

Rabbit Trails/Host helps

A 'Rabbit Trail' is a side journey that takes the discussion or study away from its intended course. We have all experienced the journey 'down the rabbit trail'. Typically, we are annoyed by the distraction. Whether the source of the journey is a spontaneous question raised by the study or someone's hidden agenda, rabbit trails are destructive to a Small Group's life.

Your Small Group has a covenant. Everyone in the group should be aware of the shared values and goals of your Small Group. If they are not, it's time for a review!

Small Group leadership must be alert to the rabbit trail and be prepared to immediately address it effectively.

For example: Stephen was one of the church's newly appointed 'deacons'. Let's assume a group member raises the question about deacon qualifications:

- Why a church has or does not have deacons/elders, etc.
- The group begins to share their historical experiences and thoughts about the topic. "My OLD church..."
- Can women be deacons. [Of course not, they would be deaconesses']

Solution:

Gently, but firmly, the leader must take action. "This is an interesting topic. Let's set it aside until we have decided to specifically invest time on this topic. As your Small Group leader, I committed to you to start and stop on time. Additionally, I committed to keep us focused on our study. After tonight's study has been completed, you are welcome to stay and discuss this topic in greater detail. Or, if the group wants to revisit the covenant and change our study, we could consider that option. For now, let's press on in our lesson. Any questions?"

Another option might be to appoint a 'gatekeeper'. If the gatekeeper sees the group going off course, through a 'gate' that will take them away from the appointed course, they are given authority to make some declaration such as "*Rabbit Trail!*" This typically gets a chuckle and the group gets back on track.

Result:

In my 30 years experience in leading small groups, I have used this approach many times. I cannot recall a time that it offended anyone. Typically, it is a **respected** action because it demonstrates respect for the people that have committed to the Small Group and its purpose. Also, no harm is done to the offender. Failure to address 'rabbit trails' is destructive to Small Group life. If you have a persistent rabbit trailer, you might talk to them privately, discuss how it affects the group. They might have a special need for a different Small Group or study.