

Lack of Focus Video Transcript

- Next, I want to say something about focus. An unfocused meeting will last too long and not get anything achieved, which is all too common and we need a plan for it. ***I think there are three ways that lack of focus shows.***

The first one being returning to previous items. Sometimes, there's a person who isn't happy with what was agreed, and they keep reopening that subject in the hope that they can get a different result. **The answer to this is to play dumb, and say, I thought we already agreed that, or I thought we'd finished with that item, we covered it earlier, didn't we?** If they persist, then you could ask them, why do you keep going back to this subject? Which should definitely put a stop to it.

The second sign of lack of focus is going off track onto what I call red herrings. These are subjects that aren't on the agenda at all. Again, you can play dumb and say, sorry Dave, I think that's interesting, but I just can't see how it's connected to the problem we're discussing. Anyone, not just the leader, can say this. You can also make it more fun by **introducing my red herring game**, where you have a fish, ideally a real toy fish, red-colored, but a cutout photo will do. And this is left in the middle of the table for anyone to reach. Then, if someone goes off track, anyone else can reach for the fish and wave it around as a signal that you think they've gone off track. I know of some meetings where there's one regular offender for going off track, where the leader says, shall we have the red herring here on the table to keep us all on track? And everyone agrees to it, all-knowing who the one person really is that it's targeted at. What I like about the herring is that you don't need to interrupt whoever's talking, you just wave the herring at them, so it's easy to do, and because it's a game, it doesn't feel quite as rude as it might do.

The third lack of focus is people going into too much detail. Rather than focusing on the big picture of what the meeting has to achieve, they get lost in part of the detail, because they're keen really. But it is a problem, and we have to reduce the amount it happens. **I think the best way is to politely suggest that the people talking about it have a look at it offline, separately to the meeting as a special project team, and report back on progress next time.** If they keep doing it, you can point out that it's slowing down the meeting, there's no time to go into that much detail, and they can do it outside the meeting. As well as my redfish, I've also got a little sponge car that I use for can we keep things motoring along, please? And I wave that around whenever we threaten to get bogged down. It's

such a problem that I figured it justified spending \$8 on the car. And it's already been really worth it. In fact, you can use the car on red herrings and returning to previous items as well, as they all prevent us from motoring along, although I'm keeping my red herring as well, people seem to like it. One more thought is that you can also appoint a progress monitor person, or even three people to each look for one of the above and point it out if they see it. You could even appoint the main offenders to look for red herrings and too much detail and returning to previous items, as there's no one as zealous as the poacher turned gamekeeper.

So how are you going to handle these three types of lack of focus? Are you going to get an actual toy herring and or a car? Are you going to appoint people to keep the meeting on track? Or are you going to at least gently point out the problems when they happen? Use the notetaking tool to answer these questions.