






GREAT ANSWERS to TOUGH QUESTIONS*

When we are doing big work that matters, it's almost inevitable that at some point, something will go wrong and we'll face tough questions from clients, donors, our board, or the media. This formula will get you through it. **It's as easy as ABCDE:**

- A** **Answer or Acknowledge the Question.** ✓
If you know the answer and are allowed to give it, **do so**. Truth and facts. If you can't, say so and explain why (still working to find the answer, confidentiality, ongoing investigation, etc.) *But, don't stop here...*
- B** **Cross the Bridge to the Positive.** 
This is a verbal tool that enables you to **move things to a positive, useful space**: "What's important to note is..." or "To put it in a wider context..." or even "But..." or "And..." *Note: This bridge is one-way. Once you move to the positive, don't cross back into the negative.*
- C** **Communicate the Content of Your Message.** 
This is your chance to get across one of your **key messages** (*prepared beforehand, and usually positive*) that is most relevant to this question.
- D** **Dangle an Example** 
These two go together to make your answer even more **engaging, meaningful, and memorable**. The Dangle is another bridge: "A really good example of this is..." This moves you into an **example or story** that paints a clear picture for the audience, **moving your key message out of the abstract**. *Bonus: The end of the story or example gives a clear-cut spot to end your great answer on a positive note, and may prompt a positive follow-up question.*
- E**

And remember:

1. It's common for tough questions to be loaded with negative words. You don't need to echo them back in your answer - **reframe on your terms**, using positive words when possible.
2. Giving great answers is a **learnable skill**. It just takes some planning and practice.

* These insights can be found in Michael Dodd's book *Great Answers to Tough Questions At Work*.