

Listening to Learn



How Audience Feedback Drives Change at
California Symphony

Presenters: Cory Schuman & Theresa Madeira

Bernie

California Symphony

**I am once again asking
for your feedback**

Hello!



Cory Schuman

Senior Coordinator, Patron Loyalty

California Symphony



Theresa Madeira

Director of Marketing & Communications

Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale

Why We Started Surveying

- Inspired by a League of American Orchestras session
- More than just ticket sales as a barometer of success
- Qualitative input for programming and marketing
- Gather quotes/testimonials for collateral
- Validate or challenge squeaky-wheel feedback



Creating the Survey

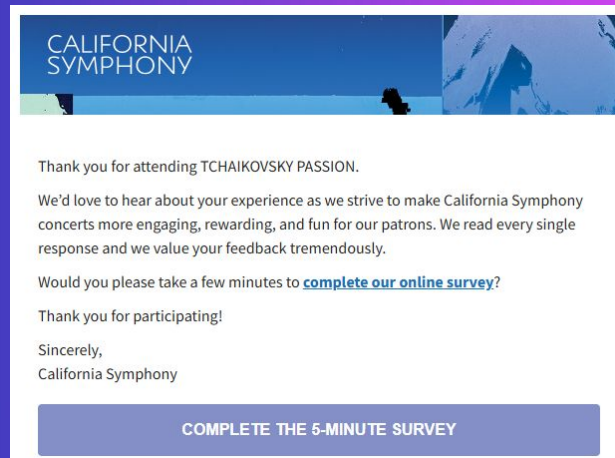
- Inspired by and modelled after a League session
- Questions focused on actionable insights
- Covered full audience experience—even areas we don't control
- Kept language consistent across concerts for ease of comparison (minimizing the variables)

Implementing the Survey

- Weighing SurveyMonkey vs. Google Forms
- Tested internally before launch
- Standardized & productionized process:
Sent at noon, day after concert
- Simple subject line and clean email format



Scan here for sample
California Symphony survey!

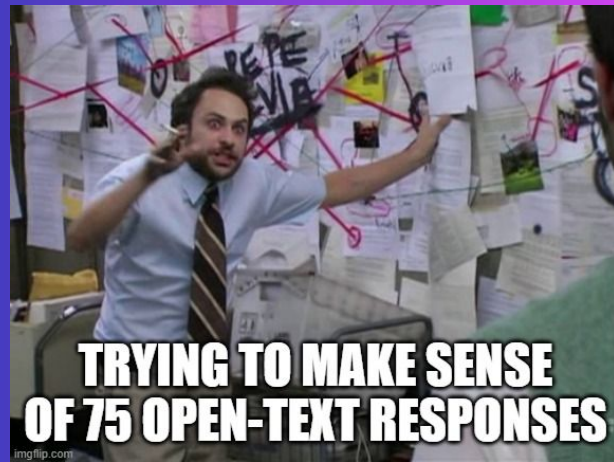


Implementation Timeline

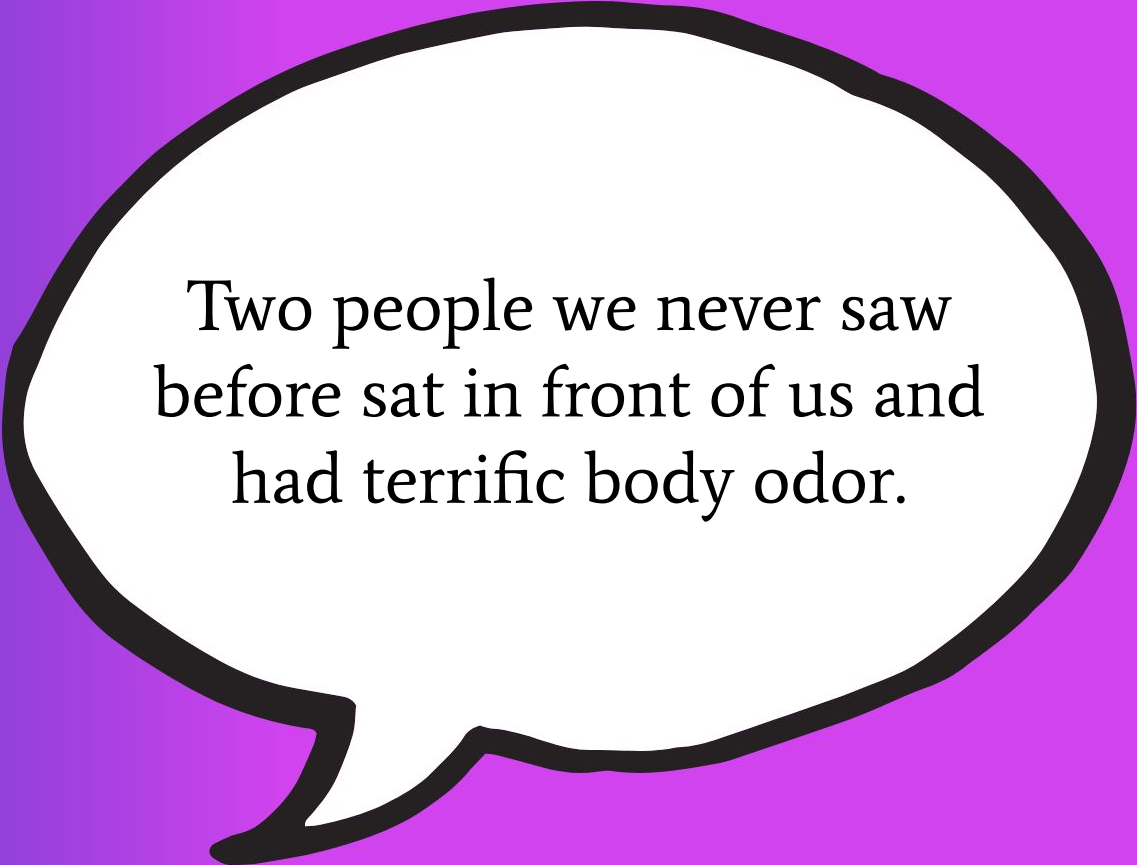
JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
Attend League 	<i>Back to the office</i> 	<i>Season prep</i> 	<i>SET 1: Season opener</i> 	Find conference notes Draft Build Test	SET 2: First surveys are sent 

Analyzing the Data


- Quantitative + qualitative mix
 - Math the quant. AI the qual.
- Use AI to...
 - Summarize the free text questions
 - Positives
 - Negatives
 - Additional comments
 - Find audience pull quotes
 - CAUTION: Ask for “VERBATIM” quotes
 - (And then check them!)




Real Feedback Quotes



Two people we never saw
before sat in front of us and
had terrific body odor.



An unusual concert
arrangement - very good.



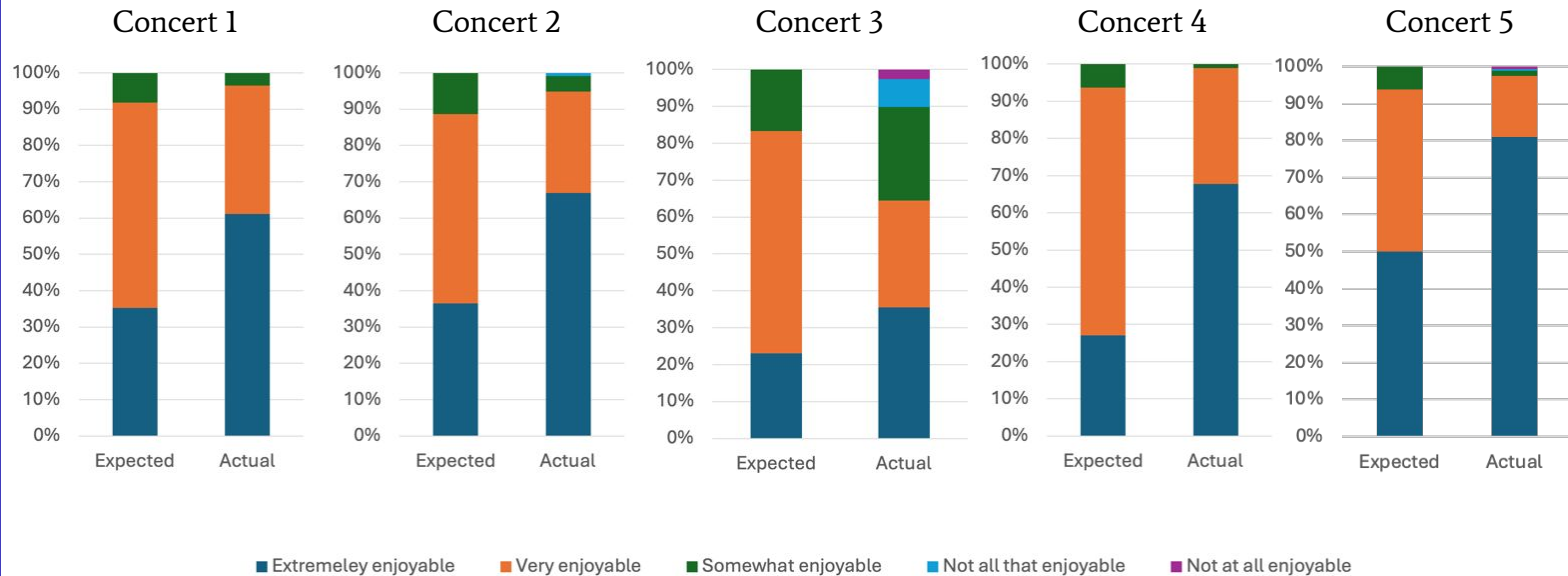
Beethoven's ninth was exceptional,
especially with the chorus and soloists.
One of California Symphony's most
spectacular performances!

The Killer Qs!

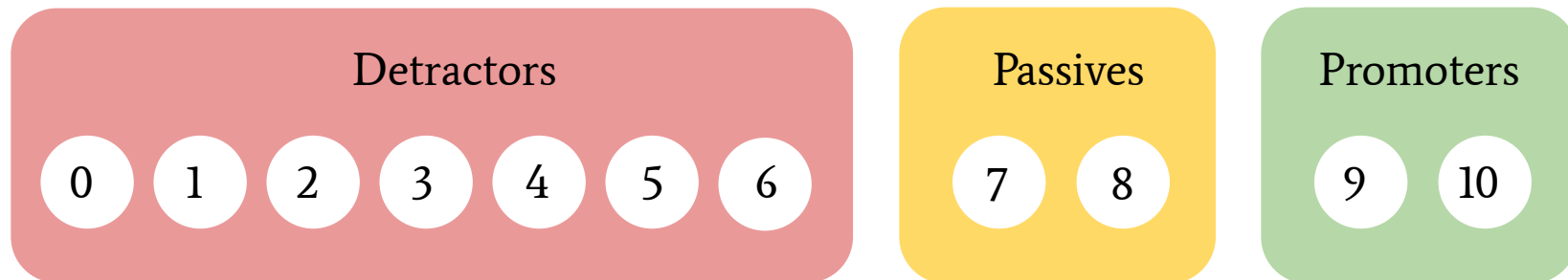
Understanding Concert Enjoyment

1. How much did you EXPECT to enjoy the concert?
2. How much did you ACTUALLY enjoy the concert?

Concert Enjoyment



Traditional Net Promoter Score



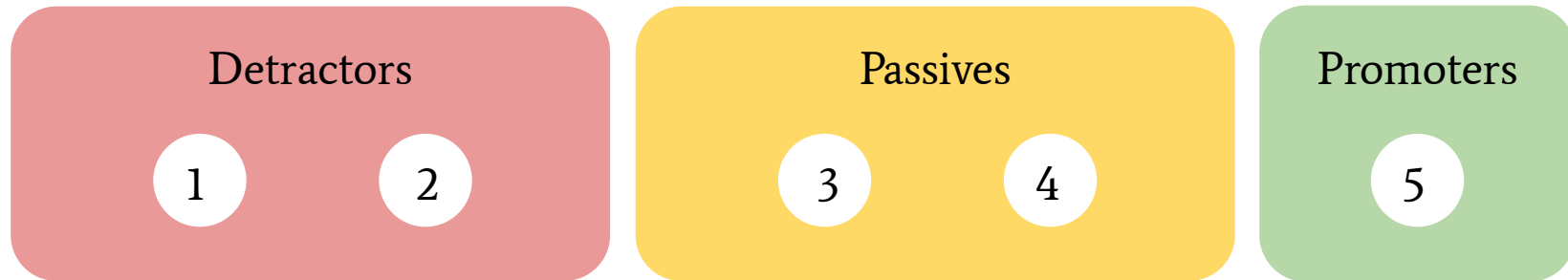
$$\% \text{ of Promoters} - \% \text{ of Detractors} = \text{NPS}$$

What is a good NPS score?

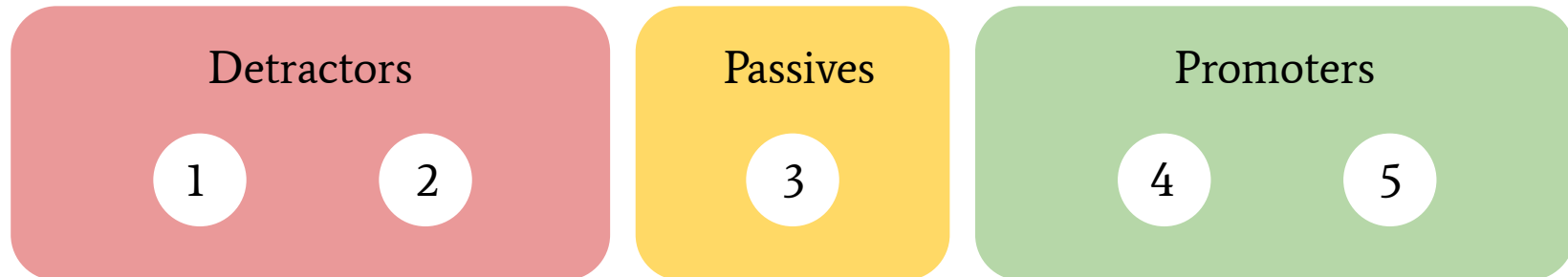


CSO's Adjusted Net Promoter Score

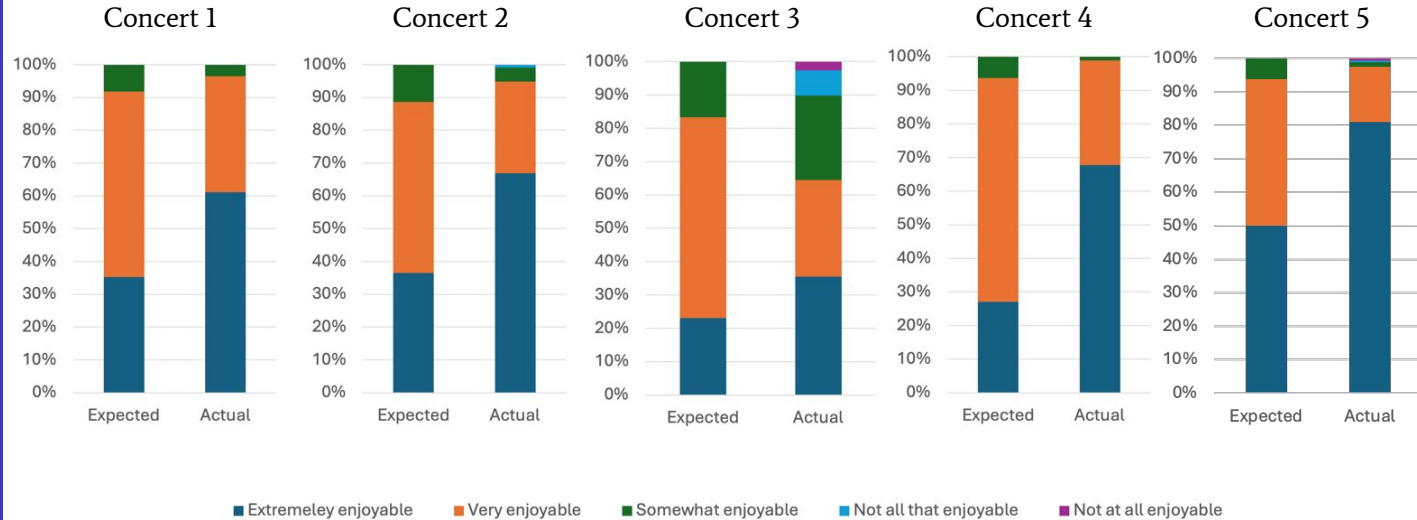
A. Recommended 5-Point Scale



B. Adjusted 5-Point Scale



Concert Enjoyment



NPS A. 61.2
NPS B. 96.5

A. 66.1
B. 93.9

A. 25.3
B. 54.4

A. 67.7
B. 99.0

A. 79.6
B. 96.3



Word Clouds as Tools

Why Word Clouds Can Mislead

- BEWARE OF SEXY GRAPHICS!
- Word clouds show frequency, not sentiment!

Putting Feedback to Work

- Quotes used in top-performing ads (with permissions)
- Included in email campaigns and social media

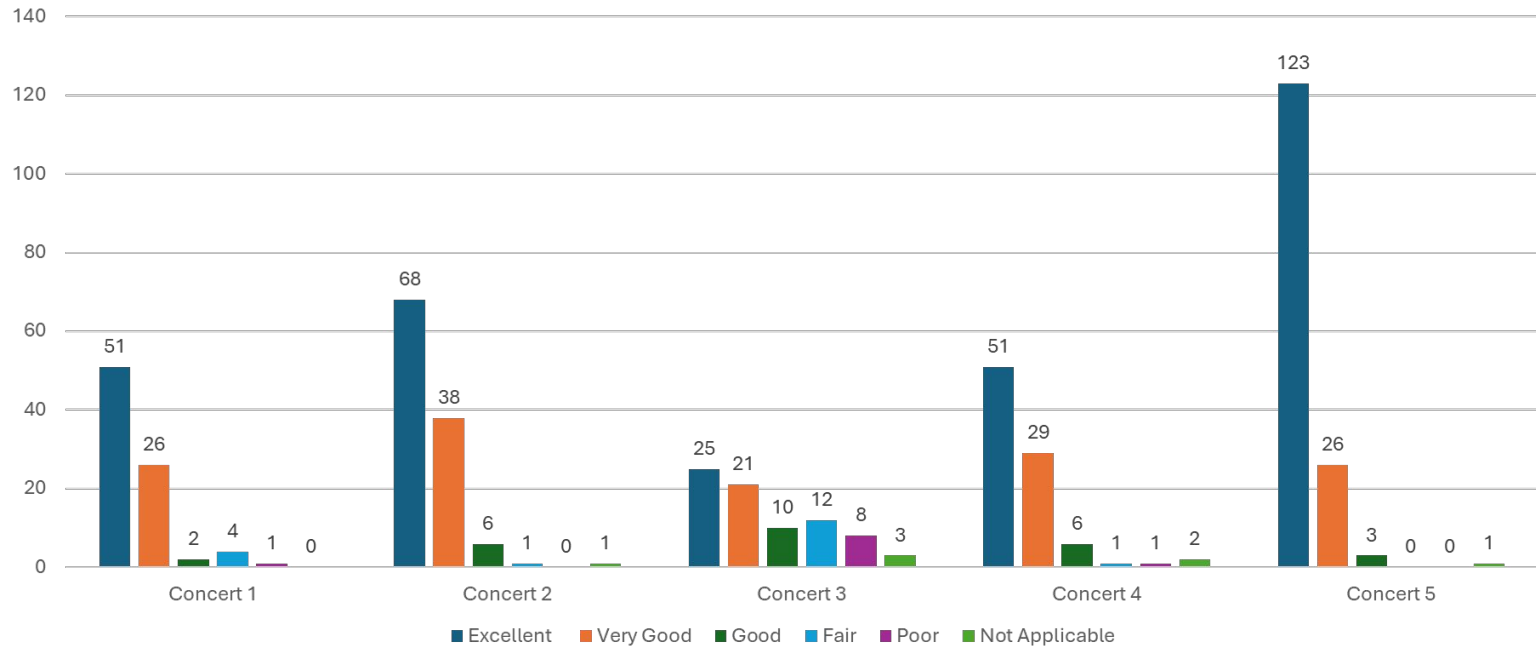
Putting Feedback to Work

- Shared with venue for experience improvements
- Direct patron outreach - especially to the negatives



How would you rate these aspects of the experience?

h. Selection of pieces



Programming

- Not direct—sometimes subtle course-correcting
- Leadership heard what audiences were responding to (or not)
- Reinforced some instincts, challenged others
- Marketing / messaging implications

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- Small and skewed sample sizes
- Feedback on aspects we can't control (e.g., parking, HVAC)
- Disproportionate number of subscribers vs single-ticket buyers
- People don't always read questions closely
- We've since added questions about individual works

Sharing Internally and Externally

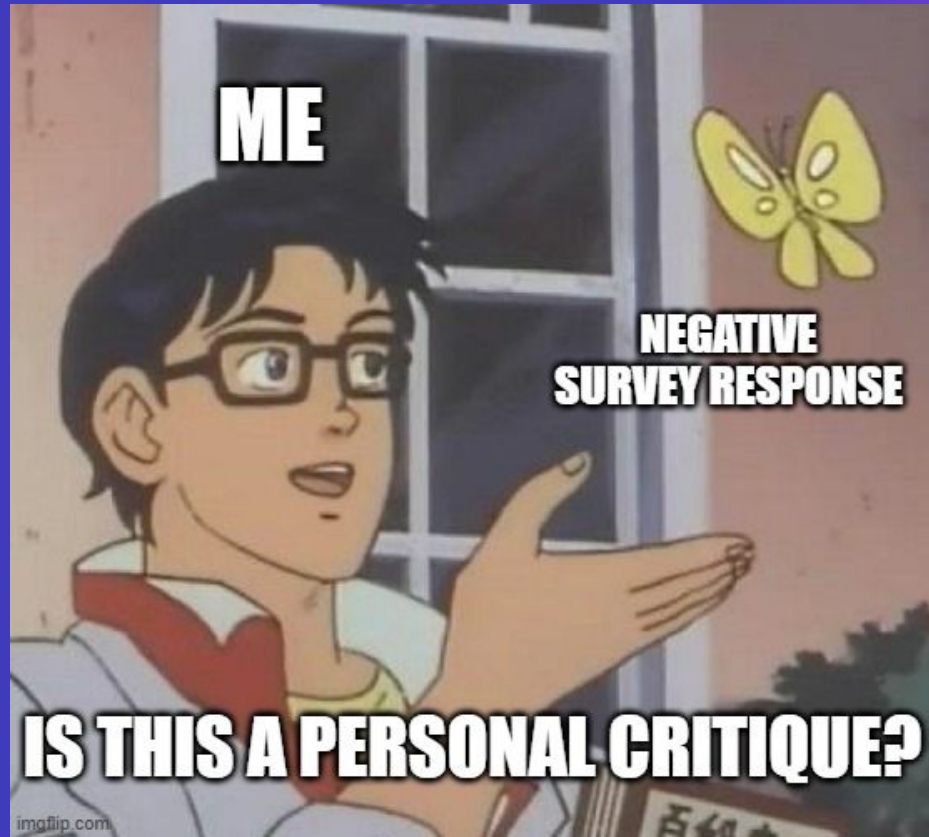
- ✓ Patron Services
- ✓ Development team
- ✓ Music Director + programming staff
- ✓ Marketing + content creation
- ✓ Venue partners

What We'd Do Differently

- Would have started sooner
- More collaborative workshopping of sensitive Qs - more time for input & buy in
- Looking into indexing over time / dashboarding

Takeaways for Your Org

- Start simple—consistency matters more than complexity
- Balance qualitative and quantitative
- Share feedback widely—internally and externally
- Build relationships through transparency and follow-up
- Surveys aren't just for reporting—they're for listening



ME

**NEGATIVE
SURVEY RESPONSE**

IS THIS A PERSONAL CRITIQUE?

imgflip.com

Thank You! Let's Chat...

Cory Schuman

cory@californiasymphony.org

Theresa Madeira

tmadeira@philharmonia.org



Any questions?

1. What is your current audience feedback loop?

2. What one thing would you want to ask your audience?