

# Reverse Searing: When NOT Following the Process Can Pay Off

by Katherine Rosback



**T**hose of you in the U.S. are likely coming off of some serious grilling time as we recently passed through the long Labor Day weekend and the cooler temps are settling in. I certainly am, and it's largely because of my delightful trips to Brazil and India last year to teach my facilitation workshops (face-to-face connections are so much richer than the virtual ones we had to settle for during Covid).

Thanks to the culinary cultures of those two countries, I've gotten into grilling, smoking (meat, that is), and experimenting with spices.

During a workshop break in Brazil, a participant bemoaned the U.S.'s love affair with A1 Steak Sauce. He claimed that the typical U.S. grill cooker "just doesn't know how to cook meat correctly and so resorts to sauce to make it taste

better." Given that Brazil is the world's second-largest producer and exporter of beef, I was all ears to understand what was behind his statement. After a visual lesson on why and how Brazilians even cut beef differently than we do in the U.S. and some in-depth post-workshop instruction, I had a whole new perspective on grilling beef.

While in India, I got a crash course on how to *really* cook with spices. So now I am not only cooking beef the way it should be cooked, I'm also making delicious rubs for pork ribs smoked over apple and cherry woods. So much learning!

The learning was so inspirational that, just a few mornings ago as I was reviewing an article on the Maillard reaction (you can't take the chemical engineer out of the girl), I found myself pondering expert

advice on searing versus reverse searing a steak.

Reverse searing? Isn't that backward? Maybe, but this quote caught my attention.

"Understanding the reaction, even on a surface level, is a gateway to understanding the chemical and physical processes of cooking. Grasping the variables involved and learning how to manipulate them is one of the best ways to become a more confident cook—*it's the difference between being a slave to a recipe and being free to make a recipe work for you.*"

My attention jumped from searing to facilitation. That quote is the essence of what using a problem-solving or decision-making process is all about! Are you making your process work for the issue you are facing or are you "a slave" to the steps? Do you adjust as needed, and do you know why you are adjusting? Do you "grasp the variables

involved" or just force-march folks through a process, regardless of what is happening in the room?

In my decades of facilitating every type of meeting imaginable, I have never led a team in the same way twice. Ever. Like smoking meat, countless variables suggest that adjusting or modifying a tool (or an approach to a tool) or jumping ahead can help your team work more effectively backward.

An example? Most processes begin with a definition of the problem—and they should. (Trash the ones that don't mention defining the problem.) But just because a process begins with Step 1 doesn't mean that Step 1 is the best place to start.

For instance, I've often worked with groups that have been marinating in solution-speak for quite some time. I would surely create a whole lot of resistance if I insisted that they "trust the process" and drop the

thinking behind their solution-speak. Instead, I start with their solutions and ask, “So if your solution is implemented, what is being solved? What would be different?” With that question, I am making the recipe work for the team, and that results in better outcomes.

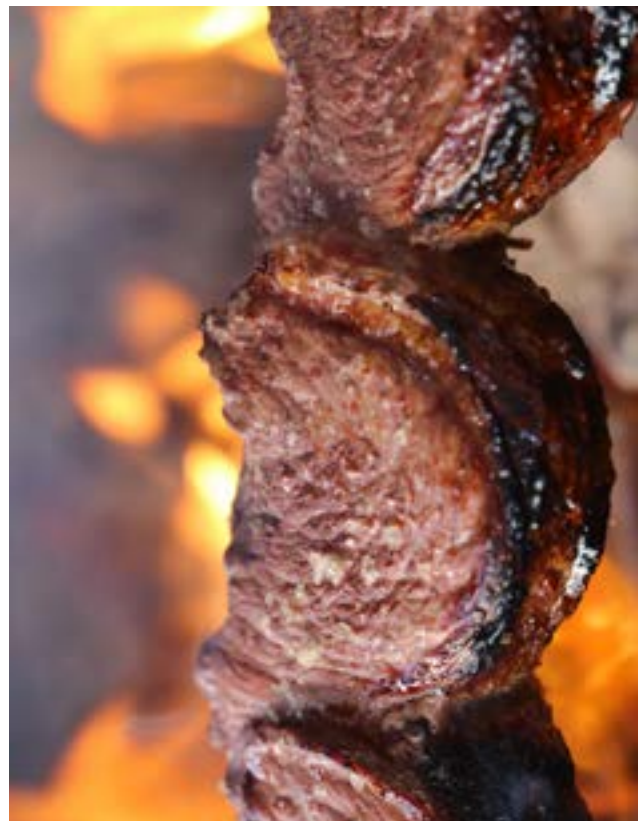
As another example, imagine you are in my shoes, helping a healthcare group explore options. Your participants include a high-ranking doctor who is a clear SME and eight far-lower-ranking (but just as insightful) contributors. The doctor *emphatically* suggests his idea would resolve the issue. Following the process would mean coaxing the others to provide alternative views, and that might prove difficult for a variety of reasons (just because your ground rules state that “all titles are checked at the door” doesn’t make it so). I made the recipe “work for me” and used Edward de Bono’s Concept Fan tool. This used the doctor’s idea as a springboard from which to create other options. We settled on a completely different idea, with the doctor being quite proud his initial idea has provided the seed for innovation!

Sometimes problem-solving or decision-making groups identify solutions that suggest a solution to a

much broader problem. Do we ignore this potential opportunity? Absolutely not. If it warrants, we circle back and reconsider the problem the group initially identified.

Some time ago, I asked a leader why he hired me to facilitate his team tasked with addressing a key issue. He replied, “Because you don’t follow the book.” Translation: there’s the recipe and then there is being free to make the recipe work for you.

Making your process work for you results in better outcomes for your team and your business.



Katherine Rosback is a recognized expert in the science and practice of helping leaders ask better questions and is a master facilitator. She has a BS in Chemical Engineering and an M.A in Organizational Communication. She is the author of *Asking is Better Than Telling*. Sign up for her weekly blotg at [katherinerosback.com](http://katherinerosback.com).