



Handling objections that may arise during a speech or a presentation

The challenge

When you are striving to convince an audience, you may be strongly tempted to counter or stifle objections as soon as they arise. However, this reflex is dangerous. First, your audience may be less likely to adhere to your ideas. If people get the feeling that their questions or doubts are not taken into account, they may resist passively, or even openly. Moreover, by not listening to objections, you lose a valuable opportunity to enrich your ideas through constructive discussion.

A three-step response

You will be able to turn objections into an opportunity for real dialogue with your audience more easily if you oblige yourself to apply a three-step process:



You must resist the temptation to respond immediately to the objection. Allow the other person to express all he or she wants to say. Otherwise he or she might end up not listening to your answer.

Hearing an objection does not mean that you understand it. Try to "read between the lines" to demonstrate your sincere interest and prepare your response.

After listening, you should regain control and call the attention of the audience to the points that you choose to promote.

Helpful tips

- Before beginning your presentation, remind yourself that having objections is **normal**, because the members of your audience do not necessarily have the same knowledge of the subject or interests as you. It is even **desirable**, as this enriches the discussion.
- Do not allow yourself to **interrupt** the other person. People often have trouble expressing an objection, and the root of the problem may become gradually apparent.
- Make sure your **nonverbal language** does not betray your feelings.
E.g. Looks or tone of voice that could reflect your exasperation or concern.
- **Note down** objections in the words in which they were expressed, in order to make them **visible to everyone**. This will show that you are listening and will help the group gain perspective.
- However, **do not tolerate** personal attacks: if needed, remind people if they step over the line.

Helpful tips

- If you have the feeling that the objection contains implicit **insinuations**, express them to make them explicit, or remove a possible misunderstanding.
E.g. "When you say that this project has no chance of succeeding, do you mean that we lack the required capabilities?"
- **Ask** the other person questions to understand the reason for the objection. Do not hesitate to break the problem down to analyze it more effectively.
E.g. "You feel that the sales objectives are too ambitious. On what market segments do you feel that this is true?"
- **Reformulate** what the other person says to validate your understanding. This will eliminate possible misunderstandings and can also give the other person a chance to bring more precision to his or her thoughts.
- Give the floor to the **entire group** in order to verify whether the objection corresponds to the feeling of just one person or the majority.

Helpful tips

- If the objection leads you to **challenge your position**, even in part, explain how you are planning to integrate it.
- After briefly explaining your position, **support it** with specific evidence ("We made this decision based on the latest customer surveys.") or logical arguments.
- Expose the **limitations of the opposite alternative**. For example, underline the negative consequences of not making a decision.
- Try to **reach agreement** from your opponent on some aspect of your position: this will be helpful in supporting the rest of your arguments.
- Do not hesitate to rely on **people who you know support you**.
- If necessary, emphasize the fact that some points are **not negotiable**.
E.g. "This decision is up to Management."