



Group Decision Tip

E-mailed every two weeks to help groups make good decisions

Brake in Advance

In principle, when you have to stop or change course by a certain time or place, it helps to prepare in advance. The more momentum something has, the longer the stopping distance; the more preparation required.

In physics, momentum is mass times velocity. In groups, momentum is number of people times level of energy, such as enthusiasm or anger. A large group of fired-up people is simply unable to stop or change course quickly. And as any driver knows, if we try to stop or change course too quickly we can lose control with disastrous results.

Practical Tip: If you are the group facilitator or leader, give your group advance notice when approaching the end of a discussion or project, or when a policy change might be coming. Build in advance the expectation for stopping or changing at a certain time or place. Meeting agendas with times and project plans with dates serve this function well.

Of course braking in advance requires knowing in advance what's coming. Establish and heed early warning signs. Groups appreciate regular updates on what lies ahead. Groups hate to make decisions without advance warning.

Braking in advance also requires good brakes, the most critical part of any moving object. The most important thing about learning how to ski fast is learning how to brake fast. In groups, good brakes are all about attitude; the ability of group members to be open-minded and flexible in light of new information or circumstances.

If you are part of a large group with much energy, throw your weight in the direction you would like to see things go yet calibrate your expectations to the group's momentum.

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