

Meeting Course-Corrections Guide

At LifeLabs Learning, we've studied hundreds of meeting hours to identify what makes a meeting successful. Here are our favorite quick fixes to help any meeting get back on track:

General skill: pause, make an observation, suggest a process

THE SITUATION	THE FIX:
The group keeps repeating itself or decision making stalls	Make an observation that the group is revisiting the topic. Do a summation: "Here is what we seem to agree on, and here is what seems to be still open." Decide on a decision process (e.g., dot vote). If indecision: Ask, " <i>What conditions would need to be met for us to be able to commit / move on?</i> " Document any decisions, questions, or issues.
Participants talk too much or give long answers	Give an interruption signal (e.g., lift hand), interrupt, playback, and ask for the headlined version: " <i>Sorry to interrupt. I want to hear what you are saying, but I'm noticing we only have X minutes left. In the interest of time, can you please share the headlined version, or can we add it to the parking lot?</i> "
Side conversations happen between two or more people	Make an observation statement. Suggest refocus: " <i>I see there are some side conversations happening. I want to make sure we stay on track together so we can all make progress. Would it be okay to refocus or agree to take the conversation offline?</i> "
The group spends too much time on each agenda item	Make an observation statement. Suggest time-boxing: " <i>I'm noticing we're going over time, so we won't be able to fit everything in. Shall we time-box the remaining agenda items?</i> " Volunteer to be the timekeeper or ask for volunteers. When people go over time, raise your hand and say " <i>time check!</i> " or use an audible timer.
People are multi-tasking or checking their phones/email/messaging	Clarify the purpose and benefit of the meeting. Ask one person to be the notetaker and distribute notes later. Suggest a distraction-free time-frame: " <i>I'm noticing a bunch of people checking their phones/hearing Slack notifications, which might mean we're not all fully present. What if we experiment with a phone-free norm and take a break in 10 minutes?</i> "
The group is going off-topic	Make an observation statement: " <i>It seems we've been straying from our topics, which means we might not cover everything we wanted to cover.</i> " When the group goes off topic, ask: " <i>quick check-in, are we good with going off-topic?</i> " Create a parking lot. Share a visual agenda.
A few people are dominating the conversation	Make an observation, and suggest a process: " <i>I'm eager to hear from everyone. How about if we try going round robin? Say pass if you'd like.</i> " If there are specific people you haven't heard from, invite their perspective: " <i>Hey, Name! Was there anything you'd like to add? I'd love to hear your thoughts on this topic.</i> "

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People are quiet or there is low engagement	Diagnose it. Ask yourself what needs are not being met for the group. Is it clarity (about how to contribute), security (not feeling safe answering), purpose (confusion about what the goal is), or food/rest (people need a break, stretch, or a snack)? Check-in with the group: <i>"Looks like we are quiet today, but I think this topic is important for us to discuss because X. What if we take 5 minutes to break up into small groups then share trends?"</i>
People are arriving late to the meeting	Start on time. If you start late, you will teach people to continue arriving late. Start with something less important, building toward more important information later. Give feedback to participants who are chronically late. Re-establish start time norms.
People are leaving the meeting early	At the start of the meeting ask if people need to leave early. If so, sequence it so they are present for their relevant parts: <i>"This meeting is scheduled to go until 10:30. Before we start, does anyone have a hard stop where you need to leave earlier?"</i>
The meeting keeps getting canceled or rescheduled	This is a prioritization issue. Speak with relevant people to find out what would increase the prioritization of the meeting. Share the meeting purpose and benefit statement. Double check that the meeting has value in its current format.
There is no decision maker	This is a role issue. Have a discussion with relevant stakeholders to designate a decision maker and decision process. Ask: <i>"What are the decision criteria? How will we decide? Is this an advisory, consensus, or majority vote?"</i>
You're inviting people just so they don't feel left out	Share your reasoning for leaving people off the invite list: <i>"To save you time, I didn't add you to the meeting, but let me know if you feel it's important to join. I'm also happy to give you a summary afterward."</i>
You're invited to a meeting but don't understand the purpose or don't think you should go	Ask before saying yes: <i>"Thanks for inviting me. I don't see an agenda. Can you tell me more about the purpose of the meeting so I can contribute well?"</i> If you don't believe it's the best use of your time, offer other ways to participate: <i>"I appreciate the invitation but won't be able to join the meeting and meet my deadlines. Would it be okay to contribute my thoughts in writing / review a summary of the discussion afterward?"</i>
A meeting starts with no agenda / people are bouncing from topic to topic	Ask for a plan. <i>"Before we go further, could we align on a quick agenda together so we all know how to best contribute? What does success look like for this meeting?"</i>