

Skills 360 – Defending Your Ideas (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel and react when you think someone is attacking your ideas?
2. Do you have any effective ways of dealing with people you think are difficult?
3. Do you think you are good at admitting when you are wrong?

Vocabulary

To win the day: to be successful or beat the competition; “I’m pretty happy that among a dozen really good bids, our proposal won the day.”

A dog eat dog world: we say it’s a “dog eat dog world” to mean that there is a lot of competition and people will do anything, even harm others, to be successful; “Reggie realized that he didn’t have the confidence and drive to survive in the dog eat dog world of real estate sales.”

To lay out: to present, display, or explain; “Infographics can be a great way to lay out complex information or data.”

Attitude: the way someone behaves or shows feelings and opinions; “It’s very important for our customer service representatives to maintain a positive attitude.”

Diplomatic: dealing with people and ideas in a sensitive manner; “Delivering an effective performance review requires you to be very diplomatic.”

Logical: reasonable or using clear evidence for opinions or conclusions; “Well, it seems logical to me that our decline in sales is due to the economic downturn.”

To be dragged into something: to become involved in something negative or unpleasant; “The Board of Directors didn’t want to get dragged into a prolonged battle with the shareholders.”

Petty: not important, or not worth caring about; “Even when a customer’s complaint seems petty, we should at least try to take it seriously.”

To reference: to mention an idea or document, especially to support an idea; “Committees may find it useful to have a copy of previous minutes on hand so they can easily reference past decisions.”

Target market: a specific group of customers that a company tries to sell or appeal to; "With its new line of colorful phones, the company is trying to broaden its target market to appeal to teenagers and tweens."

To elevate: to raise or improve something; if we "elevate" a "debate" or "discussion," we are trying to make it productive and meaningful; "The facilitator did a good job of elevating the planning discussion and helping people overcome trivial differences."

To ensure: to make sure; "We need a good policy manual to ensure that all staff understand company procedures and protocol."

To drive someone nuts: to make someone very annoyed, bothered, or frustrated; "The Republicans refusal to accept the health care plan is driving Democratic lawmakers nuts."

To be fixated on something: to be so interested or concerned about something that other things don't matter; "I think that as long as we're fixated on cost-cutting, we're never going to expand our market share."

Primary concern: the thing that is of most importance; "Our primary concern with this contract is that it prevents us from doing business for other clients."

To get someone on board: to persuade someone of an idea or to get someone's support for a plan; "I'm trying hard to get our CFO on board with the idea that outsourcing can help save money."

In the face of: in a situation where you have to deal with something negative; "It seems harder and harder for building developers in the face of so much regulation and red tape."

Leading question: a question designed to get a specific answer; "Advertisers often rely on leading questions to encourage potential customers to believe a product is useful or necessary."

Slick: impressive, smooth, or persuasive; "For their slick new advertising campaign, Rolex has recruited several prominent athletes."

To nod: to move your head up and down to show agreement; "You'll know you have the audience's attention when you see them nodding and hear them murmur agreement."

Rhetorical question: a question that is asked simply for effect, not necessarily to get a response; "The motivational speaker punctuated his talk with rhetorical questions like "Is this really all that life has to offer you?"

To admit: to say or confess that something is true, especially when it might be difficult to do so; "I have to admit Ken, I really don't like the way you handled that meeting."

To have a point: to make a correct or important statement; "Well folks, I think Jane really has a point when she says that we're not ready as an organization for expansion."

To give a little: to accept some compromise or to accept someone else's ideas; "The mediator stressed that both sides would have to be prepared to give a little in the negotiations."

To concede: to accept or admit that something is true or someone is right; "When faced with a potential lawsuit, we had to concede that we had not met safety standards."

Construction: a particular way of arranging words grammatically; "The language trainer taught us several useful constructions for making comparisons."

Aggressive: if a person is aggressive, they may be angry, rude, or confrontational; if a plan or timeline is aggressive, it is very severe or difficult; "HR needs to come up with an aggressive plan to address the issues of lateness and absenteeism."

To ditch: to give something up or get rid of something; "When the economic crisis hit, we had to ditch our plans to expand into the American market."

To stubbornly hold on to something: to continue believing or doing something even if it might not make sense to do so; "My advisor told me to stop stubbornly holding on to my stocks when there's no place for them to go but down."

Defensive: becoming angry or upset when you feel someone is criticizing or attacking you; "Come on Tanya, don't get so defensive. I just said that I thought your presentation needed to be a bit shorter."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host Tim Simmons, and today I want to take a look at how to defend yourself and your ideas in a competitive world.

Some people might think that good ideas will **win the day**, simply because they're good ideas. But it's not that simple. If you've got good ideas, you're going to have to **convince** people of their value. And you'll definitely have to defend them against all the people out to criticize or compete with you. **It's a dog eat dog world**, as they say, and you want to make sure you're not the dinner.

So what do you do when you're in a meeting, you've just **laid out** your plans for a new new marketing strategy, and the guy across the table jumps up and yells that what you've suggested is impossible? Well, it starts with **attitude**. And having the right attitude means being calm, **diplomatic**, and **logical**. What you *don't* want to do is get **dragged into** an argument that's personal, **petty**, or unproductive.

One way to do that is to **reference** your organization's broad mission and goals. Show how your ideas fit with the larger strategy. Say something like, "Well, as an organization we decided to expand our **target market**, right? I believe my strategy helps us do that." Referencing broader organizational goals helps to **elevate** the debate.

And elevating the debate means **ensuring** that the discussion is about *ideas*, not *people*. So instead of, "Dave, you always do this and it **drives me nuts**," It should be, "I can't agree with this approach." Or, instead of, "Com'on Dave, you're always **fixated on cost!**" You can try, "I don't think cost should be our **primary concern**." And if you are able to elevate the debate, then what you'll get in return is not, "John, you must be crazy to think that will work." Instead, you should get something like this, "John, I think your plan has some problems." And *that* makes for a better discussion.

So, if the debate *is* about ideas, how can you **get people on board** with yours **in the face of** criticism? One great way is to use questions. One kind of question is a **leading question**, one that has an obvious answer. For example, you could say, "Does everybody here agree that we need a really professional and **slick** ad campaign?" What you're doing with this kind of question is getting people to **nod**, to agree, and that's an attitude they'll carry over to other things you say. You can also use negative **rhetorical questions**. A rhetorical question is one that doesn't really need an answer. For example, someone might ask, "Don't you think we need to increase our market share?" Or maybe, "Isn't a website an important part of any business's marketing strategy?" Who could answer "no" to those questions?

Now, sometimes people are actually *right*. You might not like the way they're criticizing your ideas, but they're right. So, what's the logical approach to take? Well, **admit** it. You might say, "You know, you've **got a point** there." Or, "Yes, well, the plan *does* appear to have some problems." You don't have to defend your ideas just because they're yours. Remember, we talked about being logical and elevating the debate. That means you need to **give a little** too.

But you don't have to give everything. And you can still **concede** a point while continuing to defend your idea. I'm talking about the old "yes, but" **construction**. As in, "Yes, the timeline might be too **aggressive**, but that's not a reason to **ditch** the plan." Or like this, "You're right about the colors, but the layout is more important." By admitting that your opponents are right about something, you're showing that you think clearly. That you're logical. And that you don't **stubbornly hold on** to your ideas just because they're yours. And that will bring more people on to your side, and the ideas that you *do* continue to defend will be stronger.

We've talked about staying calm, using logic, and elevating the debate. But this isn't always easy. People get emotional, they get personal, they get **defensive**. And sometimes we need to manage other people's emotions carefully when defending our own ideas. That's what we'll talk about next time.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the myBEonline.com website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. Tim says that defending your ideas and yourself starts with attitude. Which of the following adjectives are part of the *right* attitude? [choose all that apply]
 - A Petty
 - B Logical
 - C Personal
 - D Unproductive
 - E Calm
 - F Diplomatic
2. Referencing organizational goals and focusing on ideas are two ways of...
 - A Gaining respect.
 - B Elevating the debate.
 - C Convincing others their ideas are wrong.
 - D Deflecting from your ideas weaknesses.
3. Which of the following is a good example of focusing on *ideas* instead of *people*?
 - A I really don't think you've thought this through enough.
 - B Do you really think that we can afford to eliminate three employees?
 - C Eliminating three employees may not be the best way of cutting costs.
 - D You always suggest such extreme measures.
4. Tim suggests using two different types of questions. What are they?
 - A Personal questions
 - B Conceptual questions
 - C Rhetorical questions
 - D Leading questions
5. According to Tim, what is the logical approach to take when someone's criticisms are valid?
 - A Find an alternative way to defend your idea.
 - B Reference strategic goals.
 - C Use a question that requires a certain answer.
 - D Admit that the person is right.
6. Tim recommends using a certain grammatical construction to concede a point and still defend your idea. What is that construction?
 - A "Not only... but also..."
 - B "Either... or..."
 - C "Yes, but..."
 - D "It is... isn't it?"

Review Answers

1. Tim says that defending your ideas and yourself starts with attitude. Which of the following adjectives are part of the *right* attitude? [choose all that apply]
B Logical
E Calm
F Diplomatic
2. Referencing organizational goals and focusing on ideas are two ways of...
B Elevating the debate
3. Which of the following is a good example of focusing on *ideas* instead of *people*?
C Eliminating three employees may not be the best way of cutting costs.
4. Tim suggests using two different types of questions. What are they? [choose 2]
C Rhetorical questions
D Leading questions
5. According to Tim, what is the logical approach to take when someone's criticisms are valid?
D Admit that the person is right
6. Tim recommends using a certain grammatical construction to concede a point and still defend your idea. What is that construction?
C "Yes, but..."

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