The Rules of Disengagement:

Ending Conversations Gracefully and Tactfully

Do you ever have trouble ending a telephone conversation?

Do you need to speak to someone but worry because it always turns into a long drawn out conversation on topics you would rather not speak about?

Do people come in your office and you can't get them to leave?

Do your meetings run too long and get off track?

Some conversations don't just end naturally they need to be closed or disengaged. The following are ways to take back control of your time and disengage from those conversations that are not going where you would like them to go.

Politely disengage:

1. When you are the person making a call, be prepared in advance. Have speaking points. Know exactly what you want to get out of the call. This will keep you on track. Start the telephone conversation with, "I only have a couple of minutes but I need to ask you..." or "The reason for my call is." When ending the call thank the person you called for providing the information you needed.

2. If colleagues enter your office and start chatting when you don't have the time or you want to end the conversation simply stand and this will signal an end to the conversation. Sometimes you will need to walk the person closer the door and also offer language that will close the conversation.

"Thanks for dropping by" or "We should schedule a time to get together to speak about this in greater detail."

3. Reference the next time you will see the person. That way it won't feel like you are brushing them off.
4. If you are at a reception and the conversation is going longer than you would like, shake hands and tell the person you are speaking to that it was nice to meet them or to see them again. You can also say something like "I would really like to continue this conversation another time - please give me a call so we can schedule it."

5. In a meeting have a clearly outlined agenda and share it with the group. The agenda should include times for each topic. When things are going long, you can refer to the agenda and say, "In order for us to keep with our agenda we will have to move on. If we need more time on this topic we can reschedule."

People often develop a fear that others will be hurt or insulted if they have to end a conversation, but if it is done properly, the majority of people won't think anything of it. They will respect the fact that you are a busy person and have other matters to attend to. Try using these approaches to disengagement:

Humour- as long as the person knows you are joking:
"Jim will hunt me down if I don't get this to him by noon."
"The office is a madhouse right now."
"I need to get back to my desk, Facebook is calling me."
"I'm trapped under a pile of paper and have to work my way out."

Polite wording - Etiquette has taught us these traditional conversation enders:
"I had better let you go."
"I'm going to let you go now."
"It will be great to see you at..."

Excuses - whether it is real or fictional, either way it is a valid ender:
"I have a meeting to get to."
"I have to make a phone call."
"I'm swamped with work."
"I'm in the middle of something and can't break my concentration."

Positive comments will make the person feel good ending the conversation:
"I'm really glad you spoke to me about this."
"That's an excellent point; I will keep this in mind."
"I appreciate your concern/effort."
Remember, that it is your time. Spend it doing things that are the most important to you. By following these tactics for disengaging gracefully you will respect your time and the people with whom you are speaking.

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