

HOW TO ANSWER

Tough Questions & Keep Your Cool



Everyone faces tricky questions sometimes. How do you respond to a left-field interview question without hurting your chances of getting hired? How do you handle a difficult conversation with a co-worker or supervisor and maintain your professionalism? No matter what your position or with whom you're talking, it's important to keep your cool. Lynn and Tikiri each share their best advice on how to tackle those tough questions.





TIKIRI'S ADVICE

1

Listen carefully. Know that it's about them, not you. Think about and find out what their intention is. And remember to watch for tone and body language – after all, 93% communication is nonverbal.

2

Ask questions. Don't get defensive. Instead, focus on the problem, not the person. Ask open-ended questions to probe what they are looking for. Your perspective should be to solve the problem.

3

Stay calm. Count to 10 if you have to. Don't jump in to close a silent gap - that's a tactic that's used to make you say anything. Choose your words carefully.

4

Be diplomatic but direct. Think about the long-term relationship. Avoid burning bridges! Don't be wishy washy and try to couch your words so they lose meaning. Don't apologize if you don't need to. Instead, be confident and clear in your communication.

5

Be honest. Look the other person in the eye. Be true to yourself, because pretending and lying will hurt your own self-esteem and confidence in the end. And remember: people can smell horse manure from afar. Don't be a doormat. You should stand up for your values.



LYNN'S ADVICE

1

Tune in to your Fight / Flight / Freeze response. This can directly impact how you acknowledge the question. Reframe your response as an opportunity to demonstrate who you are.

2

Don't take it personally. It's simply a question, so don't read more into it than that. Remember to see the good in the other person.

3

Adjust your response based on the temperature of your relationship. Your response to a superior or new acquaintance will be different than to a trusted peer or close friend. Flex your style to meet the other person halfway and establish common ground.

4

Ask questions to learn more and better understand the other person's viewpoint. Saying "tell me more" or "help me understand" can open pathways to a deeper conversation.

5

Your manner and tone should be positive and empowering. Words matter. Avoid taking a defensive stance, belaboring a point, or displaying negative emotions.

6

If the conversation becomes heated or upsetting, disengage and gather your thoughts. Set a time to pick up the discussion – in an hour, offsite, or the following day. Talk over the situation with a mentor or trusted friend to prepare for the next conversation.

7

Always treat the other person with dignity, compassion, and respect. This is another human being. In the end, the essentials conveyed in your answer reveal your values and character.

8

Utilize the PICKLE strategy to help you answer with poise and grace.

PICKLE STRATEGY

When you receive a question seemingly from left field or one that appears pointless, stop and take a moment to consider the PICKLE.

P Pause and gather yourself before responding.

I It does not matter why they asked this oddball question.

C Control your emotions – no eye rolls or frustrated sighs.

K Keep in mind that this is a team member.

L Let go of any attitude or annoyance, and respond in a professional, courteous, and friendly manner.

E Express your answer with honesty and civility, no matter how silly the question.

Utilizing this strategy will move you forward and past the PICKLE.