

Get Back on Track or Reveal a Bright Idea?

How often have you heard, or said, “Let’s get back on track” or “Can we take this offline?” during a business meeting? If you’re like me, remarks like this can be jolting and uncomfortable for the person speaking as well as the group. What’s worse, the person oftentimes disengages at that point. Yet, these ideas that seem unrelated actually can be connected in unexpected ways and they can even trigger a breakthrough!

How do you know which ideas that appear off topic at first are actually worthwhile and should be explored? Start by asking the speaker to draw the connection: “How does your idea link up with ... ? Help us make the connection.” Then paraphrase and validate the explanation: “Are you saying ... ? Good point. I see what you mean.”

From here, so many options open. You may draw out the speaker’s idea and encourage others to react, allowing for productive discussions that just may lead to breakthrough solutions. On the other hand, if you find the idea truly is off topic, there’s nothing lost. File it in the “parking lot” list for another time.

I’d love to talk with you about other ways to create an open and welcoming atmosphere for more productive meetings.



A passionate organizer of people and initiatives, Erica Smigielski brings over twenty years of experience in project leadership to financial software and SaaS companies who want to launch their next big idea. She leads large-scale, complex projects like product launches and company mergers and acquisitions as well as focused efforts to bring structure and process to fast-track businesses. Erica holds certifications as a Stanford Advanced Project Manager as well as a Certified Group Facilitator, making her a master orchestrator of strategic planning, as well as a skillful communicator who can expertly navigate complex group dynamics.