

The Five Keys To Getting Unstuck

By Denise OBerry

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Have you ever been in a meeting where it seems that one participant is "holding out" on completing the group decision? It's a frustrating experience and often times, causes the whole group to give up. Don't give up! Try the following techniques and let us know if they helped you get un-stuck.

Separate Positions From Concerns

When a member stands on a position during the decision making process, it is normally driven by his or her specific concerns. It's the teams responsibility to help the member identify those concerns and suggest ways of addressing them in the decision.

A useful question for surfacing concerns is -- "What is most important to you in this situation?" Focus on this point to help the person reach their comfort level.

Lower The Risk Of The Decision

Some members are uncomfortable when they feel a decision is irreversible. This can be accommodated by framing the course of action in a manner that lowers the risk level. You can lower risk by:

- Suggesting that the team pilot the recommended course of action for a limited trial period.
- Minimizing the initial area of impact for the recommended course of action.
- Looking for ways to assure the team member(s) that their concerns will be addressed.
- Asking the concerned members to be part of the subteam responsible for monitoring the progress of the decision.

Focus On Areas Of Agreement

Your team could be moving right along in the decision making process when a team member just gets stuck on a minor point of disagreement. It's very easy, at this point, for the team to forget all the positive progress they have made toward a decision, and focus their attention on the area of disagreement.

If you see this happening in your team, make a point to place the disagreement within the context of agreement. List all of the points on which the members agree, then summarize the area of disagreement. Focus on the small areas of disagreement until each member is satisfied.

Temporarily Table Areas Of Disagreement

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If your team is still stuck after using the technique above, write the issue down on a flip chart or board and let it cool off a while. Move on to other areas of discussion. Often, just leaving a subject for a short time, then revisiting it helps the discussion get moving again.

Don't Trash The Bad AND The Good

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Sometimes members will reject an entire idea because they have concerns regarding a small part of the decision. In this type of situation, the good part of the idea is being thrown out with the bad.

If this happens during your meeting, ask the resisting members to specifically describe those parts of the solution on which they agree. Help them identify those parts they disagree on and work with them to allay any concerns.

For ultimate success during team discussions or decisions, remember the following key points.

- Keep your discussion objective and focused on issues
- Ask for opinions and suggestions, especially from quiet participants
- Seek out areas of agreement in different alternatives
- Use the word "because" frequently - "I recommend this because..."
- Avoid win/lose positions
- Don't lay down ultimatums
- Avoid voting, averaging, or flipping coins - these techniques are only appropriate for minor team decisions
- Don't give in merely to placate or reward a dissenter
- Don't bargain - "I went along with your idea last time, so this time you should support my idea."
- Continue to clarify the goal, problem or opportunity
- Don't sulk if your idea isn't the final team decision
- If a stalemate occurs, reschedule the meeting to give time for reflective thinking

Group decisions take more time, however involving all members in the process builds "buy-in" and saves time in implementation. And, it really will feel great and create more success in the long run!

Denise O'Berry helps small business owners identify and execute the steps to grow their business. Find out more at <http://www.whatspossible.com>

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