



Keep a Meeting Focused & On-Point

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Four tips to stop your meetings being hijacked

We've all experienced meetings where, despite our best efforts, we have found the meeting hijacked. For example, where someone is persistently interrupting or dominating the conversation, where someone continually goes off an unrelated tangent and side-tracks the conversation, where they go into extensive and unnecessary detail, or where someone tries to hijack the meeting for their own personal agenda.

So how do you refocus the meeting and get it back on point?

The first thing to do is to take control of your emotions. When we feel a meeting is being interrupted or 'hijacked', whether deliberately or not, it is natural to feel upset. To deal with the situation effectively you need to quash your frustration.

Four Techniques to Use

Work to a Prepared Agenda

If people have been involved in shaping the agenda, then they will be less likely to disrupt the meeting. Before the meeting send out a proposed agenda in advance and ask the invitees for their input. Give them a time frame within which to make recommendations and ask that they include a reason why they think the item is worthy of discussion. However, the final decision on what to include or not should be yours.

Having a clear and agreed agenda ahead of time has several benefits including:

- It makes people aware of the purpose of the meetings, the decisions to be made, and the outcomes sought. This helps them to prepare for the meeting.
- It guides the meeting, helping people to know what to discuss and when.
- It controls the meeting. If people start to go off-point then you can ask them how what they are saying connects to the issue under discussion.



- It saves time – people stay on track more easily and go off-track less frequently and for shorter durations.

Listen & Respond

Focus on what the other person has to say, don't ignore them or try to steamroll them. There are three steps in this:

- *Listen* – actively listen to what they are saying and make sure that what you understand is being said is what is meant.
- *Validate* – reply to their comments by building on what they have said, this way they understand that you have understood them.
- *Reframe & Redirect* – shape your reply, and where it takes the conversation, by framing the subject under discussion so that you can redirect it back to the agenda.

Probe Further

Don't always rush to redirect the conversation. You want to address issues efficiently that also engages the other person and creates a sustainable solution. Frame the interruption as an opportunity for learning a new perspective.

Be Resolute and Direct

If your colleague keeps interrupting or 'hijacking' the meeting, then you need to be direct and firm to close down the interruptions. It may be best to talk further outside the meeting in private.

Try using these ideas for yourself in your next meeting. Post here how it went and share your learning and insights.