

Difficult Questions and Bridging Statements

One of the best ways to prepare for a difficult Board Meeting is to make a list of a few of the worst questions you can imagine being asked and prepare responses to each question.

It's easier than you might think, thanks to a bridging statement that “bridges” from the of Board Member/Resident/Business Owner/Property Owner/Council Person's etc. difficult question to your key message. If someone asks an innocent enough question, answer it. But if it's a really tough question, answer in as few words as possible— “yes” or “no” or “perhaps” then bridge to your key message using a bridging statement, like this:

Question: “There is no place to park in the downtown!”

Sample Response: “**Let me emphasize again** that a parking study was conducted by a nationally recognized consulting firm and the data shows that there are over 100 spaces available during peak times.”

In other instances, the question might be so outlandish that you don't want to give an answer, so you use a bridging statement to go directly to the key message.

In other words, what you say after the out-of-bounds question is asked really **isn't an answer** because it doesn't answer the question. **It's actually a response**, and it includes the **key message or messages** you've prepared beforehand.

Here's an example of a question you might be asked by a Downtown Development Authority member. The bridging statement is in red.

Question: “What are you going to do when my business drops due to all of the downtown construction?”

Sample Response: “**It is true that** this transition with the construction will be difficult, **but it is also true** that the City and DDA are working together to put out a marketing plan that will promote the downtown during construction.”

or

Sample Response: “**With that in mind, if we look at the bigger picture,** the business owners and residents wanted a more walkable and vibrant downtown. This is a project plan that was developed by the business owners and residents.”

This would be a good time to explain what you are doing to help mitigate construction and offer to meet one on one. Further, you could offer suggestions as to what the business could do on their end. (discounts, customer appreciation programs, snacks etc.)

Question: “What are you using all of the tax captures monies for?”

Sample Response: “**Let me put this into perspective by saying** all the DDA work plans and yearly budgets are posted on our website. Please check it out. Additionally, I invite you to join us for our next meeting, yearly work plan and/or strategy meeting where you can contribute. The next meeting is scheduled for _____.”

At times, you may use a bridging statement to deal with a rude comment. See the examples below.

Question: “We can’t issue a blank check to an organization and not require accounting back and just trust that because they say it was all spent appropriately, that it was.”

Sample Response: “**And what’s most important to know is that** all required components of the local unit are included in the financial statements and/or disclosed in the reporting entity notes to the financial statement as necessary.”

Question: “You’re not doing your job!”

Sample Response: “**In this context it is essential to note,** my job duties and responsibilities are determined by the Board and what you are asking me to do is outside of my scope of work. The board determines the areas of focus for each year and what you want me to do is not within that focus.”

Question: “Why are you limiting the amount of traffic going by my business? I need as many cars going by my shop as possible.”

Sample Response: “**After we take a closer look, we would see** that a Road Diet can improve economic vitality by changing the corridor from a place that people “drive-through” to one that they “drive-to.” Road Diets are a powerful traffic calming tool for urbanized areas that can help communities improve safety, nurture lively neighborhoods, and increase local business sales.

This would be a good time to point to other examples nearby.

Many of the people we encounter in our daily lives can frequently ask “what if” questions. It’s safest to not speculate and get caught in that trap by trying to answer.

Other strategies you can incorporate into your responses are:

- Invitations to meet one on one
- Invitations to attend future planning meetings
- Ask your change agents to respond/post positive responses on social media

64 Bridging Statements

Here are 64 bridging statements you can use even in routine interactions with the public, as well as when you're on the hot seat:

1. "We find the more important issue is..."
2. "I think it would be more accurate (or correct) to say..."
3. "Here's the real problem..."
4. "What I've said comes down to this..."
5. "Let me emphasize again..."
6. "What matters most in this situation is..."
7. "While _____ is important, it's also important to remember that..."
8. "It all boils down to this..."
9. "And that reminds me..."
10. "Before we leave this subject, I need to add..."
11. "I won't speculate. What matters in this situation is..."
12. "And what's most important to know is..."
13. "However, what is more important to look at is..."
14. "However, the real issue here is..."
15. "And what this all means is..."
16. "And what's most important to remember is..."
17. "With this in mind, if we look at the bigger picture..."
18. "With this in mind, if we take a look back..."
19. "If we take a broader perspective..."
20. "If we look at the big picture..."
21. "Let me put all this in perspective by saying..."
22. "What all this information tells me is..."
23. "Before we continue, let me take a step back and repeat that..."
24. "Before we continue, let me emphasize that..."
25. "This is an important point because..."
26. "What this all boils down to..."
27. "The heart of the matter is..."
28. "What matters most in this situation is..."
29. "And as I said before..."
30. "And if we take a closer look, we would see..."
31. "Let me just add to this that..."
32. "I think it would be more correct to say..."
33. "Let me point out again that..."
34. "Let me emphasize again..."
35. "In this context, it is essential that I note..."
36. "Another thing to remember is..."
37. "Before we leave the subject, let me add that..."
38. "And that reminds me..."
39. "And the one thing that is important to remember is..."
40. "What I've said comes down to this..."
41. "Here's the real issue..."
42. "While...is important, it is also important to remember..."

43. "It's true that...but it is also true that..."
44. "The key here is..."
45. "I see that, but ... (key message)"
46. "I'm not here to comment on that. What I would like to say is..."
47. "I'd also like to add that..."
48. "Just to put this into some context ..."
49. "What's absolutely critical to remember is..."
50. "People have said that but..."
51. "I can't agree with you"
52. "To put this in perspective ..."
53. "What you're talking about isn't my area of expertise, what I can say is..."
54. "That's very interesting, but first let me make the point..."
55. "That's very interesting, but what I believe is..."
56. "The point is..."
57. "What I'm most concerned about is..."
58. "What we have to look at is..."
59. "You wouldn't expect me to discuss such sensitive issues with the media before talking to staff ..."
60. "I cannot speak for xxx, you should address issues to them specifically. What I can say is ..."
61. "Have you visited the site/seen the building/tested the equipment you are criticizing – I'd be delighted to show you..."
62. "I'm sorry, I don't have the precise details. I will come back to you on that."
63. "May I finish the point I was making..."
64. "I'm sorry, I don't know. However, what I can say is..."

Copied from: <https://lindareedenever.com.au/64-bridging-statements-can-use-media-interview/>

Please Note: A Bridging Statement would be perfect to address an off agenda or planned discussion item.

For example:

Unfortunately, we need more time to discuss that matter. This issue can be addressed on the next agenda. We've noted your concern, but right now we have to move on item #....