

5 Ways to Avoid the Intellectual Muzzle of Group Think:

When it comes to team performance, the homogenization of thought is the enemy. If a team comes to alignment on an issue after analysis and discussion, that's progress. The team is ready to execute a decision or course of action. But if the team is offering pre-packaged agreement before it begins analysis and discussion, that's normally a sign that the team has been intellectually muzzled.

Remember, when a team becomes an echo chamber, a discussion becomes a meaningless exercise in confirmation bias. To avoid this costly trap, do the following:

- 1) Clarify the decision-making model.** Are you making a consensus or consultative decision? (Note: 99% of business decisions are consultative). Distinguish between participation rights and decision-making rights and clarify who has which.
- 2) Lead with questions.** Your job is to draw out the team into divergent and lateral thinking. Catalyze the process with questions to engage the team in both explanatory and exploratory thinking.
- 3) Invite challenge and dissent.** Invite the team to be bold and curious in challenging the status quo. Reassure them that they will be rewarded, not punished, when they engage in this vulnerable behavior. When the first person issues a challenge or registers a dissenting voice, reward that act immediately.
- 4) Model acts of vulnerability.** Acknowledge to the team that you don't have all the answers and that you have made your share of mistakes in the past. Share a personal example of making a poor decision as a result of not adequately seeking feedback.
- 5) Validate and appreciate.** As the team engages in creative abrasion, validate their contributions. Express appreciation for their willingness to debate issues on their merits, to bring "what if" questions to the table, and to respectfully and yet honestly challenge the current state and explore new possibilities.



Note #9