

CONSENSUS AT WINTERBERRY

Assume goodwill from all involved...

Create for yourself a new, indomitable perception of faithfulness. What is usually called faithfulness passes so quickly. Let this be your faithfulness:

You will experience moments.... fleeting moments.... with the other person. The human being will appear to you then as if filled, irradiated with the archetype of his spirit.

And then there may be.... indeed will be.... other moments, long periods of time, when human beings are darkened. But you will learn to say to yourself at such times: "The Spirit makes me strong. I remember the archetype. I saw it once. No illusion, no deception shall rob me of it."

Always struggle for the image that you saw. This struggle is faithfulness. Striving thus for faithfulness, we shall be close to one another, as if endowed with the protective powers of angels.

-Rudolf Steiner

Consensus Process in action...

Unity, not unanimity...

Ask yourself, "Is the spirit of the action moving in the direction of the shared values?"

Discernment...Standing Behind the Principle vs. Personal Preference

Ask yourself, "Is having my strategy adopted important for the nature of this particular decision or is this more about steering the decision in a direction that is closer to my own personal preference?" Clearly identify if this about principle or preference before adding to the discussion.

Stand Aside / Step Aside...

Typically happens when a person realizes they are too attached to personal preference and are only holding the group process back. Once a person stands or steps aside he or she is agreeing to let the group move forward without them. In doing so they agree not to undermine group decisions. The aforementioned behaviors uphold the integrity of the body and its agreements.

Blocking (secular term) or Standing in the Way (Quaker term)...

This technique should rarely be used and has been estimated that a person who uses consensus consistently in their everyday life should use this no more than six times in a lifetime! In terms of an organization, it should only be used when a particular decision would lead to a probable disaster for the group as a whole. It should only be used to ensure the survival of the group or if the proposed action can be shown to conflict with group's shared values. The blocker bears responsibility to group and process to identify a valid reason for blocking and should provide evidence to support the decision to block.

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Tools for Consensus Making...

Rule of Three...

If the group is going to make a major policy decision it should be brought to no less than three meetings. When there are time concerns special meetings can be called, but the format should be:

Mtg 1: Introduction of the issue and dialogue (20-30 minutes): Prior documentation should be provided to committee/board/group members. From here the issue gets sent to committee with the mandate to create/bring a proposal. This should be sent out to members prior to the second meeting.

Mtg 2: Full discussion of the proposal by the group (60-90 minutes): Send all recommendations back to committee for revisions after input. Once revisions are finished the new proposal should be sent out to group prior to the third and final meeting.

Mtg 3: Final discussion and decision (45 minutes)

Define the Role of the Mandate Team or Committee...

This can be anything the group wants it to be. One example is making clear that maximum representation of stakeholder input be solicited prior to a recommendation being made. Another is that the proposal be objective and principle based.

Documentation...

While time consuming to create, this is a total time saver in the life of a group's meeting time. At least one paragraph should be offered for every item to be discussed at the meeting. Each item on the agenda should have a sponsor who provides the history and documentation of the proposed issue. Good practice says no sponsor/no documentation equals no consideration by the group.

Timely Agenda...

The agenda should be sent out in a timely fashion and adequate time should be allowed for the topics at hand. A group should have a calendar of the year and its yearly goals should drive agenda topics when possible. There should be a good energy flow to the meetings and breaks or moments of silence should be taken when necessary.

Clear Minutes...

Minutes should not be a play-by-play representation of the meeting. The minute taker should strive to capture the key points and identify the "Minute of Decision" or the motion/unity of the group.