

6 Steps to Refocus a Team That's Gone Off the Rails

1. Call an emergency meeting

Set the tone: This meeting will be creative and disruptive. But NEVER disrespectful. The focus is on finding solutions — not blame.

Assign an impartial mediator to chair the meeting: This person will enforce positive communication and keep the conversation moving.

State the purpose: Communicate the purpose of the meeting and problem(s) that will be addressed.

2. Set the purpose and tone of the meeting

- Recap of the purpose of the project
- Summarize the challenge you're here to solve
- State your intention to keep the meeting productive by focussing on solutions.

3. Set Communication Ground Rules

Be Respectful

Listen fully and don't interrupt. Thank the last speaker for sharing their ideas.

Be an active listener

A great technique is to mirror what the person said by restating it in your own words. For example, "I hear you saying that..." and paraphrase their point to make sure you understand.

Say “yes and” instead of “yes but”

If you begin your answer with “Yes, but...”, you essentially shut down the other person’s idea. Begin your answer with “Yes and...” to show that you heard what the person said and you are willing to explore it further.

Say “could” instead of “should”

This is huge. When you begin a sentence with “should” it’s like shaking your finger at the person and putting them down. When you begin a sentence with “could”, it feels collaborative and helpful.

Be kind and respectful

If you forget everything else, just remember one thing...

How you make people feel is more important than what you say

4. Investigate What’s Gone Wrong

- Observe:** Quietly observe the team and look for clues. Are there personal hurts or offences that need to be addressed?
- Sticky Notes** : Use sticky notes to retrace the steps taken that lead up to the dysfunction.
- Draw out the problem on a whiteboard.** This helps people see past the linear timeline, make new connections and discover creative solutions.
- Document the meeting.** This provides a reference if the team reverts back to unproductive behaviours. Snap photos of the sticky notes and whiteboards.

5. Commit to Solutions

- Start over** and build a new team
- Find and identify** each team member's strength
- Replace** members of the team if they cannot work it out
- Set team rules and responsibilities**
- Set goals:** Create an action plan, milestones and accountabilities for moving forward.
- Commitment:** Record what each team member has agreed to. Sign the document as a covenant for team unity.

6. Keep the project on track

- Check in:** Check in with team members often to make sure they are staying on track.
- Feedback:** Give team members individual feedback to let them know how they are doing.
- Celebrate and acknowledge** when team members meet their goals and commitments to the project.