



Rules for Reaching Settlements

At the Board Table

By Brenda Kelleher-Flight Ph.D.

Often board members arrive at a board meeting, only to find that there is a problem to be solved within a short timeframe. The chair may table the issue and ask the board member concerned to describe the issue. Then the board members debate the issue, the chair calls for a motion and a decision is made. That is one way to make a decision. When an issue is controversial, however, the board needs a strategy which will assist the members to focus on the issue and reach a settlement.

The steps below are designed to assist the board chair and board members to reach a settlement which is the best possible resolution given the current circumstances.

1. Name the issue
 - Each person may see the issue from a different perspective, therefore, it is critical to ask each person to describe the issue and ask the other persons present to withhold judgment about the accuracy of their story.
2. Outline the interests that lie behind the issue
 - Try and determine the interests from each person's perspective.
3. Determine what all of the conflicting parties have in common
 - Outline the commonalities and ask if they agree on those points.
4. Outline the areas where there are differences of opinion.
 - Write up the areas of difference for all to see.
5. Determine if there is a question you could ask which could include the different points and simultaneously solve the differences?
 - Write up the question for all to see and ask the board members if they agree with the question.



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6. Brainstorm options for solutions
 - Ask board members to: suggest solutions, even if they think they will not work; refrain from judging or commenting on the suggestions of others; refrain from looking for the right answer; and be as creative as possible.
7. Eliminate options
 - Eliminate those options which all parties agree would not work in this case, combine those options which could be combined to make a better option, and debate the pros and cons of those options which remain.
8. Reach a settlement
 - Choose the option which meets most or all of each parties interests.
9. Create an implementation plan
 - Outline the criteria which would be used to determine if the implementation was successful and the steps required to implement the solution. Assign roles, dates for completion of each action, and when and how each person will report back to the board.
10. Monitor the situation
 - Determine who (person, committee or board as a whole) will monitor the implementation of the settlement and whether the results are those expected.
11. Evaluate the effectiveness of the process used
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of the process used and determine whether there are steps which could be modified or streamlined for future use.

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