

Title:

Monsters in Meetings - Part 2, Multiple Conversations

Word Count:

318

Summary:

A simple side conversation can eat holes in a meeting. Here's how to stop them and bring your meeting back on track. (This is the second 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:

Side conversations ruin meetings by destroying focus and fragmenting participation.

Here's how to bring your meeting back on track when a side conversation starts.

Approach 1: Ask for cooperation

Start by asking everyone to cooperate. Look at the middle of the group (instead of at the people talking) and say:

"Excuse me (pause to gain everyone's attention). I know all of your ideas are important. So, please let's have one speaker at a time."

"Excuse me. I'm having difficulty hearing what [contributing participant] is saying."

"There seems to be a great deal of interest for this issue. Could we have just one speaker at a time?"

These statements diplomatically acknowledge that a side conversation is occurring without naming the participants or putting them on the spot. Hostile statements, such as: "Hey you! Stop that!" will create hard feelings that undermine your effectiveness as a leader.

Approach 2: Change the process

If side conversations continue, change the rules to make cooperation more convenient. For example, you could use a speaking prop.

A speaking prop is an object that entitles the holder to speak. When the person finishes speaking, the prop is passed on to the next person who wants to speak. Possible props include a gavel, paper cup, or toy. If you are working on a controversial issue, select a soft object, such as a teddy bear or foam ball. It reduces stress and potential injury (if thrown).

Introduce the new process by saying:

"We seem to have a lot of enthusiasm for this issue. So, let's decide that only the person holding the gavel (cup, teddy bear, foam ball) may speak. Is that okay?"

Notice this statement begins with a complimentary acknowledgment of the situation (multiple conversations) followed by a suggestion and ends with a request for cooperation.

Use these techniques to regain control of your meeting.

This is the second of a seven part article on Monsters in Meetings.