

If Clint Eastwood went ahead and made anyone's day last night, it was probably Jon Stewart's or Stephen Colbert's, as the legendary film star stole the show at last night's GOP convention and launched himself to the top of social media trend charts. It can be debated whether Eastwood's unique speech hit or missed the mark; whether those that invited him were pleased or disappointed with his performance; or whether Saturday Night Live's forthcoming impression will be one for the ages.

But what cannot be debated is this – by spending some time holding a conversation with an empty chair, Clint Eastwood taught you an important GMAT test-day lesson:

In order to succeed on the GMAT you have to ask questions to an imaginary opponent, and then answer them for yourself.

That internal dialogue, asking “the testmaker” questions as you’ll see below, is critical to the logical reasoning emphasis of the GMAT. Questions like “Why did you say ‘nonnegative’ and not ‘positive?’”; “Why is this obviously insufficient statement even here?”; “What’s the purpose of the 30 words following the underlined portion of this seemingly-easy SC question?” – these questions can be instrumental for you in attacking the GMAT as a strategy game and not merely a rote-memory multiple choice test (which it is not!). Here are some examples of how Clint Eastwood can help land you at an elite school in Westwood, UCLA Anderson, or wherever you’d like to attend.

Question 1 – Why Are You Here?

Say that a Data Sufficiency question asks:

Is $x/y > z$?

(1) $x/z > y$

(2) $z^3 < z$

If you're an algebra whiz, you may see that statement 1 looks pretty good: multiply both sides by z and divide both sides by y and you get, exactly, $x/y > z$, meaning “Yes We Can! (solve the problem with this statement...sorry – mixing political messages)”. But wait – statement 2 is clearly not sufficient, so why is it there? If you ask the testmaker “why would you give me such a worthless statement?”, you have a chance to save yourself. If z -cubed is less than z , there are two options: one, it's a fraction between 0 and 1 ($1/2$ cubed is $1/8$, a lesser value), or it's a negative number less than -1 (-2 cubed is -8 , a lesser value). And what if z were, indeed, a negative number? Then when performing the algebra you'd have to flip the sign when you multiply it. So statement 1 is not sufficient, after all. And statement 2 should also tip you off to the fact that you don't know the sign of y , either, and so without that information you can't solve this at all. So the answer isn't A, it's E. And having an Eastwooden conversation with yourself can help you find that.

Question 2 – Why did you use THAT word?

Say that a question asks:

If x and y are nonnegative integers, is the value of y^x even?

(1) The product xy is even

(2) The value of y

Here, statement 2 might look sufficient. If you can tell that y is even, as statement 2 tells you, then y to any positive power will be even. But wait – why did the question says “nonnegative”? That's not exactly “positive” – it leaves the

option open for the x to be 0, in which case $y^0 = 1$...an odd number. So actually we don't know whether y^x is even – there's that one odd exception of 1. So again the answer is E (statement 1 doesn't tell you which of x and y is even, and as we've found out from statement 2 even if they're both even the value could still be odd). And you're much more likely to see that if you've asked the testmaker – in the form of an empty chair – some questions.

Be prepared to ask some questions to the testmaker on your GMAT exam. And, like Clint Eastwood, you'll have to imagine the answers in a way that work to your advantage. Clint Eastwood's signature punchline last night was "no, I can't do that to myself" – and that should be your response, too, to the GMAT testmaker's question "don't you want to just take the easy answer?". Ask the invisible testmaker some hard-hitting questions, and use your reasoning ability to provide the enlightening answers. Follow Clint Eastwood's advice, and the score report you see at the end may just go ahead and make your day.