

## **Applying the Principles and Methods of Sociocratic Organization Without an Organization**

If you do not live or work in a sociocratic organization, you can still apply the principles and methods to achieve greater harmony and develop a deeper understanding. By demonstrating that they increase effectiveness, you increase the possibility that they will be implemented elsewhere. These small changes will make a big difference in your life as well as in that of others.

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### **1. EXPECT CONSENT. Function with the expectation that consent is the standard for decision-making.**

When a decision is about to be made, before anyone can call for a vote or move forward with their own proposal without listening for objections, ask if there are any objections. If possible, glance at each person as an invitation to speak. If someone tries to dismiss objections or interrupts, say "Let's look at this for a moment." If necessary, try to help clarify objections, determine if they are objections or concerns, and ask if someone can address them.

When there are unresolved objections at the end of a discussion, emphasize that a decision has not been made. Many small groups function by consent most of the time but with only one or two objections will avoid a formal decision and proceed as if it had been made. State clearly, "We have no decision" or "Let's decide not to proceed until we have enough information to resolve these objections."

### **2. START ROUNDS. Actively initiate rounds by asking, "What do you think, Mary?" and moving around the room.**

Doing rounds can completely change the dynamic of a group because they (1) establish equality in the room as each person is given time to speak, (2) bring out comments from those who dislike competing for time or feel their ideas are not important, and (3) prevent people from avoiding responsibility by being silent.

### **3. DOUBLE LINK. Suggest that two people with differing styles or opinions represent your group to other groups, approach an authority, or attend a conference.**

Leaders and representatives are accustomed to negotiating or presenting autocratically and this authority is very hard to give up. When two equals represent a group, however, (1) the process is more likely shift to collaboration and consultation on behalf of the group, to searching for a solution rather than presenting a fait accompli. With two representatives, (2) co-opting is less likely than with one. With two differing points of view or different skills or training, (3) the information conveyed in both directions is likely to be fuller.

### **4. ELECT BY CONSENT. Don't ask for volunteers; ask whom group members think might be a good person for the task or function and obtain consent.**

A volunteer may not be the best person for the job and the person who is may not volunteer. Before anyone can volunteer, ask what skills the task or function requires and then directly ask one person whom they think could fulfill those requirements.

Convey the expectation that there will be more than one qualified person. People often recognize abilities in others that they don't see in themselves.

**5. ACTIVELY SOLICIT CONCERNS AND OBJECTIONS. Thorough examination of all concerns and objections is essential to more effective decision-making.**

Welcome the expression of concerns and objections and explain that resolving them builds a stronger decision. Once expressed, don't allow them to slide away unresolved. In addition to correcting or improving a proposed decision, taking objections seriously builds the commitment and focus necessary for effective action.

**6. MEASURE. Build measurements into your decisions so you will know if they are working in the ways you expected.**

In every decision, ask, "How will we know if this is working? How will we keep track?" Set a time limit on decisions so they will be reviewed and changed if necessary. This doesn't have to be complicated. Gauge the measurement to the complexity or possible effects of the decision. For personal decisions, it may be as simple as putting a mark on the calendar setting a time to consider how you feel.

**7. ENCOURAGE SELF-ORGANIZATION. Ask questions that expect people to find their own answers. Take control over your personal and work decisions.**

The meaning of "governing" is "steering." When you self-organize, you take the helm and steer your life like a boat, correcting course as necessary. Ask yourself "How can I fix this?" "What do I need to do?" Ask this of others as well as yourself. Self-organization is often discouraged at work, but there are usually small areas of possibility. Once you start, you will see even more opportunities.

There is often more freedom to self-organize in your personal life. A mother with four high-energy children and a husband who worked twelve hours a day did one thing that changed her life—she woke up an hour earlier than her family and organized her day over her own quiet breakfast. A single father of suddenly adopted 18-month-old twins has a DayTimer on the breakfast table next to his plate "for the house and the twins. Everything is in it."

**8. SELF EDUCATION. Take responsibility for your own development, for continuing to learn about life, about your work, and about your organization.**

Management literature often calls this "don't get stale." It means keeping up with your industry and developing beyond it. Define your professional area, and your personal life, broadly. If you work on a loading dock, find out how other organizations handle late shipments and transient employees. Watch changes in your company at the top levels that may help you understand your job. Design educational programs that reduce emergencies and increase productivity. Bring your colleagues along with you. Develop your social contacts at home. Follow your dreams. This will create an environment of growth—not in size but in depth.

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