

# Salvaging Meetings which have Deteriorated

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When counseling, mentoring, disciplining or negotiating with employees, it is easy for the discussion to deteriorate. Daniel Goleman highlights several reasons why such fora may go sour, including egos, misunderstandings or the interference of negative emotions. Whatever the reason or underlying cause, it is always in your best interest to get the meeting back on track as quickly as possible. If not salvaged, the contentious meeting can lead to:

- Unpredictable office politics
- Aggressive behaviour in the office
- Disengaged teams

So how then do you salvage a meeting which has started to go downhill? One of the first things one needs to be able to do is pick up on the verbal and non-verbal cues that the meeting is heading off the track. That way you can proverbially nip any confrontations in the bud, and diffuse tempers before the situation escalates. The next step that Goleman states is that once you realize that the meeting is falling apart, you must check in with your self-awareness. Consider whether any emotions are interfering with you or if you are in a negative state, or if you are reacting to another person's negative emotion, as this can have a severe impact on the tone of the meeting.

Very often negative emotions come when we take the problem and make it about the individual. Mistaking the person for the problem causes us to take issues personally and by extension, can sour any discussions, present and future, which you are trying to have.

He notes that after checking, it becomes important to re-centre and re-focus on the common goal, i.e. what you are trying to achieve at the meeting. Some helpful questions he suggests to get the meeting going again are:

- Why are we here? What do we both want to achieve?
- Did I do something to upset you? You seem upset?
- What are you expecting now?
- How do we move forward?

By asking these questions, and genuinely listening to the responses, it helps to diffuse the situation by allowing the other parties of the meeting to air their concerns and express their grievances. Goleman notes that this exercise will allow you to be aware of if you did something wrong or at least understand the differences which exist between you and the other parties. All of this, he states, is essential in ensuring that you are connecting with the other parties to your meeting or negotiation.

Connections are important to your likeability as a manager or colleague, and helps you to re-engage persons should there be a misunderstanding during a heated discussion. Those who have made personal connections with their employees and colleagues are more likeable and thus can find a common ground to steer the discussions back on track. Employees are also more inclined to confide in or respond positively to a manager whom they like than one they dislike. Trust and reputation also play an important role in likeability, and your ability to salvage a discussion which has gone astray. When colleagues trust you, believe you to be sincere, and you have a good reputation of standing by your word, it is easier for persons to put their feelings aside and focus on the matter at hand.

As the chair of any meeting it is important to pay attention, not just to what persons say, but also their non-verbal cues. One must be self-aware and ensure

that you are not corrupting the meeting with any negative emotions or letting your negative emotions cloud your ability to be impartial. Early detection and correction of a meeting going astray can prevent personal attacks, loss of focus and unnecessary adjournments.