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ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.

—**Helen Keller**, author, activist, and educator

*A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus,
but a molder of consensus.*

—**Martin Luther King Jr.**, Civil Rights leader and 1964 Nobel Peace Prize winner

Consensus rule is a group decision-making process focused on creating a win-win situation for everyone. Each person gets to voice his or her opinion, just as with majority rule. But with consensus rule, there's no voting. And a single team member who hesitates to compromise can keep the group from making a decision. This can make things complicated and time consuming. Some people feel consensus rule means giving up your individual opinion, because in order to come to a decision, you might have to compromise. But for groups that believe having everyone agree on a decision is the most important thing, consensus rule is worthwhile. To successfully lead group members to agree with one another calls for keeping discussion focused and finding a way to support everyone's interests.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT IT

Consensus Rule: Talking It Through



When it's just you and one or two other people, it's often easy to make a group decision by flipping a coin or cutting a deck of playing cards. But when a larger number of people are concerned, those methods aren't necessarily appealing or satisfying for everybody.

Larger groups often use different approaches to make a decision more effectively, depending on the situation. One approach is *consensus rule*. You can explore another approach to group decision making called *majority rule* in session 15.

WHEN TO USE CONSENSUS RULE

The following factors in different situations point to whether using consensus rule to make a decision would be most effective or appropriate.

Good Times to Use Consensus Rule

- The leader realizes everyone must agree on the same outcome for the decision to be successful.
- Group members feel strongly about conflicting issues and believe a vote would minimize the importance of certain issues.
- The time available to make the decision is unlimited, as long as everyone agrees with the final choice.
- Power in the group is unevenly distributed and cliques in the group could easily sway a decision if determined only by having everyone vote.

Not-So-Good Times to Use Consensus Rule

- The group has a limited timeframe to make a decision.
- The group doesn't have a limited timeframe, but the time it would take the group to reach consensus could be more wisely used doing something else.
- The group can make a decision easily since there's no controversy.
- The group has been informed of the options, which are clear-cut and not likely to be misinterpreted.

- The group has discussed an issue at length but can't come to a common agreement and a vote is necessary to move the group forward.
- The group is very large and getting everyone's input wouldn't be easy or necessarily change the outcome if a vote were requested.
- The group is relatively balanced in terms of power, so the "voice" of any members in the minority won't be excluded.



Think and Write About It

Achieving consensus as a group can be challenging. It isn't unusual for groups to give up trying to reach agreement and just take a vote. Success in using consensus as a leader begins with creating an environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing his or her opinions. And when group members who often disagree can discover common interests or common ground, it is more likely everyone will support a decision.

Each of the following scenarios describes a situation in which a group needs to deal with a difficult issue. Imagine you are the group leader or well-respected team member. What steps will you take to help the group build consensus and resolve the problem?

During a youth group meeting, someone expresses that the group never does anything new and every meeting is boring. Others disagree and feel the group is doing fine.

At the neighborhood community center where you lead tutoring activities for younger kids, one of the best-liked kids, who also tends to be a bit lazy, won't participate. Now other kids are losing interest, too.

Calling all leaders!

...yes, that includes you.

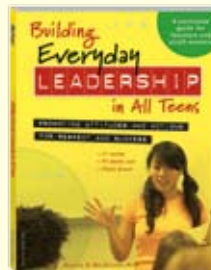
Every teen can be a leader. That's because real leadership is not just about things like being class president or team captain. It's about taking the lead every day in many different ways. It's about feeling confident and respected, being heard, and making a difference.

- If you're already a leader, this book will make you a better one.
- If you're not yet a leader, this book will help you develop a leadership attitude. Like a positive attitude, a leadership attitude changes everything. Suddenly you're doing things you never knew you could do.

This is *your* book. You'll use it in group sessions with other teens. You'll read it, write in it, and store pictures, notes, and handouts in the pockets. Your teacher or group leader will guide you. At the end of the sessions, you'll have a collection of your thoughts and ideas on leadership. You'll have a history of your progress toward becoming a leader. And you'll have a handy resource you can refer to whenever you're called or inspired to lead.

TEACHERS AND GROUP LEADERS: This book is meant to be used with the curriculum guide *Building Everyday Leadership in All Teens*. To order, visit www.freespirit.com or call toll-free 1-800-735-7323.

Mariam G. MacGregor, M.S., founded and runs Youthleadership.com, an online clearinghouse and resource center for individuals working with youth leaders.



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