

Don't Let Tangents Hijack Your Meetings!

By Jon Petz

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Ever been in a meeting when Tangent Tony hijacks the conversation with an off-agenda issue, taking it in a direction you didn't expect?

You've been there and so have I. So what happens next?

- the meeting's objectives don't get advanced as planned
- people feel discouraged about wasting precious time
- they get impatient with Tangent Tony—and you, the facilitator

Yeah, you guessed it. The meeting sucked.

Still, when Tangent Tony takes over your meeting, you have to ask, "Is Tony's point relevant to the entire group?" If the point does apply to that group and its reason for coming together, then you need to ask, "Does it have a direct relationship to the focus and desired outcome of this meeting?"

Suppose you just can't move forward with your planned agenda until Tony's issue is addressed. You've collided with one of my Suckification Reduction Devices related to tangents.

(What's a Suckification Reduction Device or SRD? A tactic that helps prevent meetings from sucking!)

"Let 'Em Go!"

Let's use the "let 'em go" SRD in an example.

Say you suddenly realized you can't continue your planned branding discussion because the color tones for the graphics haven't been finalized. Do you let those in the room who aren't involved in picking colors "wait it out" when they could be doing something else? No. You activate the "let 'em go" SRD. That means you give them the gift of time to go be productive for the next 20 minutes while you finalize those colors. However, you "let 'em go" with the understanding that at any time during this scheduled

meeting time, you *may* text them and request their return. Alternatively, if you know the color selection will take a bit of time or additional input from others, then you reschedule this meeting on the spot.

When a tangent takes over the focus of your meeting, you might also consider:

- Getting uninvolved participants to discuss certain agenda items in another room or at the other side of table.
- Setting a new start time to the meeting within the already scheduled time. Say, “We’ll regroup in 15 minutes, right here.”

The “let ‘em go” SRD accepts that you won’t get to the planned agenda items without Tangent Tony’s point being resolved. It also gives you permission to STOP holding people in the room. Otherwise, you know they’ll complain about wasting time in meetings and feel less eager to participate in the future. Sound familiar?

The idea behind this “let ‘em go” SRD isn’t anything new or unique; it simply identifies and acts on the smart use of time. Try it for yourself! Your meetings won’t suck when you pull out the right strategies at the right time.

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Jon Petz is the author of *Boring Meetings Suck*, (Wiley Publishing 2011). He is also [Professional keynote speaker](#), [emcee](#) and [corporate magician](#). Learn how to GET MORE out of your meetings in our short-attention-span-high-distraction world and get out of those that bore. Pick up *Boring Meetings Suck* at your local bookstore or at www.BoringMeetingsSuck.com

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