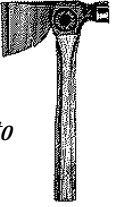




toolbox

On group decision-making

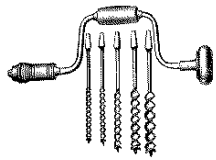


*Many of the challenges any county team encounters during the course of project work are the same or similar to those faced by other teams. With this issue **Mountain Promise** offers a new resource to Brushy Fork Associates, an occasional feature dedicated to sharing practical suggestions for dealing with concerns that often crop up as people work together for change. Think of these suggestions as tools in a team leadership toolbox.*

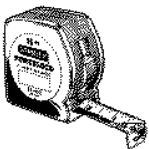
This first article is taken from a memo Peter Hille wrote to team members after a midterm meeting this summer. At the meeting the group had discussed group decision-making processes; Peter's memo sums up that discussion.



... Since you have several tough decisions ahead of you and a limited amount of time, I thought it might be handy to have in hand some of the guidelines we discussed the other day for consensus-based decision making:



- 1) Develop criteria that everyone agrees on, then apply these criteria to each of the choices.
- 2) As a general rule of thumb, it is easier to eliminate than to select. For example, if you go through your list of ideas and apply the criteria you develop, it may become obvious that some items should be eliminated and others definitely included. You need only to discuss the ones in between, those that are not obviously eliminated or included. This is much easier than discussing the relative merits of each point.
- 3) When there is disagreement among group members take a poll to see where everyone stands.
- 4) If only one or two people disagree, they must consider whether or not their objections merit holding things up. Everyone must be willing to be flexible and to ask themselves how important their reservations really are.
- 5) If someone believes their objection really is important, they must say so. There may be an important point that the group has overlooked. That group member should state their thought clearly and concisely, without going on at great length.
- 6) If the group is split, or if a lone dissenter feels quite strongly, don't just kick the issue back and forth endlessly or take a long time to re-explain positions. Figure out which aspects everyone does agree on and try to find a third alternative that suits all parties.
- 7) If you find yourself disagreeing with someone, be sure to really listen to what they are saying—you may not have understood their point. Also, the other person will be more likely to be flexible once they know they have been heard and understood. It may help to restate their point back to them, something like, "Now let me see if I've got this—you're saying that ..." This not only makes sure that YOU understand their point, it also lets THEM know that you understand.



- 8) If the group gets stuck on one thing, go on to something else. Stay within the time allotted. Come back to the sticky point later in the meeting, or put it on the agenda for the next meeting, or assign a subcommittee to work on it.



Good luck! You are all doing a great job. Remember that each of you has different and unique skills you contribute to the team, and if you appear to disagree with someone, it may be because they are seeing an aspect of the problem that you've missed. So, listen to each other, be patient, be flexible and don't forget to have fun!

