

## BEP 37 - Presentations: Question and Answer (Part 2)

Welcome back to BUSINESSenglishPOD! Today's episode is the second in our a two-part series on question and answer, or Q&A.<sup>1</sup>

The listening starts where we left off last time. Nick, the new European sales director at Harper-Tolland Steel, is answering questions after his presentation.<sup>2</sup>

Nick has proposed to retrain key sales staff at Harper-Tolland in order to boost sales after a disappointing new product launch. Where we left off, Cindy, the regional sales manager for Germany, is asking Nick how they will measure the success of the new training program.

As you listen, pay attention to how Nick and Nick's boss, Max, deal with questions and manage the Q&A session.

### Vocabulary

roll out – Implementation

new blood – New personnel or new ideas that rejuvenate a company

redundancies – Lay offs

to flat out contradict – To completely contradict (go against)

to see the writing is on the wall – Idiom. To observe signs of future doom or misfortune that are visible to all.

### Listening Comprehension Questions

1. How does Nick plan to measure the success of the new training?
2. What is Cindy's concern?
3. What does John identify as an important problem in Germany?
4. How does Max (the boss) feel about Nick's proposal?

### Dialog:

Cindy: But how do we measure success?

Nick: You mean, how can we tell if it's working?

Bryan: Yes, that's right.

Nick: That's a good question. I would expect to see a 5% increase in order volume three months after the roll out, 10% within six months. That's the main *criterion*. Does that answer your question?

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<sup>1</sup> As you'll remember, Nick has proposed to retrain key sales staff at Harper-Tolland in order to boost sales after a disappointing new product launch. Where we left off, Cindy, the regional sales manager for Germany, is asking Nick how they will measure the success of the new training program.

Cindy: Yes, thanks. But I guess another general point I'd like to raise is about staffing.

Nick: Uh huh.

Cindy: With so much new blood coming into the company, a lot of sales staff feel that the writing's on the wall. And I think it's creating a bad atmosphere interdepartmentally.

Nick: Let me check I understand. Are you asking about potential redundancies and how it might affect morale?

Cindy: In a word, yes.

Nick: Well, everyone's job *is on the line* here. The most important thing is that we are fully committed to getting sales back on track.

Max: I think that raises a different issue. We can address staff changes and morale in another meeting. Time's running short. Let's stay focused.

Nick: Okay, well, I think we only have a few minutes left. Is there one last question?

John: Yes, if I can just come in for a second.

Nick: Yes, John..

John: Well, from what we're seeing on the UK side, the sales people just don't feel our promotional materials are getting through to our most important customers. I'm talking about the decision makers—project managers, architects etc.. How do you think we can we adjust?

Nick: That's a very interesting issue, but I'm not fully up to speed on the marketing situation in UK. Bryan, would you like to comment on that?

Bryan: We can go into more detail about that in this afternoon's marketing meeting. But I would just like to point out that what you're saying just flat out contradicts the results from our market survey.

Nick: Uhm, so, right, I'm afraid that's just about all we have time for.

Max: Yes, thank you Nick. We really are running on a tight schedule today, as I think everyone can appreciate. Now, Nick's proposal is definitely a go, and needs our full support. Bryan, I want your team to work with Nick's on the value proposition for the new training material, and get back to me next Tuesday with a timeframe for roll out. I'd like to have country managers retrained during next month's sales meeting. We need to work fast. Okay people?

## Debrief:

Bryan isn't going to be very happy about this, is he? Max is the boss and he's made a decision: "Nick's proposal is a go." That means he is going to adopt the proposal. You can also say, "Let's go with this proposal."

(Well) Now, let's go back through the dialogue to examine how Nick and Max deal with questions from Cindy, Bryan and John.. We'll start with the exchange between Cindy, Nick and Bryan at the beginning of today's listening.

Cindy: But how do we measure success?

Nick: You mean, how can we tell if it's working?

Bryan: Yes, that's right.

Nick: That's a very good question. I would expect to see a 5% increase in order volume three months after the roll out, 10% within six months. That's the main criterion. Does that answer your question?

First, Nick uses "you mean" to clarify Cindy's question about how to measure to success. We covered this kind of clarifying in the first episode in this series, BEP36.<sup>3</sup>

In response to Cindy's question, Nick says he expects a 5% increase in sales volume within three months after "roll out" or implementation of the new training..<sup>4</sup> Then Nick checks to make sure his answer is sufficient—"Does that answer your question?" This is a good way to make sure your audience is following you and to encourage discussion.

There are other ways to check whether your answer is sufficient. Here are some of them.

Is that okay?

Does that make sense?

Do you see what I mean?

Do you know what I mean?

Are you with me?

Does that cover what you want to know?

Have I answered your question?

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<sup>3</sup> Quick review: Remember, during the first part of this two-part series on Q&A, BEP36, we looked at how Nick uses "You mean..." to clarify Cindy's question. Cindy asks "But how do we measure success?" and Nick says, "You mean, how can we tell it's working?" As we said last time, this is clarifying by paraphrasing.

<sup>4</sup> Here "roll out" refers to implementation. Think of a carpet in a roll. To "implement" the carpet, we unroll it, or roll it out. So Nick is saying that three months after the new sales program has been rolled out, or implemented, they should see a 5% increase in order volume—the total number of orders.

In today's listening, what comes next is another good example of clarifying. Cindy is talking about staff changes. Let's listen.

Cindy: With so much new blood coming into the company, a lot of sales staff feel that the writing's on the wall. And I think it's creating a bad atmosphere interdepartmentally.<sup>5</sup>

Nick: Let me check I understand. Are you asking about potential redundancies and how it might affect morale?

Cindy: In a word, yes.

As we learned in BEP 36, "Let me check I understand. Are you asking...?" is another way to clarify someone's question. The reason Cindy's statement is vague and needs clarification is because she uses two idioms here, probably to give her tough question a casual tone in order to maintain a relaxed mood (in the meeting).. "New blood" refers to new staff coming into the company. For example, we can "inject new blood" into a company, that is, bring in new people with fresh ideas. "To see the writing on the wall" suggests future doom or misfortune..<sup>6</sup> You can refer to the study notes for a complete explanation of these idioms.

So "With so much new blood coming into the company, a lot of sales staff feel that the writing's on the wall..." this means with so many new people coming into the company, a lot of staff are worried about their jobs. (When the new blood comes in, the old blood goes.)

Now, let's go back to the dialogue. Remember, Cindy is asking about how staff changes are affecting morale. What does Nick say?

Nick: Well, everyone's job is on the line here. The most important thing is that we are fully committed to getting sales back on track.

Nick doesn't really answer Cindy's question, does he? This is a great example of tactfully (or skillfully) avoiding an answer by making a general statement: Nick says "everyone's job is on the line."<sup>7</sup> This means "everyone's job is in danger."

Max, their boss, then jumps into the discussion:

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<sup>5</sup> Cindy is worried about the atmosphere "interdepartmentally," that is, between departments. Whenever you see the prefix "inter" think "between." For example, international means between nations.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase "to see the writing on the wall" (or sometimes "handwriting on the wall") is an expression that suggests future doom or misfortune, visible to almost anyone. For example, "He saw the handwriting on the wall and left the company before it collapsed."

<sup>7</sup> If something "is on the line," it means that it's in danger. He could also say that "everyone is in the same boat." In other words, the whole staff face the same situation: They need to work hard to get sales back on track. A "track" is a road. "To get something back on track" is to get it back on the road to success.

Max: I think that raises a different issue. We can address staff changes and morale in another meeting. Time's running short. Let's stay focused.

Max is giving us examples of two useful skills here. The first is how to deal with an irrelevant question. The second is managing the time. Let's take them one by one.

First, dealing with an irrelevant question. "I think that raises a different issue" is another way to avoid answering a question. It's particularly suitable for irrelevant questions when your goal is to keep the discussion on track, that is, to keep the conversation focused.

Listen to some other ways to deal with an irrelevant question:

- I'm afraid I don't see the connection.
- To be honest, I think that brings up another point, and I'd rather not cover that for now.
- I'm afraid that's outside the scope of my discussion.

If the point *is* relevant, but you simply can't or don't wish to answer, you may also consider saying something like:

- I'm afraid I'm not in a position to comment on that.
- I don't know that off the top of my head.
- Can I get back to you on that?

If the question is something you think you *already* covered earlier, you can say

- I think I answered that earlier
- Well, as I said...
- Well, as I mentioned earlier...
- I think I addressed that point earlier on, but I'd be happy to discuss this with you after the meeting.

What do you do if the question is relevant, but you want to answer it later? Listen to what Bryan says later on when Nick asks him about the marketing situation in Germany.

Nick:...Bryan, would you like to comment on that?

Bryan: We can go into more detail about that in this afternoon's marketing meeting.

You could also say:

- I'll be happy to answer that later when we talk about product awareness.
- Can we come back to that issue in a bit when we go through the targets for 2007?
- Let's put off that topic for now. I'd like to deal with that in more detail during the sales meeting tomorrow when the whole team is present.

Great. So we've covered how to avoid answering unwanted questions. Now, let's study how Max controls the timing. He says, "Time's running short. Let's stay

focused.” When time is running short, that means time is running out, just like when your car is running out of fuel, the fuel in the tank gets lower and lower.

There are several more great examples of controlling the timing in today’s listening. Nick says:

Nick: Okay, well, I think we only have a few minutes left. Is there one last question?

And near the end of the session, Nick and Max both use useful expressions for controlling the timing. Nick says, “I’m afraid that’s just about all we have time for. Is there one last question?” Max says, “We really are running on a tight schedule today, as I think everyone can appreciate.” These are both great expressions. There are also other phrases you can use to control the timing:

- Let’s try to keep the discussion on track. Can we get back to the main point?
- As we’re short of time, I’ll have to come to that later, perhaps during the break
- I’m afraid that’s all we have time for. Thank you very much for your attention.

So, now we just have one more skill to cover today—redirecting a question. This means giving a question to someone else to answer. Nick does this with John’s question about whether Harper-Tolland’s promotional materials are getting through to the key customers in their UK market. He says:

Nick: That’s a very interesting issue, and I don’t think it takes anything away from the validity of my proposal. But I’m not fully up to speed on the marketing situation in the UK. Bryan, would you like to comment on that?

“To be not fully up to speed on something” means not to be fully informed about it. Marketing is Bryan’s area of expertise, and because Nick is not fully informed about it (or perhaps wants to put some pressure on Bryan), he redirects the question to Bryan by saying, “Bryan, would you like to comment on that.” This is redirecting the question to another person. Let’s listen to some more examples.

- That’s a good question, but I’m afraid it’s not really my field. Ms. Smith, can you help to answer that?
- George, I think you know more about this. What do you think?
- Great question. It’s a little outside of my job scope, though. Maybe Simon—do you want to answer that?

In addition to redirecting to another person, there are also other ways to redirect a question. You can redirect to the whole group. This is a great way to encourage discussion.

- Would anyone like to comment on that?
- Has anyone else had a similar problem?
- Great question. What do others think?

- That's a good question. Let's go around the table and get some other views on this.

Finally, there's one last way to redirect a question. You can turn back the question to the questioner and let him answer it. This is called redirecting to the questioner. It's particularly useful when it's obvious that someone doesn't really want to ask a question, but rather wants to express an opinion. To redirect to the questioner, you can say:

- I think that's a very interesting question. I'd be really interested to hear what you have to say on that issue.
- You must have thought quite a lot about this. What do you think?
- That's a very interesting question. Could I ask you what your own view is?

You might try that one next time in a job interview when someone asks you a tough question. Just kidding. Actually, that would probably not be such a great idea. Let's look at a situation where redirecting to the questioner *is* useful.

A: I've been thinking a lot about this market survey. Don't you think we have a great chance to boost our sales in Vietnam?

B: That's an interesting question. You must have thought quite a lot about this. What's your view?

A: Well, there is a quickly growing middle class segment with elderly parents that have strong purchasing power. That means...

Great! That just about brings us to the end of today's episode. This was the second in a two-part series on dealing with questions. Today we've covered several important skills for Q&A—avoiding answering, dealing with irrelevant questions, and redirecting. We've also learned several useful idioms.

If you haven't already, be sure to listen to the first part in this series. Also, remember you can go to [www.businessenglishpod.com](http://www.businessenglishpod.com) and sign up as a Premium Member to access the study notes for this and other episodes.

In the meanwhile, here at BUSINESSenglishPOD we'll be working hard on great ways to inject new blood into your English. See you next time and take care!

### Language Review Questions

Rearrange the jumbled sentences to make useful phrases for Q&A. Identify the function of each phrase (i.e., checking your answer is sufficient, redirecting to another person, etc.).

1. Know that want cover does to what
2. Lot a must you have thought quite this about
3. Around go let's views some the this on other table get and
4. Keep try on let's track the discussion the
5. Smith answer that you try can Ms.

## Useful Language

**Let's start with some ways to check whether your answer is sufficient and understood.**

- Is that okay?
- Does that make sense?
- Do you see what I mean?
- Do you know what I mean?
- Are you with me?
- Does that cover what you want to know?
- Have I answered your question?

**Here are some phrases to deal with an irrelevant question:**

- I'm afraid I don't see the connection.
- To be honest, I think that brings up another point, and I'd rather not cover that for now.
- I'm afraid that's outside the scope of my discussion.

**If the point *is* relevant, but you simply can't or don't wish to answer, you may also consider saying something like:**

- I'm afraid I'm not in a position to comment on that.
- I don't know that off the top of my head.
- Can I get back to you on that?

**If the question is something you think you already covered earlier, you can say:**

- I think I answered that earlier
- Well, as I said...
- Well, as I mentioned earlier...
- I think I addressed that point earlier on, but I'd be happy to discuss this with you after the meeting.

**And here are some phrases you can use if the question *is* relevant, but you want to answer it later:**

- I'll be happy to answer that later when we talk about product awareness.
- Can we come back to that issue in a bit when we go through the targets for 2007?
- Let's put off that topic for now. I'd like to deal with that in more detail during the sales meeting tomorrow when the whole team is present.

**To control the timing, you can say:**

- Let's try to keep the discussion on track. Can we get back to the main point?
- As we're short of time, I'll have to come to that later, perhaps during the break
- I'm afraid that's all we have time for. Thank you very much for your attention.



**These are some more examples of redirecting the question to another person:**

- That's a good question, but I'm afraid it's not really my field. Ms. Smith, can you help to answer that?
- George, I think you know more about this. What do you think?
- Great question. It's a little outside of my job scope, though. Maybe Simon—do you want to answer that?

**You can also redirect the question to the whole group:**

- Would anyone like to comment on that?
- Has anyone else had a similar problem?
- Great question. What do others think?
- That's a good question. Let's go around the table and get some other views on this.

**To redirect back to the questioner, you can say:**

- I think that's a very interesting question. I'd be really interested to hear what you have to say on that issue.
- You must have thought quite a lot about this. What do you think?
- That's a very interesting question. Could I ask you what your own view is?

**Redirecting to the questioner:**

A: I've been thinking a lot about this market survey. Don't you think we have a great chance to boost our sales in Vietnam?

B: That's an interesting question. You must have thought quite a lot about this. What's your view?

A: Well, there is a quickly growing middle class segment with elderly parents that have strong purchasing power. That means...

**Answers**

**Listening Comprehension**

1. 5% increase in order volume three months after the roll out, 10% within six months
2. How potential redundancies might affect morale
3. The sales people don't feel that the promotional materials are getting through to the most important customers
4. He supports it fully.

**Language Review**

1. Does that cover what you want to know? **Checking your answer is sufficient**
2. You must have thought quite a lot about this. **Redirecting to the questioner**
3. Let's go around the table and get some other views on this. **Redirecting to the group**
4. Let's try to keep the discussion on track. **Control the timing**
5. I'm afraid I'm not in a position to comment on that. **Avoiding comment**
6. Ms. Smith, can you help to answer that? **Redirecting to another person**