

Courageous Conversation: Building an Effective Group

Norms That Build Trust

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Every group has its own rules that guide how they do business and get things done. These patterns of behavior may be a conscious set of established guidelines for conducting a meeting – or an unconscious lack of boundaries that allow members of the group to blame, shame, and dominate one another.

When groups create and commit to the use of **norms** as a means through which they communicate with one another, they are more likely to make collaborative decisions, resolve issues, come to consensus, and accomplish group goals and mission. Norms provide opportunities for group members to individually and collectively express their values through their words and actions. **Norms reduce tension, conflicts, and resentments.**

If group norms are abstract, unfamiliar, or do not exist, decisions are rarely achieved through consensus. Without norms, personal agendas of the most dominant personalities guide the decision-making process. Some members may feel coerced to agree upon solutions they do not want nor support. **Group norms set boundaries that encourage healthy dialogue.**

Sometimes a group leader must establish temporary norms for new groups/boards or groups/boards in crisis. **Norms are fluid and designed to support dialogue, build trust, and create a safe platform for teamwork.**

It is critically important for all group members to hold one another **accountable** during discussions. Norms allow a means to do that. For example, if an individual in your group repeatedly interrupts others, it is up to someone in the group to directly repeat aloud one of the norms that speaks to the desired behavior.

A Few Reminders

Resist tendencies to blame others for challenges or obstacles obstructing group progress. Conclusions and opinions based on assumptions destroy trust.

Gossip is divisive and destructive. Gossip that is tolerated within a group – even under confidential circumstances – is still gossip.

Make copies of the norms for all group members and post them in your meeting room or share them during Zoom meetings.

Collaboration is more than an all-in-favor-raise-your-hands voting practice.

Consensus creates a framework that invites full participation of all group members. Consensus does not guarantee everyone will arrive at unanimous decisions; the process of consensus allows groups to find solutions with which they generally agree and support. Norms provide safe boundaries for which discussions can occur.

Norms are only as successful as the group members' willingness to abide by them and call one another to do the same. They help a team move forward inspired and motivated to uphold their principles; confident in the security such guidelines provide.