
DEALING WITH INTERRUPTIONS



INTERRUPTIONS - INTRODUCTION

This is a topic that gets raised fairly regularly when we cover how to deal with questions with credibility, conviction and confidence.

Invariably, someone will ask what to do when another person constantly interrupts or asks questions when the presenter is mid-flow.

On the following pages I share some techniques that have worked for me and that I have seen working for others.

NOTE: When the person "interrupting" is the senior, or possibly the most senior person in the room - remember that they are looking at the **bigger picture**. To you, their questions/comments may seem off topic but to them, are extremely pertinent. Take their interjections as a sign of genuine interest rather than anything else.



HOW TO AVOID INTERRUPTIONS 1/2

- ✓ Prior to the meeting, find out from others attending if there are likely to be any questions coming up that are off topic, perhaps due to other **wider issues** going on in your organisation.
- ✓ Politely, yet firmly, **signpost** at the beginning *when* you will be taking questions. Frame this from an “audience benefit” perspective. For example “can I ask you to hold your questions until the end as I know we can get through the content in a more efficient manner if we do so”.
- ✓ Set up an **ally**. This is a person who will step in and reinforce what you are saying. They can also step in on your behalf if you have been interrupted mid-sentence, and ask the culprit to let you finish your point. This could be your line manager or even a peer.



HOW TO AVOID INTERRUPTIONS 2/2

- ✓ Always set an **agenda** and ideally have a chair, who controls the meeting and ensures things stay on topic.
- ✓ Speak a bit louder and with more **confidence**.
- ✓ Avoid weak language (think, maybe) and replace with stronger (believe, will).
- ✓ Aim to understand the **perspective** of the person who is interrupting, maybe there is a genuine reason?
- ✓ If it is a consistent issue with the same individual – address in a **private meeting** and discuss the impacts of their actions.
- ✓ Be well **prepared** and keep your content clear and concise.



HOW TO HANDLE INTERRUPTIONS

- ✓ Remind them to **hold** their question till the time you have signposted.
- ✓ Have an **ally** who knows you well enough to know when to interject on your behalf.
- ✓ Say confidently, “can I **finish my point** and then you can share your thoughts”.
- ✓ Acknowledge they want to come in perhaps with a non-verbal hand gesture indicating stop and say, “**just a second**” and continue to finish making your point.
- ✓ Allow them to make their point and quickly interject with “before we move on, **I would like to add ...**”
- ✓ If making a point that is way off track, say “I am **conscious of time**, we are here to discuss x, if we discuss y we will not cover what was planned in the agenda.
- ✓ Keep **eye contact** with another part of the room (or in a virtual world, directly with your camera) and ignore the interruption by continuing to talk.

