THE MAKINGS OF A GOOD MEETING

By

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Meetings are occasions when people come together to get something done, whether it is to share information or make decisions. Too many meetings are unsuccessful; too long, unfocused, petty, unproductive, led by domineering or disagreeable individuals, meandering, time wasting, boring... the list goes on. These kind of meetings leave participants dreading the next one. Most of us have personal knowledge of what can go wrong with meetings.

But what makes a good meeting?

- A strategically designed agenda with commonly understood goals and objectives.
- A agreed upon agenda and process for running the meeting.
- An awareness that people come with their personal preoccupations and feelings, as well as an interest in the subject at hand.
- A sense of involvement and empowerment; people feeling that the decisions are their decisions; that they are able to do what needs doing.
- A skilled facilitator.

There is no foolproof way to ensure successful meetings, but guidelines aid in sustainability and increasing productivity. Most people can learn how to facilitate a good meeting and develop a strategic agenda, but it does take time and attention. The more people within a group who have good group process skills, the easier the task of the facilitator and the more satisfactory the meeting.

The Facilitator

A facilitator is not quite the same as a leader or a chairperson, but more like a clerk in a Quaker meeting. A facilitator accepts responsibility to help the group move through the agenda in the time available and make necessary decisions and plans for implementation in order to accomplish common goals. *Please see Appendix A.*

A facilitator makes no decisions for the group, but suggests ways that will help the group move forward. He or she works in such a way that the people present at the meeting are aware that they are in charge, that it is their business that is being conducted, and that each person has a role to play. It should be made clear whether the facilitator is an equal participant in the decision making, or if the facilitator is only limited to a monitor/facilitator role, and not a participant.

It is important to emphasize that the responsibility of the facilitator is to the group and its work rather than to the individuals within the group. The group gives the facilitator additional rights to accompany the increased responsibility. These rights depend on the decision made by the group, but often include:

- the right to interrupt a speaker to ask if they are on subject, being concise, or repeating another person;
- the right to be a participant and follow the same rules for speaking to the subject as everyone else;
- the right to speak out of turn in order to assist the meeting process;
- the right to make minor judgment calls on the agenda as the meeting progresses without asking permission of the group.

Tricks of a Good Facilitator

1. <u>Know the agenda</u>. Have a good understanding of the big picture. Why is the group trying to accomplish certain objectives? Why are certain decisions important, and why can others wait. The facilitator can be much more flexible with the flow of the meeting if the objectives are clearly understood. When an impasse occurs, the facilitator can bring the group back to the goal of the item being discussed. Sometimes it is valuable to meet with key meeting attendees ahead of time.

2. <u>Get everyone's name</u> so you can call on them by name. Either make a seating chart during introductions, or make sure that they wear readable name tags. It helps to tell them you are making a "cheat sheet" so you can call them by their name.

3. <u>Call on people in the order in which they raise their hands</u>. Keep a running list

of the order. Get all the hands in the order they are raised, so that they can lower their hands and pay attention to the speaker. If it has been agreed, facilitators may want to comment as a participant, and if so, they must put their name into the order and then call on themselves at the appropriate time.

4. Keep eye contact with everyone. When a person raises their hand, you can acknowledge them with a nod or gesture to let them know they have been added to the list. This allows them to put their hand down that they may better listen to the speaker.

Eye contact is important for many reasons. It establishes a rapport between the facilitator and participants that fosters trust. It allows the facilitator to read faces and know who is agitated, confused, or unhappy and should be called upon to speak. Eye contact helps keep everyone centered and in the "here and now" of the meeting.

5. Use the ground rules established in the meeting as early as possible. For example, interrupt a speaker politely and diplomatically if they are off subject, and ask how their point deals with the agenda subject being discussed. If it doesn't, tell them where it will be dealt with in the meeting, or write it in the "bin", where items and ideas that aren't immediately pertinent are put for later consideration. A diplomatic, early intervention to enforce the ground rules establishes the seriousness of the facilitator. It helps everyone be more self-disciplined.   If the ground rules are applied unfairly or erratically, problems will often result. See the following section on ground rules and Appendix B.

6. Make the group come up with a proposal when enough discussion and process has occurred for a decision to be made. The facilitator can summarize what has been said and try to formulate a consensus proposal for the group to discuss, or they can stop the order of hands and ask someone in the group to come up with a proposal. For example, "It seems that what I hear everyone saying is…" or "a rough consensus might be…" Whenever the facilitators are "stuck" they should not hesitate to ask the group for help.

Once a proposal is on the floor, ask who has serious objections to the proposal, and call on these people to speak. Once the serious objections are before the group, ask if someone can come up with a proposal that will resolve these concerns. Less serious concerns can be dealt with through wordsmithing the proposal and through friendly amendments.

Specific Tasks of the Facilitator

1. <u>Help in the development of the agenda</u>. Arrange (before the meeting) to have somebody present background on each item if appropriate. (The more others speak, the better. The facilitator will speak enough in the meeting.) Make sure the agenda is put in writing, either on butcher block paper for all to see or in a handout.

2. <u>Set-up the room</u>. If possible, set chairs in a U-shape with the flip charts/blackboard at the open end of the U. If possible, keep the chairs only one-person-deep. Have an agenda posted, plenty of paper ready and pieces of masking tape strategically placed to make it quick and easy to post the completed sheets of paper. Place finished sheets on the walls, on the windows, or wherever there is convenient viewing and room.

3. <u>Introduce yourself</u> (or have the meeting chair introduce you). Then begin introductions all around. (Make a personal "cheat sheet" name chart of meeting participants relative to the their seating positions.)

4. <u>Make sure there is a time keeper and note taker</u>. Don't let the meeting start without them. Give brief instructions to each (e.g. "With hand signals, so as not to interrupt, Timekeeper please let me know when half the time is gone, when one minute is left, when we are out of time." "Note taker, please take down decisions, only, or try to take details of what people say, or whatever the groups preference is.")

5. <u>Review the agenda and ground rules</u>. Get agreement on these before proceeding. This will be the first consensus agreement of the group. See the following section on ground rules and Appendix B.

6. <u>Keep the group and speakers focused</u> on the agenda item and task at hand. Add "off-subject" items to the "bin" list. Always keep your "eye on the prize" of the big picture objective the group is trying to accomplish.

7. <u>Make sure that people's comments and ideas are properly recorded</u> on butcher paper. This can be done by the facilitator or by an official recorder.

8. <u>Protect the process</u> by enforcing ground rules and time allotments. The facilitator is responsible for protecting ideas and individuals from attack, suggesting processes for following the agenda and devising other approaches if the process bogs down.

9. Encourage the expression of various viewpoints - the more important the decision, the more important it is to have all pertinent information (facts, feelings and opinions) on the table. Call on people who haven't spoken as much to give them an opportunity to address the issue. Notice who is confused, agitated or unhappy with the debate, and call on them to speak to the issue. See Appendix C.

10. Don't let discussion continue between two people, but ask for comments from others in the group. After all, it is the group that needs to make the decisions and carry them out. One of the easier ways to do this is to keep the order in which hands are raised, or ask who else would like to speak and then proceed with the other speakers.

11. Hold people to speaking for themselves rather than making vague references to others. For example, discourage: "some people say…", "we all know", "they would not listen…" Even though this is difficult in the beginning, it will foster trust in the long run.

12. Help the group make a decision. Keep looking for minor points of agreement and state them - it helps morale. Encourage people to think of fresh solutions as well as to look for possible compromises. See Facilitator Tricks #6, and Appendix D-1 and D-2.

    When you test for consensus, state in question form everything that you feel participants agree on. Be specific: "Do we agree that we'll meet on Tuesday evenings for the next two months and that a facilitator will be found at each meeting to function for the next one?" DO NOT merely refer to a previous statement: "Do you all agree that we should do it the way it was just suggested?"

13. Make the group deal with going beyond the allotted time limit for an agenda item. Where will the additional time come from? What agenda item should have less time, or does the group agree to extend the time for the meeting and adjourn later. Be careful in this because it can sometimes take more time arguing for more time than it would have taken to resolve the issue. It is often wise for the facilitator to be flexible about time, especially if a decision is about to be made.

    If it is obvious that a decision will not be made in time, bring this up to the group as soon as possible, so the group can spend the last five minutes deciding when and how they will finish the agenda item. If you wait until the time is up to begin discussing whether to continue on the agenda item or to postpone discussion, you will take time from the agenda items that follow.

14. Focus on closure by insisting that discussions be resolved with the identification of appropriate next steps, and that agreements and decisions are suitably identified and recorded.

15. Make sure that the next meeting is scheduled. It is much easier to schedule the next meeting when everyone is present. Allow time for it on the agenda, and insist that people consider it.

16. Try to ensure that the next agenda-making team is identified so everyone knows who to contact to offer input or committee items for the agenda.

17. Use humor to alleviate tension. When intense situations arise, or when solutions are hard to reach, remember to use humor, affirmation, quick games for energy, changing places, small buzz groups, silence, etc.

18. Remain neutral. If you find yourself drawn into the discussion in support of a particular position, it would be preferable to step aside as facilitator until the next agenda item. This can be arranged beforehand if you anticipate a conflict of interest.

19. Take regular breaks. Almost any meeting will benefit from quick breaks in the proceedings - energy injections - provided by short games, songs, a common stretch, etc. Keep open to the over-all mood of the group and don't take too much time asking for consensus on whether to take a quick break. Just say "OK, I want everyone to stand up for one minute and stretch and then we will sit down." The break is shorter than the argument over whether to take the break or not.

20. Make it clear who has committed to what during the course of the meeting. Ask the recorder/note-taker to repeat back what each person has said they will do either right after the decision or at the end of the meeting. Another practical technique is to give a card to each person when they commit to doing something. At the end of the meeting ask everyone to show their cards, and remind them to write their commitment down.

Co-Facilitator

Instead of the usual practice of having one facilitator, it is often wise to have two. Here are some of the reasons and circumstances for team facilitation:

1.   More information and ideas are available during the planning.
2.   More energy (physical and emotional) is available to the group - especially during times of conflict or when handling complicated matters.
3.   If a facilitator becomes personally involved in the discussion, it is easy to hand the job over to the co-facilitator for the time being.
4.   Co-facilitation is a way for more people to gain experience and become skilled facilitators.
5.   It is less exhausting, demanding and intimidating.

For people who are not used to working as a team it is probably wise to divide responsibility for the agenda clearly before the meeting. However, co-facilitation means that the person who is not currently "on duty" is still responsible for paying attention as "vibes watcher" and pitching in to help clarify issues, test for consensus, etc.

In evaluating their work together, people who work as co-facilitators can help each other by giving feedback, support, and thus providing opportunities for growth.

Other Roles - "Vibes Watcher"

At times when the discussion is expected to be particularly controversial or when there are more people than the facilitator can be attentive to, it may help to appoint a "vibes watcher" - a person who will pay attention to the emotional climate and energy level of the attendees. Such a person is encouraged to interrupt the proceedings when necessary with an observation of how things are going and to suggest remedies when there is a problem.

As "vibes watcher" you pay the most attention to the nonverbal communication, such as:

1.   Body language: are people yawning, dozing, sagging, fidgeting, leaving?
2.   Facial expressions: are people alert or "not there" or looking upset or staring off into space?
3.   Side conversations: are they distracting to the facilitator or to the group?
4.   Are people interrupting each other?

It is often difficult to interpret such behavior correctly. Therefore it may be wise to report what you observed and possibly suggest something to do about it. If energy is low, a quick stretch or a song may wake people up. If tension or conflict level is preventing people from hearing each other, simply getting up and finding new places to sit might help. A period of silence might also be helpful when people may have a chance to relax a bit and look for new insights.

It is important for the "vibes watcher" to keep a light touch - don't make people feel guilty or defensive. Also, be confident in your role - there is no reason for apologizing when you have an observation or a suggestion for the group - you are doing them a favor.

PLANNING A STRATEGIC Agenda

Equal to having a good facilitator is having a strategic agenda. With a good agenda a less skilled facilitator can be successful. A poor agenda may not be overcome by even the most advanced and experienced facilitator.

If it is at all possible, plan the agenda before the meeting. It is easier to modify it later than to start from scratch at the beginning. If you arrive at a meeting where there is no agenda, you can use the following methodology to develop one in a relatively quick period of time.

Brainstorm and Prioritize the Meeting "Objectives"

What specifically do you want to accomplish tonight; not the outcome but what are the questions you want answered. For example:

We want to decide the tasks needed to accomplish the project, and we want to know who will do them.

We need to prioritize our goals for the year and develop a strategic plan for our top goal. We need to make decisions on what committees we will form, who chairs them and when they will meet.

Meeting objectives should be SMART; Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time dated. Both examples above fit these qualifications (except that the second may not be realistically attainable without enough meeting time, or past group discussion on the subject).

Verbs that should be used in developing meeting objectives include:

analyze   announce appropriate approve
assign   brainstorm   categorize   clarify
debate*   decide   delegate   determine
develop   discuss* evaluate   explore
identify   improve   learn plan
prioritize reevaluate   refine   report*
request   review   summarize   teach   wordsmith

These verbs do not lead to specific and measurable meeting objectives. They can be tools of the meeting objective but should not be the lead verb.

How do you measure successful discussion? Why does the group want to discuss the item - in order to make a decision? If so, then the meeting objective should be "Decide…." with "discuss" being one of the tools used to make the decision.

Once meeting objectives are brainstormed, prioritizing them can be a very powerful exercise. Which of the possible decisions should be made first? Some

will be easy. For example, groups should decide their purpose before prioritizing their goals and have their goals in place before developing objectives, tasks and a plan. See Appendix A and C.

There are many methods that can be used to prioritize the meeting objectives. The easiest, depending on the group, can be to request suggestions from the participants and ask if there is agreement. Once agreement is reached on the priority objectives, divide up the meeting time, plug in various agenda "tricks" and a solid meeting agenda can soon develop.

Dividing Up Time in the Meeting Agenda

Get agreement on when the meeting will end. You know what time it starts. Plug in appropriate amounts of time for the basics of introductions, agenda and ground rules review, and evaluation.

- Now how much time is left?
- How much time will your top priority items take?
- Are they controversial?
- Will more time be needed?
- Does someone need to brief the group on background, or the latest intelligence information?
- How much time will they need?

Be sure to include some time for questions and clarification. Unless you have united or small groups, it is difficult to accomplish more than one big decision item (30-60 min.) and two or three small items (10-15 min.) in a two hour meeting.

In long meetings, or meetings where it is a real guess as to the amount of time an item will take, it is wise to schedule some flex time. It can be used to end the meeting early if all goes well, or can easily be "borrowed" to add to an item that is going over time. For meetings that include a lunch break, it is generally best to remember that the group may find it hard to be productive after the break, so if you can, plan something lively.

At some point your group needs to make a decision on how closely they want to honor the meeting end time. Long term, sustainable groups find it of great value to gain a reputation of starting and ending on time. People with baby-sitters, members who get tired after a certain hour, and busy people (who are often the best and most productive members) can quickly lose interest in groups that run over time. A commitment to end on time makes it more important to give accurate assessments of how much time an agenda item will need.

What Should be the Order of the Agenda Items

Some of the order follows from how you prioritized the meeting objectives. Often it is obvious which item should precede another. For example, a group needs to decide if they want to take an action before planning the tasks.

When items don't logically follow one another, a good rule of thumb is to do a short, easy item first, then tackle the hardest issue next, with other items following. The short, easy issue allows people into the psychological space of agreeing. The hardest item or most pressing issue should come early in the meeting because participants will be fresher than they will be towards the end of the meeting. If there are several difficult issues, plan to have quick breaks between them to restore energy and attention (just a stretch in place).

A big item should often be broken into several issues and discussed one at a time to make it more manageable. Or it may be helpful to suggest a process of presenting the item with background information and clarification, breaking into small groups for idea sharing and making priorities, and then returning to the main group for discussion.

When you can, finish the meeting with something short and easy. It may have been a rough meeting, and there is great value to having everyone remember that they can agree. Remember, one of the goals of a meeting is to make people want to come to the next one.

Standard meeting components

Introductions

Even if everyone knows each other well, use this time to give everyone a first chance to speak. For some this may be their only contribution. The more people speak at a meeting, the more ownership they have of the outcome. The introduction is an easy way to ensure everyone says something.

It often works well for the facilitator to give specific instructions to everyone on what they should say in their introductions and the amount of time they have to say it. For first time meetings or meetings where people don't know each other, a standard introduction might include: your name/title/group, where you live, why you are at this meeting/interested in this cause.

In groups that have been together a while, each introduction is an opportunity to increase trust and vulnerability between group members. If there is one new person, the introduction should start with name and one of the possible introductions below:

- The best thing that happened to you today/this week?
- What will you be doing this weekend?
- Where did you work previously?
- Where is your favorite place to go hiking?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- In what religion were you raised?
- What was the last letter you wrote to an elected official?

For longer meetings, retreats, or meetings in which it is critically important for more trust to develop, more elaborate introductions may be made. For example, participants can pair up, interview each other for 1-5 minutes, and then, during the round robin, introduce their new friend. The extra time spent here builds trust that can be very important to the overall goals of the meeting/retreat.

Agenda Review

Either have the agenda written on a large sheet of newsprint, on a blackboard, or have it as a handout. By reviewing the agenda the facilitator gives the participants a chance to modify it and to buy into it.

The first thing the facilitator should do is review the meeting objectives from which the agenda derived.

- Do people agree with the objectives?
- Are there additional objectives which should be added to the agenda?
- If there are completely new objectives, should they bump the ones already there, or should they wait until the next meeting?

By discussing the meeting objectives, the facilitator helps keep the debate focused on the larger strategic picture and not the minute by minute detail of the agenda.

After enough successful agendas, groups will trust the agenda team's assessment about how long an agenda item will last and the details to achieve it. There are a number of ways in which a challenge to the agenda can be handled. The facilitator can spend time listening carefully to the persons concerns and try to incorporate this information into the agenda. Or, after getting the basic information, you can ask if they would be willing to trust your judgment on how the agenda is laid out. This assumes that there was an earlier agreement on the meeting objectives.

If major additions are proposed, make the group aware that adjustments must be made because of limited time available, like taking something out, postponing something until later, etc.

If an item is suggested for discussion that some people do not want to deal with, consider that there is no consensus and it cannot be included at that time.

Remember that your responsibility as facilitator is to the whole group and not to each individual. Don't be defensive about the agenda you have proposed, but don't change everything at the suggestion of one person - check it out with the group first.

When the agenda has been amended, ask the participants if they are willing to accept it - and insist on a response. Request those who agree to raise their hands, or without any objection, vocal dissent or nays… They need to be aware of having made a contract with you about how to proceed. Besides, it is their meeting!

Meeting Ground Rules

The facilitator should receive the participants approval of the meeting ground rules before proceeding: how the meeting will be run, what rights and responsibilities do the participants and facilitator have? Determining this at the beginning of the meeting prevents a great deal of later debate at what is often just the wrong time. Here is a simple set of ground rules for regular meetings:

1. Raise hands (when not in a brain storming session). The facilitator calls on people who have raised their hands and makes a running list and keeps to that order. New people raising their hands are added to the bottom of the list. The facilitator can speak on subject only after adding his or her name to the list.

Example: "In turn, Tom, Mary, Dave, Allison and then me."

2. Don't interrupt another person while they are speaking. Only one person speaks at a time. The facilitator can interrupt a speaker to determine if the ground rules aren't being followed..

Don't interrupt the order of hands raised except for:

- point of clarification

    (asking the speaker to clarify what they said)

- point of process

    (asking the facilitator if the process is being followed)

Examples: "Tom, hang on a second, I will put you on the list."

or   "Alice, do you have a point of clarification or process?"

3. Stay on subject don't wander or bring in extraneous information.

Examples: "George, I think you are discussing an issue we will cover later on in agenda item xx. Is there a reason we should cover that issue now?"

or   "Brenda, let me put that into the bin for ideas to be discussed, possibly at the next meeting

4. Be concise. Do not repeat what others have said.

Example: "Dave, I think you may be repeating what was just said; do you have something specific to add to that thought?"

5. Be respectful and polite. Varying points of view will be welcomed and honored. Encourage appreciation, and value the different perspectives of the people in the group. Focus on the problem, not on the person. Do not allow any personal attacks, or "knee-jerk" reactions (e.g. "that's a stupid thing to say").

Example: "Brad stop, wait a second, I think you are violating the be respectful ground rule."

You may want to copy the following box on to a large piece of paper to post on the wall or chalk board in full view of the group for a helpful reminder.

Ground Rules
1. Raise Hands - Stay in Order
    except for: point of clarification
                    point of process
2. Don't Interrupt Speaker
3. Stay on Subject
4. Be Concise, Don't Repeat Others
5. Be Respectful, Be Polite.

See Appendices: B-1 and B-2

Proposals

The group strives for consensus. When it is time to make a decision, someone needs to make a proposal which the group then crafts into a final decision. The proposal should not be some individual's wished for outcome, but the "consensus" of the group as that person understands it. The proposal moves the group from the discussion to the decision making phase.

If the group is running out of time and cannot reach consensus it would be best to refer the issue to a committee or a working group. In this case, the chair or work group leader should understand fully what the group wants to be accomplished, and have a clear objective to work toward.

Committee Agenda Items

Committee chairs, or those offering committee reports (to the whole), should in advance of the meeting understand why the group needs the report or background information. What decision does the group need to make? What is the object of this agenda item? Again, be concise and on subject so that the group can utilize the information for making the best and   most knowledgeable decisions.

Announcements

Be careful to place announcements in the appropriate part of the agenda. Some announcements could dramatically affect the agenda of the entire meeting. Such information should be brought forth as soon as possible, preferably before the meeting and directly to the agenda team.

Most other announcements should wait until the end of the meeting. Some people have difficulty being disciplined about how much time it takes to announce an item, and others love to discuss the announcement; all of which takes time away from your agenda. By placing announcements at the end of the meeting, it is more likely that participants will be disciplined about the time.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the meeting serves several purposes: to provide a quick opportunity for people to express their feelings about the proceedings, and thus to provide a sense of closure to the experience. It also helps to improve meetings in the future. A simple and standard evaluation technique is listing the "+" (positives) and "Δ" (changes) of the meeting or training.

You can do this in either order, but doing the positives last leaves everyone on more of an up-beat note. Use a large piece of paper or a chalk board and mark the bottom half with a "+" (positive sign) and the top half with a "Δ" (change sign). Under the "+", list the participants' positive comments; the things that people liked about the meeting and felt good about. Under the Δ list things that could have been done better, and suggestions on how it could be improved.

Don't let there be arguments about whether something was in fact helpful or not; people have a right to their feelings. It is not necessary to work out a consensus on what was good and what was not.

A few minutes (five) is usually all that is needed - don't drag it out. Try to end with a positive comment. Meetings almost invariably get better after people get used to evaluating how they function together.

Closing the Meeting

Try to end the meeting in the same way it was started - with a sense of gathering. Don't let it just fizzle. Some silence, standing in a circle, shaking hands - anything which affirms the group effort together as positive, and gives a feeling of closure. A round robin at the end where each person in turn gets to share their feelings about the meeting and the decisions that were made can have a powerful impact. It gives everyone a chance to speak one more time. For those who have been silent the entire meeting, this may be the opportunity they have been waiting for to explain their commitment or concerns. The facilitator can also take this time to check with each person on the commitments they made during the meeting. When someone commits verbally, or in writing they are much more likely to follow through.

APPENDIX A: Definitions

Words Describing Intended RESULTS

PURPOSE: The ultimate results the organization and effort exists to achieve. In other words, the purpose is the reason for existence. It is an ideal that may or may not be fully achievable. All organizational and program goals and objectives must be able to fit within a purpose statement. If not, the purpose statement should be broader, or the goal/strategy should not be pursued.

> Example: "NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council] is a national non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the worlds natural resources and ensuring a safe and healthy environment for all people..."

GOAL: The ultimate results the organization and effort exists to achieve. In other words, the purpose is the reason for existence. It is an ideal that may or may not be fully achievable. All organizational and program goals and objectives must be able to fit within a purpose statement. If not, the purpose statement should be broader, or the goal/strategy should not be pursued.

> Example: Ensure that all Americans have clean water.

OBJECTIVE: A specific, measurable, time-phased result. Objectives should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time dated.

> Example: Reauthorize a good Clean Water Act by 1996

Words Describing Intended METHODS

MISSION: A statement of the focus and methodologies of the organization or program. A Mission Statement includes the purpose statement plus some or all of the following:

- o why are we doing this?
- o what areas are going to be covered (geographical, societal, topics, etc.)?
- o what is our main methodology?

> Example: "..With 170,000 members and a staff of lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists, NRDC combines the power of law, the power of science, and the power of people in defense of the environment."

A mission is purpose plus methodology.

STRATEGY: A key, priority method for achieving one or more of the goals. It must provide confidence that, if implemented, the organization will show significant progress toward the vision and mission.

PROGRAM: A set of tasks designed to achieve (or contribute to the achievement of) your purpose, goal(s), or objective(s).

TASK: An activity that contributes to the achievement of your plan (including the achievement of a purpose, goal or objective).

To repeat, these are not the only definitions for these words. The most common

alternative is to interchange the definitions of objective and goal above (i.e. to make objectives broad and goals specific).

This alternate use of ìmissionî is common in the business sector, but it is a <u>different</u> concept than purpose. The reversal of the words ìgoalî and "objective" is also common, but it is done both ways in the business world. The definitions suggested above are used in much of the literature on ìmanagement objectives,î in the federal government, and in a majority of non-profit organizations. <small>Support Center 1985.</small>

Other Definitions Used in Consensus-Based Processes

INTERESTS: The motives of the parties involved in the process. What people or groups need. The end condition and state of being the people or groups seek. Interests can be arranged in a hierarchy or priority with some being much more fundamental than others. (*Steve Barbor*)

POSITIONS (also known as "demands" or "proposals"): These are solutions to which one party is committed. The positions of one group often run counter of the interests of another group in a stakeholder process or negotiation. Solutions which work for all parties usually arise from letting go of pre-existing proposals, clarifying the interests of each group, and then being creative in the pursuit of new ideas and answers which all sides can live with. (*Steve Barbor*)

STAKEHOLDERS: people and organizations who have a "stake" in the outcome of a process. Often this is a financial stake, whether it be property owners, recipients of water and power from a project, river guides who make their living rafting or fishing a river, businesses that will be hurt if water quality standards prevent them from selling or using certain chemicals, downstream cities and towns which have to pay more for water purification if upstream pollution isn't controlled, and others. Stakeholders can also be anyone who cares about a place for any reason, whether they like to visit the place, have friends who live there, or just like to know the place exists.

APPENDIX: B-1 How to Enforce Ground Rules

In addition to the examples provided in the Meeting Ground Rules section, here are a few more pointers:

- The facilitator is responsible for bringing a basic list of proposed ground rules to the group or meeting.
- In the "Meeting Ground Rules" section the facilitator should seek a quick consensus from the group that they will accept and abide by the rules as posted or amended.
- Do not hesitate at the onset of the meeting to interrupt rule violators, as this will be of great value to the group; and early action will set a respectful tone for the meeting.

APPENDIX B-2: Sample Ground Rules

The following is being provided as an example of detailed ground rules created by consensus for a large working group.

Draft Ground Rules For the 44 Voting Participants of:

HIV Comprehensive Care Working Group1993 Consensus Meeting on

Ryan White Title II Funding Distribution

We will balance process (need for participation/inclusion, focus on quality of experience for working group participants) and efficiency (need to deliver quality output in time to meet deadlines).

We will allocate authority to small groups to make recommendations back to the working group as a whole. Small group recommendations will be changed by the group as a whole. Small group recommendations will be changed by the group as a whole only on an exception basis.

Hands raised, no interruptions, no repetition, stay on subject,

We will use a consensus rule in both large and small groups. If consensus cannot be reached, we will use a majority rule based on a show of hands. If a majority of participants in the large group cannot agree on a decision about an issue, the Office of AIDS will decide.

We will not "wordsmith" or "nit-pick" small group reports of the Office of AIDS-HRSA draft application. The focus of our comments will be on substance, not wording, format, etc.

To promote a positive environment for open discussion by all participants, we agree to observe the following meeting behaviors:

- We will practice "respectful engagement" -- show respect for one another as people by avoiding personal attacks and the use of labels, listening with

understanding, and restricting process observations to behavior only (not assume we know other's motives).

- We will focus on agenda topics and timelines provided or formally re-negotiate these as a group.
- If an individual or small group accepts an assignment, they will complete it, on time, or signal as early as possible that they cannot do so.
- It is OK to respectfully "call process" at any time.
- The conversation will not be dominated by a small number of people.
- Brief side conversations are OK if the noise level is not problem. It is not OK for an individual or pair to keep up a continual dialogue while the meeting is in progress.
- It is OK to have fun.

Appendix C: Brainstorming

Getting Ready:

1. Review the rules
2. Define the problem
3. Select a method

Generating Ideas:

1. Solicit ideas
2. Record all ideas
3. No evaluation
4. Go for quantity
5. Encourage piggybacking and lateral thinking

Refining & Reducing the List:

1. Eliminate duplication
2. Clarify all items
3. Cluster related ideas
4. Eliminate ideas if everyone agrees
5. Evaluate and ìwinnowî the list

John Glaser & Associates, revised 1/94

APPENDIX D-1: Consensus Decision Making Model

Consensus is a style of decision making whereby participants are able to arrive at a decision through discussion in which:

® All participants viewpoints are considered
® The final decision is agreeable to all involved
® No formal vote is taken -- the approval is unanimous

It is important to keep the following key points in mind before beginning a consensus decision making process.

1.   Each participant must honestly state his/her opinion in a complete manner.
2.   The focus on each opinion is to make sure it is clearly understood by other participants.
3.   This is not a win/lose situation, the goal is to come to an agreement which incorporates all individual viewpoints.
4.   Participants must listen carefully and respectfully of the viewpoints of others.
5.   Participants should not support an agreement that they have objection to.
6.   The group should not pressure individuals to agree with the decision to speed up the process or to avoid conflict.

PROCESS

1.   All participants state their opinion, usually using a round robin technique where one person starts and each member to the left (or right) takes a turn.
2.   Participants ask questions to clarify statements by other members.
3.   Discussion of ideas continues until someone thinks consensus has been achieved.
4.   A trial decision is stated and all members check to see if this incorporates their opinion.
5.   If it does not, go back to (2).
6.   If all members find the decision agreeable, consensus is complete.

Consensus is valuable because it increases creativity and involves all members of the group. Since all members support the final decision, there is a low chance of sabotage or lack of follow-through by group members. Consensus takes more time up front, but in the long run probably is more efficient because of the support it engenders.

Consensus should be used with questions/decisions which are important and require support from the whole group. For boards, examples of these kinds of decisions might include:

®   Developing a mission statement.
®   Hiring an executive director.
®   Approving major changes in philosophical or program directions.
®   Determining board operating policies and procedures.
®   Developing long term plans.

Jim Hickman 10/84

APPENDIX D-2: Reaching Consensus: The Final Steps

How can a facilitator and group use the 10-15 minutes customarily put in the agenda for ìfind consensus?î It is assumed that there is work done before a proposal is made on the floor, either through the preceding agenda process, or through committee work. It is also understood that when a person makes a proposal they are not pursuing their own agenda, they are putting forward a proposal that they believe might reach a group consensus. Given these assumptions, the N Street Co-Housing Community worked out the following:

A proposal has been made to the group.

The facilitator stops the usual process of proceeding to the next person who had raised their hand.

The facilitator checks to see if anyone has objections to the proposal, feels the proposal is premature, or has a better/different proposal to make. The facilitator starts a new list of raised hands and keeps the discussion to this focus. People with minor objections, friendly amendments and similar comments should refrain from comment at this time.

The facilitator helps each person be clear in their objection and proposal, and finishes making sure all are heard.

The facilitator then asks if, after hearing these comments, can anyone come up with a new proposal that will address these objections and incorporate the other proposals? If no one, including the facilitator, can make such a proposal, the facilitator either returns the group to the original discussion, or if time is running out, moves to postpone the decision or sends it back to committee to come back with a new proposal.

If a new proposal was offered, the facilitator repeats the above process asking who has objections, etc. This process can reoccur for as long as time allows, or until a proposal is made to send the problem to committee or another action is taken.

If no one has objections or a different proposal to offer, the facilitator allows the proposal to be put before the whole group for wordsmithing, friendly amendments and discussion. The facilitator should consider using the technique of breaking difficult or complex proposals into component parts for ease in decision making.

Whenever a facilitator thinks a consensus has been found, they can check for consensus by asking for a show of thumbs up or thumbs down. If thumbs up, the facilitator asks the note taker to read back the proposal word for word to ensure accurate note taking.

If anyone puts a thumbs down, they should be given an immediate opportunity to explain their concern and be asked how a change of wording would make a difference in their decision. Or, they can be asked if they want to express their concern, but not block the groups decision.

N Street Co-housing, 1992

Appendix E - Weighing Exercises

Groups need processes whereby they can focus on the most important items in a list of options. Weighing exercises force individual participants to have to choose. Too often arguments are over the minor issues that aren't even the group's priority. By prioritizing, the group is much more likely to reach consensus by letting go of these minor issues and focusing on what is really important. Time is saved and decisions are more easily made.

A standard technique involves forcing participants to have to only choose up to one third of the total options. When the group's "votes" are compiled, usually

one third rise to the top, one third have a medium number of votes, and one third and a few to no votes. And usually every participant sees at least one of their priority items in the top third. This makes it easier for them to let go of their personal priorities that did not have as much support by everyone in the group.

Examples of weighing exercises include:

1.   Prioritizing of Lists on Flip Charts During a Break

The most important step in this process is to have a clear list of items to which "votes" can be given. The previous step should have been to categorize and clarify each of the options. If time is available, they can be rewritten on new paper with clear lines between each category. If not, the recorder can draw lines between categories on the list of brainstormed ideas. It should be clear where a participant places their vote.

Clear instructions need to be made before the weighing exercise and "vote" occurs. Without it, people can violate the spirit of the process in order to unfairly advance their own issues. By announcing the instructions and letting people know of this concern, the vast majority of people will be honest. If there is concern that "vote" piling may occur, the instructions can include direction that everyone sign with their initials.

Most prioritization exercises use the N/3 method to determine how many "votes" each participant has. N is the total number of items for which choices can be made. Thus if there are 11 options, the N/3 method would give each participant four votes. Votes cannot be compiled. They either must divided up among their four (N/3) priorities or not used.

Sticky dots or hash marks with felt pens are most often used. Initials are used if there is a concern that cheating might occur.

2.   Prioritizing of Lists Using the Hand Raising Method.

When there isn't time for a break or time for participants to walk around and cast their "votes" in a weighing exercise, a quicker method involves participants remaining in their seats and "voting" by raising their hands.

The facilitator clarifies the options and asks participants to write down or make a mental note of the N/3 that they would choose. Then the facilitator starts at the top of the list again and asks for votes with the honor system being used so that no one votes for more than N/3 options. The facilitator records the votes next to each item.

3.   Prioritizing of lists by secret ballot.

There are a number of reasons why a secret ballot may be the best option for the facilitator to select. Participants may feel pressure to cast their "votes" with their allies or bosses and not for what they truly think are the most important items. The "herd" instinct can take over where participants start voting for items that already have the most votes, and not for what they believe. Timing might be better with a "ballot" approach.

The simplest way to do a secret ballot is to number the choices. Then the facilitator announces how many "votes" each participant has and asks them to write up to N/3 choices (by number) on a slip of paper. All "ballots" with excess votes will be disqualified. Participants vote. "Ballots" are collected and counted by two or three trusted people who announce the results.

More elaborate processes involve clearly written out choices in ballot format for the votes to occur. This method involves more preparation time to organize so that clear ballots can be prepared beforehand with the exact wording for each choice.

Once the Weighing Exercise has been Completed.

These are called "weighing" exercises and not "votes" because this is a step in the process of reaching consensus, not the end. For example, an organization has ten possible goals towards which they could work. The board of directors uses the N/3 method to each record their own priorities. After the votes are compiled, for example, two are near consensus goals and two are just a few total votes lower. Then there is a set of three goals that have significantly lower total votes and three goals that have only one or no votes. The board of directors uses the results of the weighing exercise to choose their top three or four goals for the new strategic plan. At this time an argument can be made to move up a lower vote total item for reconsideration. It has occurred where the weighing process itself helped uncover new reasons why a lower priority item should move up for larger consideration.

The facilitator calls for a proposal or makes a proposal for what should be the top priorities from the list, based on the weighing exercise and the additional discussion. Consensus is much easier to achieve.

Appendix F - From Positions to Interests

Draft by Kevin Wolf based on a variety of sources including Marianne Moutoux.

The traditional method of settling disputes is through the courts. In that system there are assumptions such as: the parties must take sides, their interests are competing, the solutions and positions are in conflict, and there are winners and losers.

POSITIONS (How)

Positions are proposals as to HOW interests might be satisfied and resolved through addressing the real issues of the dispute. Negotiating from positions is problematic. They are usually:

Less Flexible: They define the problem too narrowly, one possible solution out of many

Polarizing: Each person's positions takes in only his/her needs. The two sides usually support opposite solutions to a problem. It fosters a contest between two parties' positions.

Generating more problems than they resolve: Each person comes in thinking that his/her position is the best or creates a better position for getting a better "deal" at the end. When a position is stated it often becomes more invested with emotional commitment giving it strength, even though some of this might be "acting". As a person becomes more emotionally invested in his/her position and ego is on the line, change becomes more difficult.

INTERESTS (Why)

Conflicts and disputes have their roots in:

- Interests not being met

- Interest being infringed upon by others

- Interests of one being in conflict with another

Interests may be broadly defined as principles, values, or belief systems, all of which need to be satisfied if the conflict is to be resolved equitably, practicably, desirably and durably. Interests are what people are about and are therefore not negotiable.

Asking "why" one's own or an "opponent's" proposed solution is being advanced uncovers the underlying interests. This clarifies which interests they have in common and leads to identifying common goals and strategies.

Interests are:

Related to basic human needs. (physical security, health, economic security, self-respect, self-esteem, recognition, belonging, beauty, order, knowledge)

Reasons why a person feels and acts in a particular way. "I want to get rid of the dog (position) because I think I will gain sleep (need) which will satisfy my health interest (need)"

Non-Negotiable, Priority Negotiable. Because interests are fulfilling a perceived need of the individual they are nonnegotiable. However, they are subject to change, since the satisfaction of one interest can cause the primary interest to become less important. Example: I want a raise, money (economic security) which was a primary interest, becomes less important when the interests of self-esteem and recognition are met through a change in job title and possibly responsibility or hours they work or other needs being satisfied.

Satisfaction. Satisfaction reaching key milestones leads to greater trust and belief in what is possible. As satisfaction with the process and some of the results continues, it leads to long term resolution and improved relationships. Both parties are satisfied because they have each had needs met.

Example: Two children are arguing over who gets the last orange. As the parent-mediator, you intervene since your interest is peace and quiet. The fair position that immediately comes to mind is to cut the orange in half and give half to each child. To make it more equitable, one child cuts the orange and the other chooses. This solution does not fulfill the needs of either party since half an orange does not fulfill the needs or interests of either one. You begin a process of aiding in the discovery of the interests of each person. You discover that Joe is thirsty and hungry and needs the juice of a whole orange to quench his thirst. Sue is making icing for a cake and needs the rind from the whole orange. Rather than splitting the orange in half, the solution lies in giving Sue the rind and Joe the juice. The conflict has been resolved because the interests of both parties have been identified and met. This is a win-win situation

Conclusion:

We are not used to thinking in terms of interests. Often we are unaware of our own interests. Therefore, every aspect of the collaborative negotiation process should help to uncover, reprioritize, and satisfy the interests of the disputants. In active listening, the mediator/facilitator and both sides are discovering the stated or underlying interests of the parties. Through establishing goals and prioritizing lists of brainstorming solutions, possibilities are brought forth to satisfy the interests of both parties. The interests of all parties must be met if the final written agreement is to provide long-term satisfaction.

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