

## Off Course – On Target: The Story

October 23, 2006

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**Wayne Hodgins, strategic futurist and “corporate evangelist” at Autodesk, brings his keen foresight and thought-provoking perspectives to his podcast series Off Course – On Target. In this podcast, Wayne introduces you to the story behind the name of his this series, and he starts you on the path to learning how to become more open to new ways of thinking, how to recognize when and how to act on new ideas, and how to be more innovative, inventive, effective, and productive.**

**WAYNE HODGINS:** Hello and welcome to this session of "Off Course, On Target", where unexpected paths lead to great discoveries. I'm Wayne Hodgins and I'm going to spend a few minutes giving you a bit of background on this title "Off Course, On Target" because it's the overarching name I'm going to use for all of these audio broadcasts and podcasts, as well as the other content you'll find on my site. I thought you'd enjoy knowing why I've chosen this curious title and the story behind it.

I chose the title partly because it summarizes the serendipitous nature of most of my content...serendipitous in the sense that it's often not what you would expect, but it's usually even better and more valuable. Hence the tagline, "Where unexpected paths lead to great discoveries." However, "Off Course, On Target" is much more than a title. It's a strategy in itself; it's a perspective.

Of course with me, as you might imagine, there is a story. In fact, the story of "Off Course, On Target" goes back to a great serendipitous meeting I had with Charles Garfield. He and I were both keynote presenters at a conference. Being strangers in a strange land, so to speak, we went out for dinner the night before the conference. Charles told me a fascinating story about his work as one of the chief engineers on one of the Apollo space missions. He related the story of one of the greatest hurdles they ran into...a hurdle so big that it almost led to the cancellation of the Apollo missions themselves.

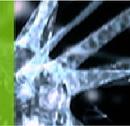
As I understand it, the story is that they could not keep the space module on the trajectory that the engineers had given them. They tried everything. They threw money at it...something they had a lot of it at that time. They of course invested a lot of money in new and extra technology; they either invented it or purchased it or acquired it from one source or another. They even threw foreign help at it, which was unthinkable until this problem came along. They did everything they could possibly think of, but nothing worked. No matter what they did or what they tried, they could not keep that space module on the trajectory given to them by the engineers.

As you can imagine, this was a pretty critical thing. People's lives were riding on this. In fact, as you may recall from the time, one could say that the reputation of the United States was riding on this, and yet they could not seem to solve the problem.

So finally—and it could actually have been their last meeting if they were unable to solve this problem—one of the people in the back of the room said, "Hey, why don't we just not care that we

# Off Course – On Target

## Off Course – On Target: The Story



are off-course most of the time?" You can imagine that this person would have not exactly have been greeted with open arms. In fact, they probably (at least metaphorically) threw him out of the room at the time.

But in fact this little idea took hold and it turned out to be their salvation. They ended up was putting their focus on being on target—getting those men to land on the moon on the right spot at the right time—and they didn't focus too much on the fact that they were off course. Instead they developed what was, at the time, the world's greatest course-correction technology.

This solution produced a statistic that many of you may have heard before. It was one of the things that came out in my conversation with Charles that really stuck with me. He said that, in the end, the Apollo mission was off course more than 80 percent of the time and yet, at the same time, it was able to hit its target, landing on the moon within 15 feet of the preferred location.

Just think about this for a second. Think about all the thousands of miles that were traveled and think about all the other things that could have gone wrong from all of the forces interacting with the spacecraft. Yet, they got it nailed. They landed within 15 feet of where they were supposed to be, even though the spacecraft was off-course more than 80 percent of the time.

Having great course-correction capabilities was the genius behind both the solution and the technology they developed. Since that time, as I thought more about it, I was struck with just how profound this notion of being off course and yet on target really was.

Now if space travel is a bit too far out for you to relate to, try a really quick and simple example that illustrates the point I'm making here—the ability to steer a car. At first, probably most of us think this should be really easy (at least the steering part) and especially so on a straight road. You just find the exact right spot, lock the steering wheel in, and you are done! As with most things, however, we find out that nothing could be further from the truth. The car wanders amazingly on the road if you just hold the wheel in one spot because of road irregularities, tires, steering suspension and so on.

I've taken this idea of steering a car from the physical into a conceptual sense. And I hope you'll see what a powerful idea it is focus not so much on being exactly on the right trajectory or on the right path or course, but rather, to focus on where you are trying to go—down that road or around that curve. By doing this now, metaphorically, and transferring it over and seeing this notion of course correction. I hope you can see how much it can be applied to both our individual and personal lives as well as professionally.

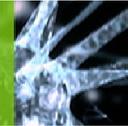
In particular, I'd like you to take away from this steering example not only the fact that you're off course most of the time, but also that what you do is constant course correction and this really amounts to frequently making small adjustments. This is a powerful principle to carry over into our lives and into our professions.

As I have spoken about this over the years and have developed the idea a bit further, I've had many people tell me that they've taken this notion of being off-course and on-target and have derived a great benefit from it—stress reduction. Because if you are always focusing on staying right on course, it's really highly stressful when you are off course. In fact, being off course is often regarded to be wrong or that you are messing up. It's not that being off course is unimportant or that you don't want to pay attention to it, but notice that we need to just have the ability to do course correction because in fact we probably will be off course most of the time. What really counts though is that we are on target.

Of course this requires us to know what the target *is*—a clarity that is all too rare in my experience—so it's equally important that we know where we are going and what the target is. This is a topic I'll come back to frequently here in "Off Course, On Target" sessions and in other

# Off Course – On Target

## Off Course – On Target: The Story



content on my site.

In education and training, there is also a nice double meaning to this idea of "off course, on target". There's a need to get off course in the literal sense, that is, the methodology of learning in terms of a "course" model of teaching. Instead we need to focus on the target—what is the learning and what is the performance that is expected—and being able to get that in large numbers of other meanings, other than just the course. So developing course-correction skills, I hope you see and now agree, is a huge factor in being agile and adaptive and surviving and thriving in times of constant change and moveable targets; in other words of course, the world we live in and that we work in.

I have chosen "Off Course – On Target" as a title for the content I'm producing since it seems to capture the serendipitous nature of discovering great things when you are off course, sometimes even purposely so, yet always keeping your mind's eye on the target.

So what I'd like you to think about as we reflect upon this session is, "How much do you focus on being off course rather than being on target? How will you know when you are off course?" You can only know if you're off course if you've got great clarity about the end goal, the purpose or the value proposition that you have for doing what you are doing. In the case of the Apollo mission, we saw that they were too focused initially on the trajectory path and that they became very successful when they switched their focus to hitting the target, putting that spacecraft in just the right place at the right time. Or in the case of steering a car, it's about safely and efficiently getting where you are going, rather than myopically focusing on that steering wheel.

So think about the projects that you are working on right now. Do you and everyone else on the team have a clear sense of the end goal? A simple test might be to ask, "How will you know when you are successful, how will you measure success?" This is the thing to focus on and everything else should be a means to this end and not an end in itself.

And when you know that you are off course, how do you do course correction, and how do you do that constantly...not with wrenching changes that are usually too late and too infrequent, but small adjustments all the time? A good test might be to take a look when the target changes. Sometimes a change is mandated by others or by circumstances, or sometimes you choose to change the target mid-project, based on feedback that you have gotten or because of other circumstances or something that now becomes possible. You decide to change where you were going for something better. When this happens, pay particular attention to your ability to change your course, to correct it, and to keep yourself on target.

See how you do that, see what kind of measurements you make, what sort of techniques you use to do that or consider adding additional ones or new ones to keep you on that target.

I'm Wayne Hodgins and I want to thank you for listening to the story behind the title of this series. Now that you know what "Off Course, On Target" is all about, I hope that you'll find the site and all of the content we have here for you to be of great value by taking you down unexpected paths that lead you to great discoveries. Please enjoy the other stories and the content we have for you here. I'm looking forward to talking to you again soon.

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