

Managing Meeting Disruptions

Aside from the diligence required to Plan a meeting, then successfully pulling off the steps of Opening, Conducting, Closing and then Following Up, managing disruptions is sometimes the most difficult thing about leading a meeting. Those disruptions most often come in the form of participant behaviors, whether intentional or not, that impact one or more of your goals.

It is important to recognize that disruptions can dampen the energy and engagement in a meeting. Handled well they are only a speed bump.



WAYS TO DEAL WITH “DISRUPTORS”

When a participant raises a topic or concern that is not on the agenda, first make sure it is not connected in some valid fashion. **RESTATE THE ISSUE USING YOUR ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS.** Ask for *clarification*, seek *additional information*, listen well for a *connection*. Keep in mind that “disruption” often leads to *innovation*. If it is not connected, it is an “off-track” issue. Once determining it is not directly connected to the goals of the current meeting, decide with the group which approach to take.

Adapt your Agenda to Deal with It Right Away

- ✓ Let the participant know that the issue does not fit on the agenda of the current meeting.
- ✓ Ask the group to decide if it can/should be added to the current agenda.
- ✓ Adjust times for agenda items or the meeting if and when you have *all participants’* permission.
- ✓ Add the item to your meeting process using the tools available.



A discussion about changing the agenda can also be a time stealer. Take care not to lose control – consider a lightning round to get everyone’s opinion, then make the call based on what you heard.

Add it to your Parking Lot

If you or the group decides that the issue is not a fit for the current agenda:

- ✓ Let the participant know that the issue does not fit on the agenda of the current meeting.
- ✓ Write the name of the issue on the [Parking Lot](#) chart, or in the meeting notes if they are visible.
- ✓ Let the participant know what will happen with the issue.
- ✓ Ask for readiness to move back to the agenda. (If needed, be assertive; insist on moving back to the agenda.)
- ✓ You may want to delegate responsibility to the participant who raised the issue for the follow up measures.

Diffuse

If the participant is out of sorts:

- ✓ Acknowledge/appreciate the person’s willingness to contribute the idea or topic.
- ✓ Let the participant know that you are equally passionate about the goals of the agenda.
- ✓ Ask how the participant would want to proceed on the new issue; ask other participants for suggestions.
- ✓ Determine the follow up on the action.
- ✓ Return to the agenda (consider following up with the participant after the meeting).

Refer to the [Ground Rules](#)

If disruptions are an ongoing factor, consider the types of behaviors that occur and build the desired behavior into the ground rules. Use them to hold each other accountable.