experience in securities research and portfolio management
- Strong analytical skills
- Strong written and verbal communication skills in English
- A team player with the ability to work with our investment team, and other teams within the organization

SALES MANAGER (CORPORATE)

The selected candidate will be required to promote the funds and portfolio management services of NAMAL to local and international investors.

Requirements :

- Degree in business / finance or equivalent professional qualification
- Minimum 3 years experience in marketing financial products
- Strong written and verbal communication skills in English, together with strong presentation skills

Job Responsibilities :

- Promoting and selling investment ideas to corporate clients (locally and internationally)
- Preparing marketing and sales plans. Will report directly to the CEO.
- Planning and implementing strategies on new product development and brand building projects
- Handling sales activities and achieving monthly / quarterly targets
- Building strong client relationships

SALES MANAGER (RETAIL)

The chosen candidate will be required to promote NAMAL funds to retail investors in Sri Lanka and abroad.

Requirements :

- Degree in business / finance or equivalent professional qualification
- Minimum 2 years experience in marketing financial products and client services
- Strong written and verbal communication skills in English
- A creative and enthusiastic strategic thinker

Job Responsibilities :

- Developing channels of distribution
- Appointing and monitoring agent activities
- Training the sales and marketing team on sales and promotional activities
- Developing and updating promotional material
- Handling customer services and building strong relationships

Selected candidates will have the opportunity to embark on a highly rewarding career which offers an attractive remuneration package and other benefits. Candidates are invited to send in detailed resumes, together with the names of two non related referees, to reach us within 10 days of this advertisement. Please state the post applied for as the subject of the email.



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