

Handling Difficult Questions

World of Work

Kickoff: Read and answer the questions.

1. Do you ever have to respond to difficult questions at work?
2. Can you recall a time you responded to a particularly difficult question?
3. What strategies can you use to effectively handle difficult questions at work?
4. How important are body language and tone of voice when dealing with difficult questions?
5. How can you stay positive and professional while dealing with difficult questions?
6. How can you prepare yourself to be better at handling difficult questions in the future?

Reading: Read the article and answer the questions.

In the professional world, encountering difficult questions is inevitable. Regardless of your industry, position, or experience, there will always be situations that require tactful and strategic responses. Mastering the art of handling difficult questions can greatly impact your professional success and workplace relationships.

One key strategy in handling tough questions is to remain calm and composed. Maintaining a level-headed demeanour will not only help you think more clearly but will also demonstrate professionalism and maturity to your colleagues. This will also help you to show empathy and understanding to your client, or whoever it is that is asking you the difficult question.

Another crucial approach is to be honest and transparent. When you're unsure of the answer or require more information, it's best to admit it and commit to finding the solution. This level of transparency will foster trust and respect among your coworkers.

At times, you may need to buy yourself some time to gather your thoughts or research the matter. Politely request a moment to think, or offer to follow up on the issue at a later time. This allows you to provide an accurate and well-considered response.

It is also worth remembering that you will not always know the answer to every question. It is okay to admit that you do not know the answer and to offer to find out. The other party will appreciate this more than if they receive a response which is not true or incomplete.

Lastly, don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you're unsure of the intent or context of a question. This helps ensure that you're addressing the issue accurately and effectively.

By implementing these strategies and practising regularly, you can develop the confidence and skill needed to gracefully handle difficult questions in the workplace.

1. Do you agree that encountering difficult questions is inevitable in your job?
2. Do you find it easy to stay calm and composed and keep a level-headed demeanour?
3. How important do you think it is to be honest and transparent?
4. Do you think that it is helpful to know how to buy time to give yourself a moment to think?
5. Do you find it easy to admit when you do not know the answer?
6. Are you able to ask for clarification when you need it?
7. Do you think that working on these four skills could help you to better handle difficult questions in the workplace?

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Odd One Out: Identify the sentence which has been misplaced.

Below are example sentences for each of the techniques for handling difficult questions. However, in each group, there is one sentence which is misplaced, as it belongs to a different group. Identify the misplaced sentence in each group and which group it should belong to.

Buying Time

- a. Let me think about that for a moment before I give you my answer.
- b. Would you mind giving me a few seconds to gather my thoughts on that topic?
- c. Can I get back to you on that one after I've had some time to think it through?
- d. I want to be transparent about the situation: we're facing some setbacks.

Showing Empathy and Understanding

- a. I'm afraid I don't have that information at hand. I can find out who does, though.
- b. I can see why you feel that way, and I want to help address your concerns.
- c. I appreciate your honesty and willingness to share your concerns with us.
- d. I absolutely get where you're coming from, and I'm here to help you with that.

Being Honest and Transparent

- a. We recognise we didn't make the best decision, but we would like to change that.
- b. Could you provide more context or details on that issue?
- c. I'd like to offer you full transparency from here on, so you can always know what's happening.
- d. I want to be upfront about the current situation and keep you posted at every stage.

Admitting You Don't Know the Answer

- a. I'm not sure about the answer to that question, but I can look into it and get back to you.
- b. That's absolutely comprehensible. Thank you for your understanding while we work to fix it.
- c. I'm not sure and I don't want to give you incorrect information. Let me check with a colleague.
- d. I don't know the answer off the top of my head, but I'm committed to finding it for you.

Asking for Clarification

- a. I just need a moment to reflect on that before responding.
- b. I didn't quite understand what you meant. Would you mind going into a bit more detail?
- c. I'm not sure I fully understand your question. Can you rephrase it or give an example?
- d. I'd like to make sure I'm on the same page as you. Can you elaborate on your point?

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Collocations: Match the sentence fragments with the verb (left) to the rest of the phrase (right) to complete the collocations.

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| I don't have | • | my thoughts. |
| I need a moment to gather | • | you posted at every stage. |
| We're facing | • | that information at hand. |
| I'd like to address | • | your concerns. |
| I don't know | • | some setbacks. |
| We promise to keep | • | to finding the answer for you. |
| I want to be | • | the answer off the top of my head. |
| I'm committed | • | upfront about the situation. |

Controlled Practice: In groups or with your teacher, ask each other the questions below. Answer them with the phrases you've learnt today.

1. Why did we lay off people when we're making money?
2. Can you explain why customers don't like our new products?
3. Why has our project's timeline changed?
4. How will we catch up to our competitor in the next few months?
5. What are we doing about our money loss last quarter?
6. How will the new government rules change how we work?
7. Why did we change our policies without asking anyone?
8. Why was the project given to another team halfway through?
9. Our company's rules on right and wrong seem to be changing. Can you explain?
10. What's being done about the problems we talked about last meeting?
11. Can you tell me more about the company's plan for the bad reactions to our advertisement?
12. I don't understand why our team isn't doing as well. Can you help me understand?

Role-Play: Choose one of the three role-play activities, assign the roles, and complete the activity using language from today's class.

Scenario 1: Manager (Person A) talks to an underperforming employee (Person B) about improving their work.

Scenario 2: Customer service representative (Person A) helps an upset customer (Person B) who got a faulty product.

Scenario 3: Team leader (Person A) resolves a disagreement with a team member (Person B) about the project direction.