

Preparing for a PQ Executive

To be successful when presenting to an executive who is a Precision Questioner, we need to be fully prepared and quick to engage. We understand that meetings at this level are important for our career development as well as the company's future. As we think ahead to the meeting, we can imagine ourselves at the front of the room. Once we have presented the core of our thinking, we know the executive will start to drill down. Each answer will count and their response to many of our answers will be to ask a follow-up question. No matter how confident we are, at some level it's hard to forget that, as the issue is being considered, judgments are also being made about our own strengths and weaknesses.

How do you know you are ready to make a presentation to a PQ executive, someone who asks precise questions and expects equally precise answers? Precision Questioning and Answering gives you three useful criteria.

CAN YOU PRESENT YOUR THINKING IN A WAY THAT IS CLEAR, CRISP, AND CONCISE?

Overloaded executives need to quickly understand what's at issue and why it's worth their time. As a rule of thumb, you should be able to state the essence of your reasoning in 60 to 90 seconds, regardless of the underlying complexity. Try to do this with just one slide, or two at the most. Don't confuse this overview with giving an "elevator pitch," which is a short, simple teaser.

- Do you need a way to crunch your thinking down to a small number of bullet points whose logic is clear? Consider adapting the structure you used in the pre-work for the PQ+A workshop. You can find a blank template in your workshop handbook.

HAVE YOU THOROUGHLY PQ'ED YOUR OWN THINKING?

When a tennis player knows that the big match will be played on a windy court, they start looking for opportunities to practice under similar conditions. You know your recommendation will be PQ'ed during your executive review, so the smart way to prepare is to start PQ'ing yourself more often. Begin this practice a week or two in advance, so that you have enough time to revise your thinking, deepen your data, and draw on sources of expert opinion.

- Questionstorming provides a simple structure for self-evaluation. Review our Questionstorming Skill Sharpener [here](#) on our website.

It's not enough to question ourselves one-level deep. We need to dig deeper. And we also need to take into account the points of view of others, whether they are internal stakeholders, external clients, or a sign-off executive. Perhaps the best test of our thinking is having the ability to drill down on weaknesses as others will perceive them. That's how to prepare for a very windy court!

- Questionstorming is a good start, but it doesn't replace Four Columns, the tool you learned in the PQ+A workshop for doing systematic self-evaluation. The key is Column 3, where you start questioning from the executive's point of view. Remember to use everything you know about their high standards and the organization's current priorities.

ARE YOU ABLE TO DO PRECISION ANSWERING IN RESPONSE TO DRILLDOWNS?

Back to that windy tennis court where you know in advance that it's going to be difficult to keep your eye on the ball unless you've been practicing. Are you using Precision Answering on a regular basis? If not, it's unreasonable to expect that in the middle of an executive review you will suddenly acquire the ability to give bullet-point answers or handle "I don't know's" appropriately. Practice is essential!

As you know from the workshop, this is when the technique we call PQ+A with a Partner comes into play. Find a partner who is knowledgeable about

your subject domain, who is good at asking precise questions, and who isn't afraid to ask follow-ups. It doesn't matter whether or not they will ask exactly the same questions your executive reviewer will be asking. What matters is that they are helping you escape your own point of view and step into the point of view of your audience. Above all, they are giving you a chance to practice Precision Answering.

- To review three elements of PA particularly important in executive interactions, study the following Skill Sharpeners on our website: [Giving bullet-point answers](#), [Using qualifiers correctly](#), and saying “[I don't know](#).”

Executive reviews are rich experiences. To capture the lessons presented, we need to understand that these leaders are showing us, through their questions in the context of real problems, how they think and what they value. When the meeting is over, study the mindset that was behind the questions they asked. As you do this, you will gradually find yourself testing your own daily thinking by their high standards. That's how to become a truly confident presenter.

This Month's Practice

When is your next review with a PQ executive? Plan carefully so you have enough time to meet all three criteria.

If you get stuck, drop us a line at questionmaster@vervago.com.

We're here to help. If you have questions, comments or suggestions for future topics, email us at QuestionMaster@vervago.com.

You may also join our LinkedIn group for Precision Q+A alumni by visiting us here at [LinkedIn](#).