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Let's face it, teams have changed. And it's not just some quick change where things will go "back to normal." They have changed for the long run. When was the last time you checked in with your team to make sure the way they are working together makes sense? Have you checked in with the parent who is juggling closed schools and working from home? What about the new employee that was thrown into the mix during the start of the pandemic? Ask some questions to show your empathy and start real conversations about your team's work.

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SOME TEAMS JUST DON'T WANT TO DIE

At one time, it may have been a high-performing team — doing great work with great people. But now...it's different...it's not the same...it's not as fun as it once was. It's a real challenge for teams to know when they should simply say "goodbye." Look for these signs that your team's work is done:

You're Done. Your team has accomplished the mission. Hooray! Congratulate yourselves on a job well done. Make sure there are sufficient structures in place to ensure the issue won't come up again. Watch out for the team that goes "searching" for a new mission — just to keep the team together.

No Customer. Take a look at what your team has been chartered to do. Who is the customer and/or end-user of that final product? Sometimes the customer isn't there, doesn't care, wasn't ever there, and won't ever be there. If you don't have a customer for your team product, no one is going to "buy" it and your team doesn't need to exist.

Below Critical Mass. How many people were on the team when it was chartered? Now, how many are on board? Sure, team members come and go, but watch out when critical expertise is not replaced. There is such a thing as "critical mass" which varies from team to team — the minimum needed to get the job done. When the team is at or below critical mass and cannot perform its functions any longer, it's time for the team to stop the lunacy. Get more help or disband the team.

Just Can't Do It. I realize everyone is operating on a shoestring and you can't always get what you want. But your team should be able to get what it needs. If your team literally cannot do its job without a specific resource (be creative — how did they do it ten, twenty, or

thirty years ago?), then go get it. Like a dog, rabidly pursue it. If still, you can't get it, stop beating each other up and call it a day.

Floating in Space. Every team should have someone in management who is championing their efforts. The champion removes barriers to team success and provides resources as needed. In the event the team loses its champion (e.g. job transfer, other priorities, or death), the team needs to find a new champion to link the team's efforts to business strategy. Otherwise, the lifeline has been cut and the team is just floating out in space.

Enough Already. The team has been in existence forever. The same people have been on the team. They have been working on the same project. They are tired, burned out, and need to move on. There seems to be no end in sight. Like a fatally wounded animal, just put it out of its misery.

In some cases, the team wants so desperately to stay together, it ignores these signs. It takes on a life of its own finding busy work and not really accomplishing meaningful results.

The first step is to recognize the signs and then have a discussion with the team. Oftentimes, it's simply a matter of regrouping your energies and accessing the right people or resources. Maybe it is time for the team to move on. Listen to people as they share their opinions and feelings. Recognize that there will be a wide range of emotions: glad, sad, worried, excited. Reach agreement on the future of the team and ensure closure for the teams' results and relationships.

HOW PANELISTS CAN RESPOND TO PESKY "GOTCHA" QUESTIONS

It's every panelists' nightmare: the panel moderator asks a question that comes from left field that leaves you staring like a deer in headlights. Modeled by our 24/7 news cycle, interviewers are poised to ask "gotcha questions" that can be clipped into sound bites that travel the world instantaneously, often detached from the context in which it was said. Here are eight different types of "gotcha" questions:

9 Types of Gotcha Questions

1. The Leading Question suggests the desired answer.
2. The Loaded Question presupposes an unverified assumption.
3. The Negative Question is phrased so negatively that it feels like there is no room to answer.
4. The Faulty Premise is based on inaccurate information or an assertion that is not true.
5. The Ambush is a provocative question asked in an unexpected situation.
6. The Non-Question is a comment or statement vs. a question.
7. The Hypothetical Question is about something that has not actually happened yet.
8. The "Left-Field" Question has no relationship to the topic or the reason why you are speaking.
9. The Personal Attack questions the panelist's character often verging into the unpleasant, personal, and/or possibly offensive realm.

As an expert panelist or during any other interview, you can proactively prepare for cage-rattling questions, recognize the gotcha question, and reframe your response so that you can come out looking like a champ!

Proactively Prepare for Gotcha Questions

- **Research.** Media Relations Expert Jan Fox recommends you research the panel moderator, media host, and panelists. Listen to their podcasts, watch their shows, Google their reviews, check for by-lines, and note any “gotcha” questions they tend to ask.
- **Reflect.** Clarity Coach and Strategist Pam Leinmiller suggests that you examine your vulnerabilities. Ask yourself, “Who is this audience and what are their biggest concerns? What is their paradigm? Where are they coming from? How will they respond to my message? Is it controversial, new, or revolutionary?”
- **Anticipate.** You already have a good sense of where the gotcha questions will come from. Business Book Strategist Cathy Fyock recommends you write down the worst questions you might be asked under whatever circumstance in two minutes. It is surprising how many questions you can think of! Extend your search by talking to colleagues and those who understand the topic/situation by asking them, “If you wanted to catch me off guard, what would you ask me?”
- **Practice.** Have someone ask you these tough questions. Fox advises you to “Rehearse short and concise answers, without memorizing the answers. You know your material, so speak answers from what you know. That way you will not get tripped up.”
- **Prepare.** For each point you want to make, have an astounding fact, an interesting three-line story, an analogy, or comparison to add along with a 15-second sticky, tweetable, repeatable, and retainable sound bite.

Recognize the Gotcha Question

- **Actively Listen.** When asked any question, listen carefully to the question. Try not to formulate a response to the question while the question is being asked or make an assumption about the questioner.
- **Spot It!** Notice the loaded trigger words that contain emotion, assumptions, faulty logic, or hypothetical verbiage.
- **Deeper Meaning.** Listen for the real question behind the question. What is actually prompting the question?
- **Pause.** Take a moment to give yourself time to think about how you can rephrase the question.

Respond to The Reframed Question

- Media Expert Alan Stevens recommends a three-part “neutral rephrasing” to respond to the question:
 1. **Clarify the Question.** Use specific language that tees up the fact that you are giving focus to the question you are willing to ask such as: “For the benefit of everybody else who might not have caught all of that, let me clarify what you are asking” or “What you want to know is...”
 2. **Rephrase.** As you clarify, frame the question in your own neutral, non-judgmental way. Media Training Expert Rosemary Ravinal recommends you “take the negative and emotional words out of the question and rephrase the question into the answer you already prepared!”
 3. **Answer** your rephrased question; NOT the gotcha question! Bring it back to the facts and do not respond to the emotional underpinnings of the question. Be concise. Only answer as much as is necessary and move on to the next question.

For multi-part questions, Stevens suggests you start with the question you can answer most confidently and in some detail. Say, "Let me take that second point that you've raised." Then go back to the questioner and say, "I believe you had some other points... (Don't say, 'I've forgotten your questions')." More often than not, they'll say that was fine.

If you don't know, be transparent and tell the questioner and the audience that you will find out and get back to them in the most appropriate way. Leinmiller says, "Honesty is the best policy. Rather than say, 'I don't know.' Try 'Here's what I CAN tell you....'" Answer what you want and then briskly move on to the next question.

Even though it appears that the questioner has control of Q&A, the savvy, prepared panelist has ultimate command of the conversation. "You're in control of what you say because you already have the answers and the clear intention of what you want to say," Ravinal explains. "While the question can be deceptive or a tricky question, you stay on your topic and give the answers you want to give with great clarity and confidence. It may not always match and that's perfectly okay." Certainly not worth losing sleep over.

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: THE TRUTH ABOUT TODAY'S MARIJUANA

[The Dangerous Truth about Today's Marijuana: Johnny Stack's Life and Death Story](#) is a harrowing tale shared by his mother (and one of my best friends), Laura Stack. It is also a cautionary tale to us Boomers who grew up with a very different marijuana than what is available nowadays. We think, "Oh, that's just weed. No big deal." But it IS a big deal for young people. Teens' brains are not yet fully developed until their early twenties – and there are some shocking realities that Stack shares in this book.

I've known the Stack family for at least a decade and saw firsthand the brutal effects this "lifestyle" had on each family member. But now, OMG. This handsome, smart, and sensitive boy took his own life after an addiction to high-potency marijuana and cannabis-induced psychosis. How can that happen in a Christian, values-based, tight-knit family? It IS possible....and you may not even know it...before it's too late.

This real-life story is laced with recent scientific-based research on how today's potent THC products lead to mental illnesses in adolescents, such as anxiety, depression, paranoia, psychosis, and sadly, suicidal ideation. It's a true eye-opener and a cautionary tale for ALL of us to read.

BTW, we just finished the Second Annual Fundraising Walk for Johnny's Ambassadors to reduce adolescent marijuana abuse, mental illness, and suicide ideation. We walked to show our passion to protect youth from the harms of marijuana and we raised \$237 with our tiny team of six! You can donate here to support this amazing cause!