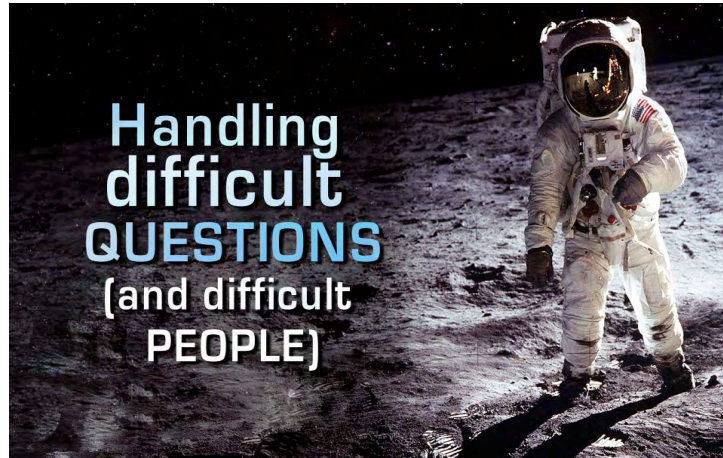


Sharing the Universe: Outreach Training Videos

Tips for



Produced by the
Astronomical Society of the Pacific
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Tips on Handling Difficult Questions

Main Ideas from the Video:

1. Seize Control! Don't let the questioner hijack your presentation.
2. Be pleasant: Don't argue. You won't convince someone with deeply held views.
3. Respond neutrally and offer to talk at a later time.
4. In a GROUP: Get back to the topic you were discussing.
5. ONE-ON-ONE: You can either get back on topic OR change the subject.

Responding in a Group Setting:

Respond neutrally and get back on topic: Use the fewest words possible to get back on topic. The more you "give" to a confronter, the more the confronter has to work with. Be sure to look away* from the questioner when you are addressing a group.

Examples:

- "I'd be interested in talking with you more about that after we're done here. Let me get back to this and we'll talk after." Look away and get back to your presentation.
- "The topic tonight is < tonight's topic>. If anyone has a question about < confronter's topic>, I'll be happy to talk to you after the program." Look away and get back to your presentation.
- "Well, that wasn't something I was intending to talk with all of you about tonight. Let me finish up here and we can talk about that afterward." Look away and get back to your presentation.
- "Thank you for expressing your views. Who has a question about < tonight's topic>?"

*LOOK AWAY: A useful technique is to look away from the questioner once you start addressing the question. Look at others in the group as you answer. Do not keep looking at the person (and don't look back at the person when you finish your answer) or you are inviting a response.

Respond in a one-on-one with an individual: Acknowledge the person then change the subject.

Examples for acknowledging the person and then changing the subject:

- "I know that others agree with you. Thank you for expressing your views. Here, let me give you a star map – what constellation would you like to see?"
- "It isn't always necessary for people to agree on everything. Especially [when we're enjoying the beauty of nature] / [on a beautiful night like this]/ [when looking at what we've learned about the universe]. I've got a galaxy in the telescope here, take a look and tell me what you see."
- "That isn't a topic I usually choose to discuss. I *am* interested in talking about <choose a different topic > - do you have any questions about that?"
- "I really don't know what to say about that. Here is information on our club – come to a meeting and you might find someone who is interested in that topic as well."
- "I'm not really qualified to discuss that. Have you seen any planets through the telescope yet?"

Final Notes:

- There are different reasons that people ask what might be considered a controversial question.
 - Some are genuinely curious about something they may have heard from a friend or read on the Internet.
 - Other times, the person is trying to be confrontational and wants to promote his/her own ideas.
- You might want to ask yourself what you think the person's motives are for asking the question before automatically disengaging when a controversial question arises.
- Recognize the curious visitor as opposed to the confrontational one. You may want to discuss the topic with the curious. You're better off to avoid the confrontational.