

Asking Questions

Most of us have experienced that uncomfortable moment when a speaker concludes their remarks and announces that they would be happy to take questions from the audience, and are met with a silent room. People look around at each other in embarrassment, but no one can think of a good question to ask. This usually does not indicate that the talk wasn't interesting or informative, but sometimes people in the audience struggle with coming up with any questions despite this being a great opportunity to learn more and make themselves visible to the speaker. **To help you break that silence, here are some general ideas of questions you might want to ask a speaker:**

- How would I find out more about...?
- What would you advise someone who...?
- What was the best/worst...?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you...?
- If you were in college again, would you...?
- How did ... (e.g. college, training as a lawyer or social worker, being a parent, etc.) prepare you for...?
- What do you do when...?
- What made you decide to...?
- Who/what is your favorite...and why?
- What did you think of ... (e.g. a recent event or occurrence- try to choose one that relates to them)?
- What's the best way to...?
- Are there books or articles that you would recommend to us?

Important points to remember:

- **Try to make your question one that will elicit more than just a yes or no – one that the speaker can expand upon.**
- **Remember that the speaker, not the questioner, should be the focus.** Don't precede your question with a speech, and don't offer a lengthy comment in place of a question.
- **Make your question clear, to the point, and appropriate** to the occasion and the audience.
- **If you want to share something personal with the speaker that won't be interesting or relevant to the larger group, please do so after the program or in another setting.**