

Get Out of The Hot Seat!

By Shawna Schuh, CSP



What would you do in the following situation? You are in a job interview, meeting a new employer, or a new client. You're trying to make a good impression, you want to put your best foot forward, and you may be required to answer some questions you'd rather not discuss. You are feeling very nervous because you are in the hot seat.

So what if you are asked an uncomfortable question? How do you handle this? Let's review some different scenarios that occur when people are asked difficult questions. Then learn how to deal with these embarrassing and off-the-wall situations in the future.

Scenario A: Here's a common reaction to being put on the spot. It happens to lots of people. You are asked a question you don't want to answer. You become flustered and defensive. You stammer something about feeling uncomfortable or overheated and you turn red in the face and become completely tongue-tied. You will remember this moment forever in a negative way and so will the person asking the question.

Scenario B: Another body reaction to uncomfortable situations is when your brain freezes and you glance around for the easiest and fastest escape route and you bolt for it. In this case you will not get the job, or any new business. You will, however, succeed in getting outside of the situation, and though you will be lonely and broke you will not have answered the question.

Scenario C: This reaction is used when you are aware and prepared. You pause for a moment and smile. Not letting the other person, be it an interviewer or client, see your discomfort. You keep your voice

even as you say, "That's an interesting question, could you clarify that?"

If it's a more casual exchange during an initial meeting you might even turn the tables on the person asking by popping a question of your own, such as "Do you always ask such probing or intimate questions so soon after meeting someone?" This will usually disarm the other person and alert them that they stepped a tiny bit over the line with you. Although you're not really offended, you're just not interested in answering that particular question.

In this scenario, you have kept your composure, defused the discomfort for both of you, and successfully moved on in the conversation. Neither of you will ever remember that there was a small moment of discomfort.

Being put on the spot is not comfortable and can send us into a tizzy of embarrassment. It doesn't have to be that way if you develop a few of the following skills.

1. Stop! Don't react for a moment.

This will give you time to think and regain your composure. Sometimes when confronted with silence during a pause, the person asking will feel uncomfortable for asking and may quickly rephrase the question before you have to answer. The biggest mistakes we make in social and business situations are when we jump in with dialogue before thinking. This happens when we are nervous. Use the pause to think, breathe and allow the other person to do the same. This takes will power and confidence, but you can do it!

2. Clarify the question.

This gives you a chance to make sure you are certain of what they are asking. It also gives you an extra minute to formulate a good answer. Let's say the question was "What didn't you like about your last job?" In this case, you don't want to make yourself or your former employer appear to be hard to get along with so repeat the question and add a little to it. Example: For the question "What didn't you like about your last job?" You could pause, smile and ask, "Do you mean as far as the tasks I was required to do or my feelings about the environment?" This will do several things in your favor:

a) It shows you can separate the job from the emotion.

b) It shows you don't jump right into an answer without clarification.

c) It forces the interviewer, employer or client to reconsider what information they want from you so that you can be selective in your answer. Now the hot seat is merely warm because you are more in control since you are not reacting. You are interacting which will help you feel more confident and poised. Client Example: For a question like, "Why should I buy from you and not XYZ company?" You can once again pause, smile and ask, "Why are you considering us instead of them?" This is a great clarifying question since you've moved past saying anything negative about your competition and are getting to the root of why the client is even talking to you.

3. Use an evasive answer.

No matter what the question is, my favorite reply to a tough or inappropriate question is: "That's an interesting question. Do you ask all new candidates that?" Or, "Fascinating question, I've never been asked that before. What do most people say?" These responses can save you from making the wrong comment right off the bat and may provoke the asker to elaborate on what they really want to know.

Many people don't really think before they speak. They ask questions that can make the other person feel uncomfortable, put upon or down right embarrassed. I don't think they do this to offend or hurt. I think that they don't realize how they are coming across.

If you can master the skills above you will not only come across as confident and poised, you will ace every interview, new encounter with clients, and budding relationships without acquiring horror stories. I guarantee you'll feel more comfortable, you'll sweat less, and not burn anything from sitting on a hot seat!

Conquer Apathy and Erase Rudeness as you follow proven, fun and beneficial information by Shawna Schuh, CSP. Specializing in communication, professionalism, service & business finesse. Shawna helps you bring your best self to the work you do for maximum results. To book Shawna to speak or for article reprinting contact Sandy McCready at 503-280-1946 or visit www.ShawnaSchuh.com.