

Title:

Monsters in Meetings - Part 3, Drifting From the Topic

Word Count:

363

Summary:

You've done everything necessary to hold an effective meeting. But someone says something that seems completely unrelated to the goal for the meeting. Here's how to respond. (This is the third of a seven part article on Managing Monsters in Meetings.)

Keywords:

effective meetings, bad meetings, business meeting, monsters in meetings, problem participants, facilitation, steve kaye, facilitator, leadership, one great meeting

Article Body:

We welcome new ideas, sort of.

True, new ideas lead to creative solutions. But, they can be a challenge when they interrupt or distract the work on an issue.

Here's how to bring your meeting back on track when some offers an amazing (seemingly unrelated) idea.

Approach 1: Question the relationship to topic

When new ideas seem inappropriate, say:

"That's an interesting point (or question). And how does it relate to our topic?"

"Excuse me. We started talking about our budget and now we seem to be discussing payroll administration. Is this what we want to work on?"

"We seem to be working on a new issue. I'm sure this is important, and I wonder what you want to work on with the time we have left?"

These statements greet the ideas with compliments and requests for clarification. This recognizes that the other person could believe the idea

relates to the topic, which it may.

Approach 2: Place in the Idea Bin

Use an Idea Bin to manage unrelated ideas. And Idea Bin is a blank chart page posted on the wall with the title: Idea Bin. Some groups call it an Issue Bin or Parking Lot. The scribe writes new ideas on this chart page or the participants write their ideas on Post-it(™) Notes that they place on the page.

Direct new ideas to the Idea Bin by saying:

"That's a great idea. Could you put it in the Idea Bin?"

When you plan the agenda, leave time at the end of the meeting to check the Idea Bin. You will find that many of the new ideas were resolved during the meeting.

I prefer to avoid working on new issues without learning about them and planning an approach. There is always more to know about a new issue. And sometimes they can be resolved without a meeting, or if a meeting is warranted, it may be a meeting with different people than the ones in the current meeting.

Thus, tell the group that you will contact those who introduced the issue and plan an approach for dealing with it.

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