



Dear Friend, Shoe Shopping

This may sound strange coming from me...as a woman, but there was a time in my life when I absolutely HATED shoe shopping. (*It hurts to write that even now!*) But, you have to understand what's behind my statement.

You see, I was born with some foot and leg abnormalities. My parents and the doctors struggled long and hard about the best approach to rectify my condition. While surgery was always on the table, it was something that none of them wanted to do, if avoidable. So, the chosen option (along with nighttime braces) was...corrective shoes! Ugh.

Now you know my dilemma. The shoes were necessary. They helped to give my forming bones the protection they needed to set in strong, healthy ways. But, can I tell you the truth? Those shoes were heavy and hard... and UGLEEEEE!

As you can imagine, going shoe shopping always ended up being a drama-filled experience. I cried. (*And what little girl does that?*) My parents cajoled, trying to help my young mind grasp that a little discomfort (and ugliness) for a while would pay off with straight feet and many years of cute shoes to come. (*Trust me, they tried, but the argument wasn't convincing!*) Honestly, the only people who were happy on shoe-shopping days were the store owners who sold those hideous, expensive things.

So, like it or not, season-after-season, year-after-year, off our family went... to a place none of us really...wanted...to go.

Have you ever been taken someplace you really didn't want to go? Yup, we all have. Sometimes that happens physically, when we have to go shoe shopping or we must attend that work event or family gathering that really is far down on the priority list, if on it at all. Other times the experience arises with a conversation that takes off in one direction, only quickly to move someplace far afield from its intended destination.

Well, in this edition of *EA Insights*, let's take a little time to consider ways to recover a hijacked conversation. I hope you'll pick up a nugget or two to help you, and those with whom you interact, to get back on track.

All the best,



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How to Recover a Hijacked Conversation

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Think about your life at work.

Have you ever mustered up the nerve to have a conversation with someone about an important matter -- a raise, the hard-to-pin-down status of a project, a process glitch, or some conduct or performance challenge -- only to have the conversation go in a completely different direction? If that's ever happened to you, then you've experienced a *hijacked conversation*.

Conversations get hijacked intentionally or unintentionally. But, whether it occurs through an innocent shifting away from the matter at hand or by means of the sly two-step of a crafty participant, what you find is that important information is left unshared or critical discussion fails to take place. And, when that happens, there's an inevitable impact that hinders the ability of your team, your organization, or your relationship with the other person to move forward in a positive manner.

The good news is that it is possible to ward off hijacking or to recover a conversation that already has started moving off track. Here are five ideas that may help.

Have a clear purpose.

A conversation is unlikely to accomplish much if its initiator lacks a clear purpose. It becomes easy for the other person to take your meeting and run with it, when there's no definitive plan for why you're communicating or what needs to result from the interaction.

Accordingly, to minimize the risk of a hijacked conversation, determine what you wish to accomplish. What is the information to be shared? What are the decisions to be made? What are the tasks to be assigned? What are the actions to be taken? Having a clear purpose, and keeping it in mind throughout the interaction, helps you stay on track.



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"Quotes"

"I think there are lessons for all of us to learn[.]"
~Kofi Annan

"Our purpose is to offer information to those who want it."
~George Austin

"I can't even speculate right now and I don't even want to get into it because it's going to lead to a whole other conversation."
~Danny Barrett

"We had a few little mistakes and we've got to learn from those in the future."
~Noe Cerezo

**** I wasn't venturing into a discussion about something that wasn't on the agenda."*
~Donald DeFedele

"Only if we can restrain ourselves is good conversation possible. Good talk rises upon much discipline."
~John Erskine

"The point is we need to get all of the facts on the table."
~Tom Fitton

"Listening well and answering well is one of the greatest perfections that can be obtained in conversation."
~Francois VI, Duc de La Rochefoucauld

"[E]verything I do has to have a purpose."
~Danielle Lee

"Never hold anyone by the button or the hand in order to be heard out, for if people are unwilling to hear you, you had better hold your tongue than them."
~Lord Chesterfield

Know your audience.

Just as it is important to know what you seek to achieve through an interaction, it also is essential that you have a sense of the person or people with whom you're going to be communicating.

Do you have a person in your circle who always seems to redirect the conversation to something about him or her...no matter what you bring up for discussion? *"We really need to talk about a challenge I'm having with the Jones account."* *"Yeah, because when I was working on the Adams matter yesterday, I was getting all sort of flack...."* Huh?

So, learn people.

-- Get to know your innocent **redirectors**. Because they're so absorbed on what's happening with and for them, it will take a little extra effort to keep them focused on the matter you're bringing forward at any given time.

-- Figure out who's a **deflector**. This is someone who tries to avoid accountability by intentionally steering the discussion away from his or her assignments, challenges, responsibilities, etc.

-- Acquaint yourself with the **brainstormers**. Brainstormers are people who are constantly in idea-generation mode. Given their makeup, staying on topic may be a struggle because they're always thinking about how this applies to that and so on.

-- Become familiar with the **distracted**. Different from the brainstormer, who's one or two steps ahead of you, the distracted person becomes preoccupied in other ways. This person may start off with you, but his or her mind easily is carried away by any interesting tidbit that's heard, by something that comes into eyeshot as you're talking, or by a memory that may or may not be related to the matter at hand.

The more you begin to understand with whom you're interacting, the better you are able to develop solid approaches for keeping the conversation on course.

Stick with the facts.

I often get to debrief difficult conversations with clients. At the early stages of our work together, it's not uncommon to hear a report of an intended interaction that went "south" because the person on the other side was very skilled at changing the subject, putting the speaker on the defensive, highlighting the actions of another person, or shifting the conversation to his or her feelings. Check and mate.

When this happens, what do you do? One of the best ways to keep an interaction from being hijacked is to stick to the facts.

Here's what happened.

Here's the impact of the event.

Here's what we need.

Here's what you must do now.

Focusing on facts doesn't mean that interactions become devoid of joint problem solving, creative thinking, or action planning. All of those things can, and probably should, still happen, but the foundation for them is *fact* (or at least a search for the facts). And so, as the conversation innocently or intentionally starts to veer off-course, you can recall your purpose and rein things back in from a fact-based orientation. You are able to remind yourself...and the other person: Here's the issue; here's what we need to settle. Let's start with *that* before moving on to anything else, especially topics that could hinder the ability to settle the most pressing, most costly, or most impactful matters.

Draw unproductive trails to a close with promised follow up.

Ideas arise. Additional topics are uncovered. Do you just ignore these and plow forward with the subject of the day? No. People want to know that you hear them, that you recognize the points they're making. The art comes in not allowing these points to take you down a rabbit trail.

What do you do?

Begin with active listening. Ensure that you are demonstrating -- through your words and/or through your body language -- that you are listening as you interact with others. Try to repeat each point presented in response to your comments. And, in restating the point, determine with the other person if and how the statement or newly offered topic relates to the matter at hand. If it *is* pertinent, weave it into the discussion; if it is *not*, but is relevant otherwise, jot it down and commit to a time when you'll revisit it. (And, then follow through on your commitment!)

Try your best not to get bogged down with matters that steer you away from the purpose that's been set for that particular interaction.

Learn from each experience.

Continuous learning is essential for us all. So, after an interaction, take a step back and critique yourself -- honestly. What went well? Where did things not play out as expected? If you had it to do over again, what would you do more of, less of, the same, differently? This need not be a prolonged self-assessment, but don't let any opportunity go to waste; use each as a learning experience.

Many of us lament about missed opportunities and interactions that didn't yield the expected outcomes. Proactively seeking to prevent diversions, or recovering conversations once hijacked, are definite ways to become more effective and to minimize both frustration and miscommunication.

Let us help you prepare for and/or assess the effectiveness of your professional interactions. Contact us today to explore how **Executive Advantage** can partner with you. We're here to help you build your **thriving business** or **career**.



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"You never knew where the conversation was going to go."

~Kathy Lawrence

"It was just this convoluted conversation.... I just couldn't get a good feel for it at that point so I had to do something."

~Joe Maddon

"Conversation is food for the soul."

~Proverb

"The information is out there. You just have to separate the facts from the wives' tales."

~Larry Rogers

"The degree of one's emotions varies inversely with one's knowledge of the facts."

~Bertrand Russell

"We are really trying to arm ourselves right now with all the facts and information, so when we go talk to people we'll be able to respond to them and actually have some meaningful conversation."

~Jennifer Steck

"I think people get too comfortable, in just doing what they do every week. And I'm all about challenge and change, and I like to read the audience."

~Trish Stratus

"It's funny; I tend to forget that we're even giving a high-stakes test. The conversation evolved here to things beyond that."

~Nancy Walser

"Whether it's a first-year guy in the organization or a veteran guy, every conversation has a different dynamic."

~Eric Wedge

"If you have a focus and a structure and then within it you can...have good conversation and bring issues to the forefront[.]"

~Lizz Winstead

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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