

Strategies for Effective Communication

Copyright © 2009 William Meacham. Permission to reproduce is granted provided the work is reproduced in its entirety, including this notice. Contact the author at <http://www.bmeacham.com>.

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Communication Skills.....	3
Be Direct.....	3
Appreciate.....	3
Make I-Statements	3
Giving Criticism.....	4
Receiving Criticism.....	5
Paraphrasing.....	5
Active Listening	5
Effective Appreciation.....	6
Touch	7
Being Assertive.....	8
Meeting Skills (Cooperative Rules of Order).....	9
How to be a Chairperson or Facilitator	16
Checklist for the Facilitator.....	16
Setting the Tone.....	16
Agenda	17
Values.....	17
How To Be an Effective Group Member.....	18
Before the meeting.....	18
During the meeting.....	18
After the meeting.....	19
Decision-Making and Problem-Solving.....	20
Consensus	21
Six-Step Problem-Solving Technique.....	22
Making Consensus Work.....	23
Agreements.....	25
How To Be A Leader	27
Self-Evaluation.....	29
Appendix: Modified Consensus Procedure.....	30
Resources.....	32

Introduction

By nature we all have the capacity to be loving, caring, cooperative people with great enthusiasm for life and the ability to come up with creative solutions for all kinds of problems. But because we've been hurt, we often inhibit these naturally good qualities. We need to re-learn how to relate to each other effectively. This paper gives some practical advice as to how to do it. It is oriented toward working in groups and in meetings, but the skills are useful for all our interactions. It is oriented toward voluntary associations such as cooperatives, clubs and non-profit organizations, but the skills work in corporate and hierarchical settings as well.

In a meeting situation, we need to distinguish between interpersonal relations and business. Obviously each affects the other, but it is wise to keep them separate. Often disagreements that are ostensibly about some planned project or system of doing things are really conflicts of personality, resentment, hurt feelings, etc. If the real conflict is not identified it will be difficult to resolve it. It is helpful to have two different kinds of meetings, one for personal relations and one for business. Or, when hidden agendas and unspoken personal conflicts are interfering with business, stop talking about business and deal with the interpersonal issues, and then go back to business.

In a personal situation, we need to distinguish between the present and the past. We often react to another person in the same way we reacted to a someone in our past, for instance our mother or father. Or, we might find ourselves treating another person in the way we were treated by a parent or other authority figure. But that person is not our parent. We need to stay conscious of what is happening in the present.

The skills listed in this paper will help you distinguish between interpersonal and business issues and stay in the present.

Communication Skills

Be Direct

The most important thing, whether in a meeting or a small group or a one-to-one encounter is this: **Be direct and honest and say what you feel.**

If feelings are left unsaid, they lie around inside you and corrode your being. You feel pervasively lousy, you don't treat people right, you are uptight, and you don't think clearly. If you say what you are feeling about someone directly to them, then it is out in the open and can be dealt with. You don't have to be afraid of being around them, they don't have to wonder why you are acting strange toward them, and you can both come to some kind of agreement or understanding about how to deal with each other.

Appreciate

Some of us tend to keep our negative or critical feelings to ourselves, so it is important to be direct and air them. But don't take it to an extreme. Being direct and honest also applies when you are feeling good about someone. Our culture does not stress the importance of telling people when we appreciate them, assuming such things don't need to be said. Well, they do. **Appreciation is as important as criticism**, and it is wise to be open and direct with both. Appreciation may, in fact, be more important. It is a way of reminding ourselves, as well as the other person, of the truth of the matter. Even if we are feeling upset with someone, they are inherently a fine and good person. It helps both them and us to say so.

Make I-Statements

When there is something we don't like about someone or what they are doing, we need to say so in a way that is not threatening. The key is to **make I-statements, not you-statements**. Say something about yourself and about how the other person's behavior is affecting you, but don't make accusations about them.

Here is a model for how to make an I-statement: "*When* (unacceptable behavior) happens, *I* feel (speaker's feeling) *because* (consequence of the behavior to the speaker)." Here are some examples:

You-statement	I-statement
You never get here on time! You just don't care!	When meetings don't start on time I get irritated because I have a limited amount of time and I don't get to do the other things I want to do.
You keep butting in! You're not listening!	When you interrupt me, I get frustrated because I don't get a chance to be heard and I feel left out.

The difference between these two types of statements is that the you-statement sets up a definition of the situation that does not allow the other person any space. It is

accusatory and likely to make the other person feel threatened and react defensively. In the I-statement you are making a statement about yourself. It defines you, not them, so they are less likely to feel threatened. When you point out a specific behavior, it gives them a handle on what you are concerned about and does not make them feel labeled or pigeon-holed. This gives them a space to respond, to perceive you and themselves in as clear a way as possible. The you-statement's label or broad generalization is often a kind of verbal punishment, and punishment is not an effective way to get people to change. There is no punishment in the I-statement. Rather, it expresses clearly how you feel and perceive the situation, thereby encouraging others to do likewise.

There is a corollary to this: often we make generalized you-statements instead of I-statements. For instance: "Well, you just get depressed when the living room is all trashed out" as if everyone naturally feels this way. Actually, many don't, and it would be more direct and honest to say, "I get depressed when I see the living room all trashed out." That way you're not making a generalization that someone could disagree with and thereby get off on a tangent; you're saying how you feel about it, which is the real issue.

Another corollary: **Say what you want.** It is OK to ask for all of what you want all the time! You may not get it, but it is an honest way of starting a rational problem-solving discussion that is more likely to meet your needs than being reticent and hoping others will meet them for you.

Giving Criticism

Giving criticism can be hard, but it is important. Usually it is something about what a person does or the way they do it that we don't like, rather than the person himself or herself, so it is important to give specific examples.

Vague	Specific
"I'm always afraid to open my mouth for fear of getting jumped on."	"When I suggested we let someone get labor credit for making a garden, you said – and I perceived this as snappish and hostile – ‘No, we don't need a gardener!’"
"The kitchen was a mess this morning!"	"The sink had a dirty frying pan and three dirty dishes in it, and I didn't like it."

The specific statement is more accurate and tells exactly what you don't like. It avoids disputes about labels (people can disagree about what is or is not "a mess") and gives the other person something concrete to deal with.

Another thing that will help is to **say something positive first.** This is important in group evaluation sessions to avoid a feeling of being "sunk" by all the things people don't like, and in individual conversations to take the edge off the criticism and remind yourself that there are aspects of the person you like and it's just a particular behavior you don't like, not them as a person. It makes the atmosphere better.

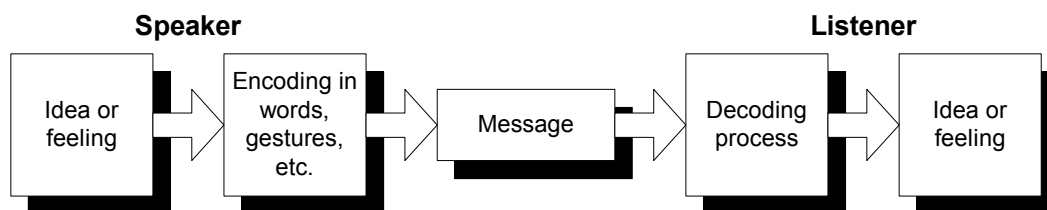
Receiving Criticism

There are some helpful ways to receive criticism too. Probably the most important is to **really listen**. This is hard sometimes; we tend to clam up defensively or mentally rehearse what we'll say back before the other person is even finished, or both. But this doesn't help clear communication, nor does it help you get a clear picture of yourself as others see you. If the other person feels they're really being heard, they're more likely to compromise and see your side of the story.

Paraphrasing

A good way to really listen is to paraphrase what the person has said to you repeating it back in your own words. Don't just parrot exactly what they say, but summarize it in your own words and tell them what you heard. For example: "I hear you saying that I come across as overbearing sometimes, and intimidate you, is that right?" This is also useful when there's no criticism: "So you really told him off." "You're saying, if your plan works the problem will be solved."

This is useful to make sure communication is really happening. The process of communication is complex; here is a model:



There is a lot going on between what the speaker thinks they said and what you hear, and unless they get some feedback and know whether they've been heard correctly, misunderstanding is likely. Paraphrasing is a way to give that feedback. If you have heard the other person correctly, they know it; and if you haven't, they get a chance to say it more clearly. In either case, communication is facilitated. It also gives you some space to consider what they are saying instead of blindly reacting.

Paraphrasing is not a cure-all and it would be tedious to do it all the time. Times when it is useful are

- when someone asks you for assurance that you've heard their message;
- when you are unclear about what they are saying and want to check your own understanding of it; and
- when things are getting rushed and confused and you want to slow things down.

Active Listening

A step beyond paraphrasing for content is feeding back what you perceive are the speaker's feelings. This is called active listening and helps the speaker feel understood on a deeper level. For example:

A: “Well, nuts! You don't have to be so bossy!”

B (active listening): “You're feeling annoyed because I said ‘Let's get on with the business,’ right?”

A: “Well, it's OK to want to get things done, but I didn't like the way you said that.”

B: “You felt that I was too abrupt or harsh.”

A: “Yes, that's it.”

Active listening – verbalizing and reflecting back the other person's feelings – is a way to help that person solve their own problems. It gives them a chance to release their negative feelings and think more clearly. It will work only if you can concentrate on feeding back the feelings and refrain entirely from judging the other, belittling the problems, jumping in to recount similar experiences of your own, or trying to suggest solutions. If the feelings are not fed back correctly, the other will either correct you or get frustrated and quit talking.

Effective Appreciation

Besides criticizing people, it is extremely important to appreciate them out loud. There are two ideas here, and both are important.

The first is to praise behavior that you like instead of just criticizing behavior you don't like. In terms of behavioral reinforcement, praise, or verbal reward, is a much more effective way of influencing others' behavior than criticism, or verbal punishment. Example: “I noticed that you left the kitchen clean for me. That was great; it made my work a lot easier.”

The other idea goes beyond this, however, to appreciating the other person as a person, leaving aside trying to change any specific behavior. If someone gets the idea that you are saying things to them only to manipulate their behavior, they'll resent it. But consider who they are really capable of being: an intelligent, creative, loving and cooperative person of marvelous complexity and worthy of extreme delight! (Some of these qualities may be hidden under imposed patterns of less pleasant behavior, but that doesn't mean they're not there.) Too often we don't feel and act like who we really can be, for lots of reasons, and it helps to be reminded of it. So when you see something you like about them, tell them about it: “Your work looks good.” “I like the way you are smiling.” “You think very clearly!” This creates a friendly atmosphere, makes people feel at home, and reinforces both your sense of yourself as a person who can do good things for others and their sense of being a worthwhile person.

Be specific in your appreciation. The more general, or global, your statement, the less effective it is. Consider the following examples:

General	Specific
"You are so smart!"	"I like the way you phrased the question. It helped us come up with good solutions."
"You are a very gifted artist."	"Your selection of colors and patterns is strikingly beautiful."
"You have lots of talent."	"You worked hard on that. I bet it feels good to have accomplished it."

The general statements do not give much information. The specific statements show more thoughtful attention on your part, thereby demonstrating that you care about the person. In addition, the general statements have the effect of encouraging a fixed mindset, a belief that one has a certain amount of talent or intellect and cannot do much to change it. The specific statements encourage a growth mindset, a belief that one can grow and improve by one's own efforts. The growth mindset is better for the person and, since they influence you by their interactions with you, better for you as well.

Touch

Finally, if people are hurting because their needs aren't being met it's hard for them to think clearly, act rationally, and interact cooperatively and lovingly. One need that often doesn't get met enough is the need for human touch. For emotional well-being everyone needs at least four hugs per day. A hug should be attentive, respectful and caring, not perfunctory, aggressive or sexually advancing. It's a way of affirming that both you and the person you are hugging are good, worthwhile people. It's a non-verbal appreciation, and therefore deeply meaningful and powerful. Many of us have learned to be embarrassed about touching. That's OK, blush and giggle, but hug your house-mates, friends and co-workers! (Unless, of course, physical contact is forbidden in your work situation. In that case, stick to verbal appreciations.)

Being Assertive

Sometimes you have to deal with people who are not interested in cooperating with you but try to manipulate you instead. Communication skills that work with people who cooperate with you may not work, or you may not have time to make them work, with people who are trying to get their way at your expense. You need skills to defend yourself.

Often if you demonstrate a little concern for them and their needs, while insisting that your needs also get met, they'll come around and work with you. Finding a way to get both people's needs met is better than one person winning and the other losing. But if their cooperative nature is too obscured and you don't have the time or energy to get to it, you need to assert yourself powerfully enough to get your needs met. Here are some verbal skills to help you; they involve persisting in saying what you want and offering no resistance to manipulative criticism.

People manipulate you by criticizing you through you-statements, trying to make you feel anxious, scared, ignorant, guilty or powerless. When someone tries to get you to do something you don't want this way, instead of giving in and acting on these feelings, simply repeat what you do want over and over again in a calm voice. This is called *broken record*, and is a form of I-statement. Don't act angry, irritated or loud; that just gives the manipulator more ammunition to criticize you with. Don't give excuses or reasons for what you want; that gives them something to argue with. Just keep calmly saying what you want over and over again, responding the same way to whatever they say. This technique works because your persistence wears them down and your calm manner doesn't aggravate them and gives them no excuse to treat you badly.

A way to defuse manipulative criticism is to verbally agree with it. This does not mean taking it to heart and believing it and feeling bad about yourself. It's more like Aikido, where you use your opponent's attack against them. Don't deny the criticism, don't get defensive, and don't counterattack with criticism of your own. Just say, "You may be right about that, but what I want is ..." You can even paraphrase what they said; the point is to avoid arguing with them and stick to what you want. This skill is called *fogging*, because you throw up a verbal fog bank that offers no resistance, and thus no way for them to keep arguing, but absorbs what they say and remains unmoved.

By refusing to act on feelings of inadequacy, guilt, etc., you give these feelings less hold over you, and thus people who try to arouse them to manipulate you have less hold over you. At some point, however, it is good to find a friend to talk to about them, allow yourself to feel and express them, discharge and get rid of them. They obscure the fact that you can be a powerful person, master of your life. You need to release them as well as refrain from acting them out.

Meeting Skills (Cooperative Rules of Order)

Meetings are one of the primary ways groups get things done, so it is important to make them work well. But when thinking about having a meeting, the first thing to decide is whether you really need one. Meetings serve three functions:

- Information-sharing, including progress review and training;
- Decision-making, including strategizing and brainstorming; and
- Building group morale.

If these functions are not served, or are not served well, people get aggravated and the group's efficiency suffers. Recurring meetings for no reason other than routine are deadly.

Here are some ways to avoid or cut down on meeting time:

- Spread information by sending around a memo or email to all who need to know, or posting it on a central bulletin board.
- Make a decision by sending a written proposal around with space for agreement, comment or proposed changes, or have an email discussion. Have a meeting only if disagreements are serious enough to need discussion to resolve them.
- Use individual, pair, or committee work instead of meetings with the whole group.
- Keep the number of people working on a project to the minimum needed to get it done; don't tie up the whole group needlessly.
- Don't have a meeting without preparation (see specific guidelines below).
- If what you really need is a social event to build group morale, have a party or a meal together instead of a meeting.

In general, the greater the level of group trust and the more routine the tasks or functions of the group, the less you need meetings of the whole group. The lower the group trust level and the more non-routine the task (more uncertainty about how to do it), the more you'll need group meetings. If you decide you do need a meeting, here are some tips on how to have an effective one. If you follow these guidelines, you will actually accomplish things in your meeting in a reasonable length of time.

➤ Before starting, keep in mind these three general guidelines:

- Know what you want to accomplish (see "agenda," below).
- Group members should be prepared with background information, clear statements of proposals and reasons for them, etc.

- Everyone should have enough self-discipline to stick to business and make the meeting work.

If everyone takes the attitude "What can I do right now to help this meeting work?" the meeting will be a success.

- Have a chairperson, or facilitator, somebody to call on people to speak and help the group stick to the agenda. It really helps to have somebody keeping an eye on the flow, directing talk away from irrelevant diversions, keeping track of the time, being sensitive to personal interactions, making sure everyone has a chance to speak, etc. These tasks may be shared with other people, such as a time-keeper, speaker's-list-keeper, vibes-watcher (see "other," below), but some one person should chair the meeting.
- Have an agenda. Post it or distribute it ahead of time so people will know what's to be discussed and can think about it ahead of time. Have established and well-publicized procedures for putting items on the agenda. Prioritize agenda items, putting the most important first (see "agenda review," below), and note needed decisions. Each agenda item should be as specific as possible, for instance a specific proposal instead of just the name of a topic. Include background material and desired outcome (decision, information-sharing etc.), as well as reasons for the proposal. Set a fixed time for the meeting, usually no more than two hours. Beyond this, people's attention wanes.
- Start on time. Don't reward latecomers by waiting for them; they'll soon learn to come on time. If they don't, tell them you don't like it, using an I-statement, and negotiate an agreement about when to start. Also, quit on time. Don't drain people's energy by prolonging the meeting. Your group should not be run by those who can tough it out to the end of a tedious meeting! If it is, the others will resent it and probably won't go along with decisions made after they leave. Quitting on time helps maintain good will for the next meeting.
- Start the meeting with some kind of personal sharing to draw people's attention to the here-and-now and start things off on a pleasant note. If it's a new group, introductions are in order. A good form of personal sharing is "news and goods," in which everyone takes a turn and tells the group something new and good in their life, something they are pleased about that they did or that happened to them recently.
- Next, have an agenda review. See if there is anything to be added or deleted; decide the order of what will be discussed; and decide how long to talk about each item, so everyone will know what to expect. Make time commitments explicit, both for each item and for the whole meeting. Time is a valuable resource; agreement on how to use it is crucial.

It is particularly important to decide the order of the agenda items. Almost invariably the first business item gets talked about the longest, the second the next longest, etc., so don't leave the really crucial issues last. Put the most important issue first, the next most important second, etc. Exceptions to this general rule are the following:

- If there's something that can obviously be dealt with quickly, put it near the beginning so people get a feeling of accomplishment and are encouraged to go on.
- To vary the pace and keep up interest. put short items in between ones that will require a lot of discussion.

Experiment with the agenda order over several meetings and find out what works best for your group.

If the meeting is long, schedule a break near the middle for stretching, relaxing and informal discussion.

Make sure everyone agrees with the reviewed agenda, the order of items, etc. Otherwise there may be resentment, which gets in the way of getting things done.

- Stick to the agenda. Keep the talk focused on the topic under discussion and avoid getting off into side-trips. This is everybody's job, but especially the chairperson's. Anyone can call "point of order" (see "speaking out of turn," below) to do this. Stick to the time allotted for each item too. Doing so rewards the group; not doing so can cause aggravation. If more time is needed, get group agreement on how much.

If things come up that need discussion but weren't on the agenda, put them on a "parallel agenda," sometimes known as a "parking lot," a list of things to be dealt with another time.

It is always possible to revise the agenda if it seems needed or helpful. Go back to Agenda Review and get everyone's agreement.

- Be clear about making decisions. All too often a few people will think a decision was made one way and others think it was made another way. Before going on to the next agenda item the chairperson or recording secretary should say, "My understanding is that we have decided such-and-such; is this right?" Get everyone to answer yes or no! Some may think silence means agreement while the silent person actually dissents.

The ideal decision is one made by unanimity or substantial consensus, (everybody agrees or at least agrees to go along even if they don't like it completely).

Sometimes majority rule may be necessary; if so, be sure the minority has had a chance to speak and doesn't feel railroaded. The important thing is to make sure a decision has been made and everyone knows it before going on to the next topic.

Here's the format for an action decision: Be sure everyone knows

- What is to be done
- Who will do it
- When it is due
- What the criteria are for knowing it's been done
- When there will be review and evaluation.

- Keep minutes. This will require a recording secretary to write down the decisions the group has made so you can refer back to it and not get into disputes between people's memories.. The secretary should write down all proposals (motions) and read them to the group before a vote or test for consensus so everyone is clear about what is being voted on. If the decision will have the effect of binding a legal entity, for instance, a corporate resolution by the Board of Directors of a corporation, record who made the motion, who seconded it, and what the vote was.

Type and distribute the minutes to group members and other relevant people as soon as possible after the meeting, and in any case before the next meeting.

- Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak. Some people are more assertive than others in a group discussion and may dominate it without even knowing it. Others are more retiring; this doesn't mean they don't have good ideas. The strong-willed people need to make a deliberate effort to hold themselves back a little, and the quieter ones need to assert themselves more. Luckily, there are ways to help this happen:
 - Keep a speaker's list. This is a procedure in which you write people's names down when they raise their hand and call on them by going down the list. This ensures that the aggressive types won't hog the show and the quieter ones get their chance. It also gives people a chance to think before they speak; they know they'll be called on and don't have to keep asking to be recognized. Of course you have to go by the list; it's no good for people to jump in out of order. Exception: the person who has the floor may ask someone for information; the person asked gets to answer, then the questioner still has the floor. Occasionally the chair or the list keeper should read the list of names so people know who's coming up.
 - Go around the circle or table, giving each person a turn to speak. This is useful when you really want everyone's input (although a person may pass without speaking). Depending on the issue it may be good to limit each person's time to speak.
 - Speaking tokens can equalize participation. Everyone gets the same number of tokens to begin with, say spoons or poker chips or whatever you have on hand. When a person speaks they put a token in the center. When they are out of tokens they can't speak any more. After all the tokens are in they get divided up and the process starts over.
 - If you can keep track of it without speaking tokens a good rule is: Nobody speaks twice until everyone has spoken once; nobody speaks four times until everybody has spoken twice.

In the author's experience, the speaker's list works best. If there's a controversial proposal it's good to go around the circle first, to get everyone's opinions, then use a speaker's list. It's possible to discuss two or more topics at the same time with the list, like computer time-sharing, if everyone knows and uses the procedure, but it's best if the topics are related to the agenda item being discussed.

- Here are some ways to speak out of turn:
 - "Point of information" is used to ask for information (not to give it!). Used to get someone to clarify their proposal or to get relevant facts.
 - "Point of order" is used to get the discussion back on the topic that is supposed to be being discussed, or to object to someone speaking out of turn.
 - "Point of personal privilege" is called when someone feels that personal feelings or conflicts are getting in the way of rational discussion. (This is an expansion of the use of this motion in Roberts Rules of Order, which is to benefit the well-being of the group or an individual by, for instance by opening a window or having the speaker talk louder, etc.) If there is general agreement that this is happening, discussion on the business topic should cease and people should deal with the interpersonal issue. This is a way to keep levels of interaction distinct. If personality conflicts are getting in the way of business functioning, they should be dealt with; otherwise the business won't be dealt with effectively.
- Make sure all business is dealt with. If an agenda item is not dealt with because of lack of time or inattention, the person who put it on the agenda may get resentful or frustrated. This will not help future meetings. Deal with business in one of the following ways:
 - Make a decision.
 - Refer it to a committee, either to make the decision or to bring back a recommendation. If it's to make a decision, the committee should report what the decision was.
 - Redefine the problem in different terms and set a time to deal with it.
 - Postpone the item to a definite time. Do this if the group needs to do more research.
 - Table the item indefinitely.
 - Delete the item from the agenda.

If an item is to be tabled or deleted, get the permission of the person who put it on the agenda to avoid resentment.

- Evaluate the meeting before adjourning. Get the group to say, in brainstorm fashion, first what was good about the meeting, then suggestions for how to improve next time. Write all this down and refer to it before the next meeting, so meetings will improve with time.
- Finish the meeting with hugs. Remember, everyone needs at least four hugs a day for emotional well-being.

Here are some other things that can be used to keep the meeting going well:

- Have the meeting inside a quiet room that doesn't have many distractions, such as large windows to the outside. Minimize interruptions. Have somebody else take phone calls, messages, visitors, etc. Doing these things will help keep people's minds on the business.
- Have everyone sit around a table, so there's room to put agendas, notepads, etc., and so everyone can see each other. If no table is available, arrange chairs in a circle or sit on the floor in a circle so everyone can see everyone else. Have everyone sit at the same level, all on chairs or all on the floor, so people feel like equals.
- Encourage everyone to bring a pencil or pen and paper so they can write down comments and questions, leaving their mind free to think about what's going on rather than remembering what they want to say.
- Use a big newsprint pad and magic markers or a blackboard and chalk to write the agenda and order the items. When an item is successfully dealt with, cross it off, perhaps with a flourish and a group cheer. This will maintain sense of accomplishment and liven the meeting. Write proposals on newsprint so everyone knows what's being discussed. The pad can be used for evaluation too, writing down people's comments.
- Time is very important. Schedule enough time to cover the agenda, or limit the agenda to fit the time available. Avoid times when people are likely to be irritable, like right before lunch or when they are expected to be doing something else. Use "dead times," like early in the morning or late in the afternoon (if you supply munchies!) for short meetings to save your days and evenings for other things. Use break time to relax and refresh during long meetings; it's also a good time for informal discussion to help people clarify their point of view without bogging down the whole group. Be clear about how long the break is and stick to it.
- Use "attention expanders" or "light and livelies," – short little games or exercises that get people moving and, usually, laughing – to break the pace between long, serious business items so people come back to business refreshed and with more attention.
- If there's a very controversial item, try breaking into small groups for discussion then bringing each group back to report to the group as a whole. This is a good way for everyone to speak and be heard and get everyone's ideas on the floor and save time too.
- The chairperson may wish to delegate some of his or her roles to other people, such as a list-keeper to write down people's names on the speaker's list and a timekeeper to remind the group shortly before the allotted time for an item is up.

Two other roles that can be useful are “vibes watcher” and “process observer.” The vibes-watcher pays attention to people's moods and interactions rather than the

business and intervenes when they see someone needing personal attention – somebody getting withdrawn, for instance, or frustrated and holding it in. Attention to the emotional climate and interpersonal relations can aid effective dealing with business; people should learn appropriate skills to deal with these areas. The process observer does not normally intervene during the meeting but watches what goes on in order to give feedback during the evaluation. This person will jot down notes about who tends to speak the most and least, when procedures are being used well and when they aren't, what kinds of behavior makes the meeting go smoothly and what doesn't, etc. This role is particularly useful when a group will be meeting many times, so people will get more and more skilled at meeting behavior and work together more effectively,.

In groups with a spiritual focus, another useful role is “keeper of the heart.” This person meditates or prays silently, without actively participating in the discussion. Doing so creates an atmosphere of harmony and, by example or by subtle influence, encourages the active participants to stay mindful, avoid harmful emotions and obsessions, and remember their connection with Spirit.

Poorly-run meetings are unpleasant, and people who have had bad experiences in them may expect meetings in general to be unpleasant as well. Avoid this by rewarding yourself in meetings: deal with the most important issues first, finishing the agenda, and ending on time, etc. The feeling of accomplishment is a powerful reward. Celebrate the end of the meeting with hugs, socializing, and appreciation of each other. You deserve it!

How to be a Chairperson or Facilitator

A facilitator is a helper; you are there to help the group achieve its goals. This section tells you how to accomplish this.

Checklist for the Facilitator

- Be aware of and think about the group as a whole; you are an observer as well as a participant.
- Direct the flow of talk so it is focused on the group's goals and everyone participates. The bigger the group the more active your role will have to be.
 - Use a speaker's list when necessary (explain it first).
 - Call on quiet people and gracefully hush domineering people.
- Remind the group of the primary focus when necessary.
- Clarify what's being said by paraphrasing and summarizing,
- Call for proposals; restate the proposal; test for consensus or conduct voting.
- Keep track of time.
- Write a "parallel agenda" of items that came up to be dealt with at another time.
- Manage conflict or misunderstanding, through the following:
 - Paraphrasing or active listening
 - Encouraging I-statements
 - Verbally getting in between combatants
 - Suggesting solutions.
- Give evaluative feedback; be positive and constructive.
- Encourage closure and evaluation at the end. Model for evaluation: first say what went well, then what to improve next time.

Setting the Tone

- Demystify your role; be sure everyone understands that you are a helper, not a boss.
- Encourage group members to take responsibility, to be in charge; don't let them make you a boss, and don't slip into being one (curb your own ego).
- Be conscious of others' emotional needs and when you can and cannot meet them.

- Be conscious of your own emotional needs and in what ways it is and is not appropriate to meet them in your role.

Agenda

Here is a brief outline of how to order a discussion or workshop meeting:

- 1) Introductions and personal space.
- 2) Explain role of facilitator, techniques to be used etc., if necessary.
- 3) Agenda review.
- 4) Discussion, or whatever the business of the meeting is.
- 5) Evaluation and closure.

Values

This model of group facilitation embodies certain values:

- Peerness: everyone is valuable and has something to contribute.
- Autonomy: everyone is in charge of their life and contribution to the meeting.
- Cooperation: all work together to meet collective goals.
- Honesty: encourage honesty about opinions and feelings; self-disclosure fosters mutual trust.
- Power: everybody has personal power (ability to get things done), and can use it to help (or hinder) the meeting.

How To Be an Effective Group Member

As a member of a group you have a lot of power, and you can use it to help the group work well or to hinder it. By "power" I mean the ability to get things done; I don't mean coercion, or imposing your will on others without their consent. These are two different things. Power in this sense is a good thing, a positive value. This section contains some ways to use your power constructively to help your meetings run well and accomplish the group's goals.

The most important thing is attitude. Be in charge, whether or not you are the designated leader or chairperson. Think to yourself "I'm in charge here. It is up to me to see that things run well." Think about the needs of the group as a whole, not just what you want to get out of it. Being in charge does not mean being a dictator; it means figuring out what you can do to help. In this sense, it is best if everyone is in charge; the group will work if at least one person is in charge; but if nobody is in charge things will fall apart.

Before the meeting

Get prepared. Read the minutes of the previous meeting(s). Submit items for the agenda beforehand, with background information, desired outcome, and reasons for proposals. Read the agenda, including background information, and know what you want the meeting to accomplish. Get there on time and bring materials needed (information, pen and paper, etc.) Schedule your time so you won't be interrupted (no phone calls, emails, messages, visitors, etc.; have someone else take these for you). Think out and organize ahead of time any presentation you will make. Begin informally discussing agenda items in advance and start to formulate your ideas.

Before submitting an agenda item, figure out the following:

- What you want the group to do about it (for instance, make a decision, make a recommendation, or merely find out about it.)
- Whether dealing with it in a meeting is the best way for you to get what you want.
- Whether you can give the group enough information for it to give you what you want.
- How long you want to spend on it.

If you are clear on these things beforehand the group won't get in a discussion that is not appropriate or relevant, or without enough information, or not knowing why the issue was brought up in the first place.

During the meeting

Know and use communication skills and meetings skills, and remind and help others to use them as well.

Have self-discipline. Stick to the agenda. Don't blindly insist on your opinion without listening to others; use listening skills to be sure you understand them. Avoid disruptive jokes, sarcasm, asides, etc.

Know and say what you want. Introduce your agenda item in terms of the desired outcome: "I want a decision on ..."; "I want to inform the group about ..."; "I want to brainstorm a few minutes on ..."; etc. This will save time trying to define what the issue is.

Once you've introduced an issue, get as much information out about it as you can. Defining the problem clearly is crucial to avoid wasted effort. Then follow the six-step problem-solving technique (below) to make a decision. Look for constructive solutions that will enable everyone to get what they want.

Participate actively; don't hold back feelings or opinions. But contribute only when you have something new to add. If you don't understand something, ask for clarification, and paraphrase what you hear to be sure you've got it.

Encourage others to participate too. Use listening skills to clarify what they are saying

Keep notes on what you agree to do after the meeting.

After the meeting

Do what you have agreed to do.

Pass on information and decisions others need to know about.

Keep quiet about anything that might put someone else in a bad light. Don't gossip; instead appreciate others for what they do well or what they do that you like. Backbiting destroys group morale; appreciation builds it.

If there's a problem between you and someone else, go to them directly to work it out, using communication skills.

Don't complain about a decision you agreed to. If you have second thoughts, bring them up at the next meeting, or in some other formal way to the whole group.

Start preparing for the next meeting.

Decision-Making and Problem-Solving

Who should make decisions and how they should be made is a controversial topic. The oppressive society around us denies us our power by making decisions for us and coercing or manipulating us. In reaction, many groups have insisted that everybody should be involved in all decisions. One early formulation of this in Austin was “Decisions should be made by those affected by the decisions, and people should have input to the decisions in proportion to how much they will be affected by them.” This is a fine principle, but not the only criterion for decision-making, and if carried too far can result in extreme inefficiency and paralysis of the group.

Three criteria for evaluating a decision are:

- Its rationality, or workability; i.e., how well it solves the problem it addresses.
- How well it is accepted by those who are affected by it and who must carry it out; how committed people are to implementing it.
- The amount of time it takes to make the decision.

There are various forms of decision-making, and each has good and bad aspects. On a continuum from individual to group, they are:

- Autocratic: one person makes the decision. Good aspects: fastest, good in a crisis. Bad aspects: less likely to be the most rational decision, less likely to be accepted by others,
- Consultative: one person decides with advice from others. Good aspects: fast, more rational. Bad: takes more time, may lack acceptance by others.
- Minority: decision by those with special interest or expertise. Good: high rationality, decision by experts. Bad: may not consider all points of view, may not be accepted by others.
- Voting with majority rule. Good: most people are familiar with the process; can work with any size group; can lead to rational decisions if used properly. Bad: win-lose mentality may not yield most rational decisions; lack of acceptance by losers; can be manipulated; can be cumbersome.
- Consensus: substantial agreement; everyone agrees to go along with the decision even if they have reservations about it. Good: highly rational decision because of input from all and synthesis of ideas; elicits more commitment. Bad: may be time-consuming; progress can be blocked by minority; may be cumbersome in a large group.
- Unanimity: everyone totally agrees. Good: maximum commitment. Bad: almost impossible to attain with more than two people!

Various forms excel in meeting different evaluation criteria. Autocratic is fastest. Consensus or unanimity elicit the greatest commitment. If it has enough information, a minority of experts probably makes the most rational decisions.

The key to effective decision-making is information. If a group does not have sufficient information, it should not make a decision, regardless -of how "democratic" it may appear to be. The rationality of a decision is in direct proportion to the amount of relevant information available. To make effective decisions, the group members must prepare by collecting information, hearing all points of view, and thinking carefully.

To save time, a decision should be made by the smallest group that can reasonably make it. A committee with representatives of different views can save a lot of time by gathering information and making the decision, then bringing it to the larger group for ratification.

Consensus

The main controversy is over the relative merits of parliamentary procedure (majority rule, Robert's Rules of Order) versus consensus decision-making. Both of these methods can work, but consensus is preferable if the group has the time and will to make it work.

Robert's Rules are very formal and structured, and useful for large groups in which getting the business done is a priority and it is agreed that personal feelings among the members are to be taken care of outside the meeting. The process is quite logical and works well if everybody understands it. If some know more than others, they can manipulate the process unfairly; and even if nobody is malicious, if people don't know the process it can bog down and be frustrating. Since discussion can be cumbersome, it's good to hash out details of proposals in smaller groups such as committees before bringing a motion to the main body for a vote. A knowledgeable and firm chair is a must. Its biggest drawback is that it can foster competition to win votes instead of working together to find the best solution, so rationality may suffer. Losers may be resentful and not contribute wholeheartedly to the group or even, deliberately or not, block actions they don't agree with.

Consensus means "united judgment." It entails getting unanimous or at least substantial agreement. Rather than motions that are accepted or defeated (win or lose), the group attempts to find a solution that is acceptable to all, so everybody wins. (Even if not everybody agrees completely with the proposed solution, everybody agrees to give it a try.) Consensus relies on persuasion, not pressure. It fosters creativity in finding solutions, holistic understanding of the problem, and respect for everyone's thinking. Decisions are more workable because everyone's ideas are included, and generally everyone is more committed to making the solution work because they understand it clearly and they had an integral part in choosing it. The longer decision-making time may be offset by shorter implementation time once everyone agrees.

There are some potential drawbacks: stubborn people can block consensus, making a tyranny of the minority; and the process can be too slow to react to fast-moving events, in effect forcing a decision on the group through its inaction,

Consensus works best in small groups, although it has been used successfully in quite large groups by breaking into small groups for discussion and returning to the whole several times. It is suitable for groups whose members value their association highly. It is not so effective in groups whose members don't know and basically trust each other, because it may require agreement to proceed despite reservations. This is more likely if people value group unity more than their side's winning. It requires a commitment to make it work, respect for others, patience, and a skillful facilitator (chairperson).

Six-Step Problem-Solving Technique

The big question is how to achieve consensus. A systematic method for reaching consensus is the six-step problem-solving technique. This is useful for all sorts of problems where concrete needs are to be met. It is not so useful in cases of conflicts over basic beliefs, values, etc., unless these can be shown to have tangible effects on the needs of others. It is away of finding solutions to problems that meet everybody's needs, and can be used to find solutions to group problems as well as to resolve conflicts between individuals or groups. Here are the six steps:

1. Define the problem in terms of needs, not competing solutions. The biggest obstacle to successful problem-solving is too-hasty grasping for solutions. The problem must be defined clearly first!

Doesn't work	Works
"We need to have a Board retreat; when can we have it?" (presupposes solution)	"The board needs to work together more effectively."

Bring out as much information as you can. State your needs clearly, using I-statements. Encourage others to do the same, and verify your understanding of their point of view through paraphrasing and active listening. Don't be in a hurry. Define the problem to include everybody's needs, and get agreement on the statement of the problem.

2. Brainstorm possible solutions. Think creatively and encourage everyone to participate, Write down all suggestions, if possible on a big paper or blackboard. Allow no criticism or evaluation at this point, no discussion, except to clarify a proposed solution. This is the creative part of the process; avoiding criticism stimulates good, innovative thinking. Apparently unworkable solutions may contain the germ of something that will work; two partial solutions might be joined to form something much better; etc. If things bog down, try restating the problem in terms of needs. Keep going until everyone sees several solutions they are willing to work with. This is crucial, because the point is to get a solution that meets everyone's needs. Generally it will become apparent when to move on: when you have generated several reasonably feasible solutions or when one clearly stands out as superior.

3. Evaluate the suggested solutions. Good communication and group process skills are crucial here; make sure everyone gets a chance to speak, and use paraphrasing and active listening to be sure communication is happening. Use I-statements to state your views clearly. Everyone should be honest about their feelings and needs and state them openly. Eliminate solutions that are unacceptable to someone. Think critically: are there good points to build on? Flaws to be rejected? A new solution or an improvement on a previous one may come up. This step should result in several solutions that are acceptable to everyone.
4. Choose the best solution, acceptable to everyone. Discuss all the alternatives, even if one seems obviously the best. Don't try to push a solution on the others; remember the goal of consensus, to reach a unified judgment, freely chosen. Everyone should make a commitment to try the chosen solution. State it clearly, get agreement on it, write it down for future reference.
5. Implement, the solution. Decide who will do what by when. Decide how to tell if the solution is working or not. Pick measurable, objective criteria to avoid subjective judgments that may be perceived as unfair. Pick a time to get together and evaluate how well the solution is working.
6. Evaluate the solution at an agreed-on time while it's in progress and after it's all over. Agree that decisions are always open to mutually-acceptable revision. If some people are having trouble doing what they said they would, look for unmet or unidentified needs that are getting in the way. Go back to step one and go through the process again. Evaluation is a reviewing, checking and monitoring process, necessary to see how well the needs are being met, and how well the group is achieving its original purpose.

Making Consensus Work

For consensus to work, several things are necessary:

- A good attitude: the idea that a highly rational, mutually acceptable solution can be reached best by tapping the resources of everyone in the group.
- Focusing on solving the problem rather than on winning a battle or having your ideas prevail.
- Balancing being open to influence by others and being firm in your own ideas.
- Using communication skills to make sure you are understood and you understand others.

The most critical thing is to stay rational, to deal with issues, not personalities. The whole point is to come to the most rational decision, based on all the input available. If personal feelings are getting in the way, stop and deal with them before going on with the process. If you are under time pressure, make an effort to think clearly anyway and deal with them later, but deal with them in any case.

If you are in the minority and agreement is hard to reach, you have to weigh the value of continued opposition. Which is more important, getting your way or getting on with the group's project? If it is really important to you, don't give up. Be open to influence

from others, but be firm in your opinions. It has happened that a single person changed the mind of a whole group, which was on the verge of deciding differently, and everyone agreed that the new decision was better. It is always possible to find a rational solution that meets everybody's needs

If the issue isn't that important to you, you might go along with the prevailing view, valuing a speedy decision more than having your own way. Or you might agree to try the majority's solution but reserve the right to bring the issue up again if more information, is found. In this case you don't lose, you redefine the situation: based on current evidence the group decides one way, but more evidence might cause it to question its analysis and reexamine the decision. Try to spell out just what such evidence would be. This is part of step six, deciding when and under what circumstances to re-evaluate the solution.

If the group does not reach consensus in a reasonable length of time, it must choose between deciding on some other basis, usually majority rule, or deferring the decision until more thought, input and discussion can yield agreement. If the question is so important that substantial agreement is necessary – if, for instance, there is a principle involved that the group doesn't want to compromise – end the discussion without a decision but with an agreement to meet again, and in the meantime let everyone find ways to discharge emotions that are inhibiting clear thinking and reflect on the issue some more. If a timely decision is necessary – for instance, if inaction would force a decision on the group because of external events – then the group should have an alternate method of decision-making ready, possibly majority rule, or a two-thirds or three-quarters majority.

Agreements

Agreements are the foundation of any kind of workable, non-coercive interaction between people. An agreement is a verbal, explicit pledge that you will do something, giving the person to whom you pledge the right to expect that you will do it. It may be unilateral, with nothing promised in return, but is more usually reciprocal, an exchange: I'll do this if you'll do that. For a group to work well, agreements must be taken seriously and honored. They are the essence of coordination of people in a humanistic way, replacing coercion, threats, unilateral orders, and manipulation. The whole point of consensus decision-making is to come to agreement in the group about what to do. The more highly people value group unity, the more they must be committed to honoring their agreements.

So what can you do if agreements are not kept? It will do no good to resort to coercion or manipulation. If you do the results will be reduced communication, motivation to proceed and trust; and increased costs in time and energy spent enforcing your decision, conflict and attempts to manipulate or coerce you back, and alienation and stress. Instead, use non-coercive methods. Here is a list, ranked from least to most severe:

1. Remind the person of what they agreed to do.
2. Make an I-statement of how you feel about it, including concrete consequences to you and what you're trying to do. Also point out consequences to what the group is trying to do. Appeal to the person's rationality and concern for the group's cohesion, goals and purposes. Caution: avoid manipulating them, making them feel guilty or inadequate. Keep it rational.
3. There's a reason why they aren't keeping their agreement; find out what it is. Use active listening to see if they have a need that is not being met, perhaps one that was not identified in the original analysis of the problem. Use the problem-solving technique to find a way to meet their needs as well as yours and the group's.
4. Be their counselor, or find someone else who can. Give them space to discharge feelings that are blocking rational action. Often a third person who has no stake in the issue is best; the person may trust them more than you.
5. Bring the problem back to the group. This is step six of the problem solving technique, evaluation. It may be necessary to redefine the problem and go through the process again.

If there is a recurrent problem with someone not doing what they agree to, the group will have to take stronger action. Although, given enough time and attention, rational agreement and action can always be reached, it may not be worth the group's time and energy to keep struggling with it. In that case, stronger measures are necessary:

6. The group may agree to avoid giving the person certain responsibilities in the future. If the person has trouble honoring agreements only in certain areas and is competent in others, this could work.

7. If it's a business situation, for instance where a collective member or employee has agreed and is expected to meet certain performance standards, specific consequences for specific levels of achievement should be outlined. If they meet certain standards they get a raise, if they meet lower standards, no raise, etc. Standards and consequences should be explicit and agreed in advance to avoid charges of unfair subjective evaluation. Behavior such as failure to honor agreements would not be rewarded, or would be punished.
8. If the group is organized hierarchically, you can escalate the issue by notifying the person's manager. This assumes that the manager has some power to reward and punish, thereby coercing compliance.
9. A leave of absence, or cooling-off period, would give the person time and a second chance and calm the group atmosphere.
10. The ultimate solution is to expel the person from the group, to fire them. If the person is not carrying their weight, keeping them on will endanger the group's success. The group must be clear about its need for competence and results and act on it.

How To Be A Leader

First of all, leadership is necessary. In the oppressive society we live in, most leadership is oppressive, and in reaction some people resist all leadership, calling it "elitist" or "authoritarian" or "hierarchical," etc. But we need to create non-oppressive forms, of leadership, not try to do away with leaders. So-called leaderless groups succeed only because someone (at least one person, maybe more) is tacitly acting as leader; otherwise the group flounders in non-cooperation and lack of focus. The essence of leadership is getting others to help in a joint effort; if nobody is doing this . not much gets done.

It's important to designate the leader so everyone knows who it is. More than one person can exercise leadership functions, but at least one must be responsible to do so in case everyone else bogs down. Having the leader clearly designated avoids buck-passing confusion. In cases where a quick. decision must be made, it is better to have even a wrong decision than vacillation. If the leader makes a wrong decision the results quickly show it and it can be corrected; but if vacillation and indecision continue, everybody gets in a tangle.

Often people are afraid to be leaders; they feel inadequate or think it's too hard, etc. If you are one of these, be a leader anyway! It's not hard to be a leader; in fact it's much harder to be a follower, particularly if the leadership isn't functioning well. That's when it gets really aggravating, trying to get important things done in a system that isn't well led!

Whether designated as the leader or not here's how to function as a leader. Think about the group as a whole, its progress, functioning, goals, etc., rather than (or in addition to) about what is going on from your own point of view as a participant or proponent of a certain idea or action. There are three dimensions to this:

- Think about the group as an entity, with its own dynamics and ways of functioning.
- Think about each person in the group, how they are feeling and functioning, what they need, etc. Use communication skills to help them function better.
- Think about both in a historical sense, where they have come from, what they are growing toward, and how to facilitate that growth in good directions. Based on your thinking, take steps to help the group function well.

To help the group achieve its goals, draw out everybody's ideas; don't try to impose your own without listening. Elicit the best thinking from the group members, collect it, put it together with your thinking, and communicate it back, paraphrasing and summarizing. You may get some useless responses, but you'll get more good ideas than you would have thought of yourself. Everybody has the ability to think creatively and well; it's your job to encourage this. The more you do, the better the group will function.

To help draw out people's ideas, propose a solution when you state a problem: "Here's what's wrong, and here's what I think we should do about it." If you don't, you'll get insecurity, lack of confidence, objections, worries, and negativity . If you do, you'll get constructive thinking. The implied message you are sending is confidence that a solution is possible, People will react rationally; if the proposal is no good, they will say so and come up with a better one. They'll have confidence that the leadership function is being filled. (This does not conflict with the six-step problem-solving technique. That technique is a formal, systematic way of doing this.)

A corollary: consult everyone you can, but sometimes you have to take immediate action: "Everybody out now, don't argue!"

A good attitude to take toward the group members is to expect everybody to become a leader. Everyone has the capacity to think creatively and well, and everybody has the drive (although sometimes hidden under imposed patterns of negativity) to learn more, think better, and master the world more and more skillfully. To fully flourish, a human intelligence must learn to enlist the aid of other intelligences, for a joint effort, and do it well, which is the essence of leadership. Encourage each person to take the attitude, "I'm in charge here, it's up to me to see that things go well." For the group to work, at least one person must have this attitude. If nobody has it, little if anything gets done. If some do and some don't, things get done but the ones who don't have the attitude make little progress and the ones who do have it risk burning out. If everybody takes this attitude, the results can be outstanding.

Caution: Don't think someone is ready for leadership just because they say they are or are eager to be; use your judgment. Some people crave the rewards of the oppressive society's leadership roles, prestige, power, admiration, etc. If they get into leadership roles they get stuck and don't grow. Look for the person who isn't sure they can do it, but who thinks well and does what's best even though they feel scared. These people will do well, because the job itself will force them to evolve.

To expect and help the group member to become a leader means the following in concrete terms:

- Validate and encourage them; give your approval and congratulations for their successes; give them confidence.
- Give them a more demanding responsibility; expect and require performance; challenge them to do better. To neglect this is to let them down, because their underlying drive is toward greater mastery of life.
- Listen to them; provide the safety for them to let feelings out that are making it hard for them to think and function well. Use listening skills and encourage outward physical release of emotional tension. Emotional discharge, such as crying, laughing, shuddering, acting angry, etc., is discouraged by the oppressive society and even by well-meaning people who equate the discharge with emotional pain. In fact, the discharge is the healing of the pain and should be encouraged to run its full course. Undischarged emotional tension inhibits clear thinking and confident mastery of life. Discharge unblocks the vast potential in each of us.

In addition to supporting the group members, get support for yourself! You owe it to yourself and your group. Support means more than appreciation, strokes and encouragement. These are important, but not enough. You need two things: help with the work and emotional support.

Get others to help you with the physical work of whatever your group does, both its task functions and its maintenance or morale functions such as preparing for meetings, etc. Also, get others to help you with the thinking about the group that must go on for successful functioning. This in itself will go a long way toward avoiding burnout.

Seek out people who like you and care about you and whom you trust. Get them to listen to you and make it safe for you to let out your feelings and discharge your own emotional tensions. You need a space where you can let go of feelings you may have of being scared or inadequate or frustrated, etc. You also need people with whom to share the joy and excitement of accomplishment, and just to laugh and relax with, friends who care. Emotional health is essential, and people who care about you and whom you care about are the key.

Of course, you also need to take care of your physical, intellectual, and spiritual health too. Eat right, get enough exercise and sleep, learn to relax. Keep learning new things, and find practices to help you remember and tap into the vast compassion and wisdom of which you are capable. (If you take care of your emotional health, you'll be smart enough to do these things anyway.)

Self-Evaluation

Finally, here is a tool to help you and the group think about your own functioning and how to improve: self-evaluation. Set aside a time to this with your group periodically. Here are the steps:

1. First talk about what you do and have done well. Avoid concentrating on mistakes; focus on successes. Otherwise you'll get bogged down in discouragement, which is not the point. Emphasize the positive, don't rehearse invalidations; we get enough of that already!
2. Then, talk about what you'd like to improve, and how you intend to learn to do better.
3. After you do this, have others in the group say what they see you do well.
4. Then they should say what they'd like to see improve, and what they will do to help you function even better. Each should take a turn, and be perceptive and thoughtful.

This kind of self-disclosure with a positive emphasis will foster group trust and lots of good ideas about how to help you and the group do better and better.

Appendix: Modified Consensus Procedure

A consensus procedure with provision for majority rule if agreement can't be reached within a reasonable period of time has been used in some Austin co-ops, and is offered here as an example of an attempt to get the best of both systems. It seeks the best decisions, subject to these considerations:

- Balance the desire to reach consensus with the real need for timely decisions.
- Respect the right of people to have their views heard, but not necessarily for them to repeat what has already been said.
- Draw into the decision-making process all views so as to more fully analyze the evidence.
- Attempt to balance the rights of a minority not to be trampled vs. the rights of a majority not to be held back by those who don't agree.
- Attempt to provide a process which can enable the group to act quickly.

This modified consensus process is used routinely only in voting about substantive motions, not procedural ones. However a motion to use this procedure may be approved by a majority, in which case it will be adapted to whatever is the question.

The steps in the process are these:

1. Discussion of issue to get lots of input before a solution is proposed
2. Substantive motion proposing a solution is made and seconded.
3. Discussion of motion, procedural motions, amendments, etc., much like parliamentary procedure.
4. Call for a straw vote (non-binding vote). May be called by the chair or from the floor. If no objection, straw vote is held; if there is objection, majority rules. If the vote is against having a straw vote, discussion resumes (step 3).
5. Straw vote. The purpose is to find out what people think regardless of the views of others. It does not bind, merely informs.

If the vote is unanimous, the chair calls for a binding voice vote to confirm the decision immediately.

If there is dissent or abstention, the chair calls for no more than three from the minority to say why they dissented or abstained. Chair decides how much time to allot to this phase.

6. Call for a deciding vote. A seconded call brings the question of whether to have a deciding vote to the floor. If there is no objection, vote proceeds immediately. If

there is objection, majority rules. If the group votes not to have a deciding vote, discussion proceeds until another call for a deciding vote is approved.

7. A deciding vote is held. People vote, taking into account the views of others. If it's unanimous, that's the end; the decision is made.
8. If the deciding vote was not unanimous, there is discussion on whether this should be a binding vote or not. Alternate between those who feel it should and those who don't. No more than two in favor and two opposed; chair decides how much time.

Note: some who voted in favor before may not want to impose the decision on the group; some who voted against may not want to hold up the co-op.

9. Binding vote; majority rules.

Resources

Avery, Christopher M., *Teamwork Is an Individual Skill: Getting Your Work Done When Sharing Responsibility*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001.

Center for Conflict Resolution, *A Manual for Group Facilitators*. Re-published by the Fellowship for Intentional Community, <http://www.ic.org/>.

Center for Conflict Resolution, *Building United Judgment: A Handbook for Consensus Decision Making*. Re-published by the Fellowship for Intentional Community, <http://www.ic.org/>.

Coover, Virginia, et. al., *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution*. Philadelphia: New Society Press, 1977. Out of print; if you find a copy, grab it.

Dweck, Carol S, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2006.

Gordon, Dr. Thomas, *Leader Effectiveness Training*. New York: Wyden Books, 1978; Bantam Books paperback, 1980. Communication and problem-solving skills. See web site at <http://www.gordontraining.com/>.

Re-evaluation Counseling, 719 Second Avenue North, Seattle, WA 98109. Worldwide network of peer co-counselors removing emotional blockages to clear communication. See web site at <http://www.rc.org/>.

Smith Manuel, *When I Say No I Feel Guilty*. New York: Dial Press, 1975. Good tips on how to be assertive.