

PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP TIPS FOR CONSENSUS BUILDING

Consensus or unity building is an essential aspect of effective leadership in any arena of life. This is especially true for Buddhist leaders. Nichiren Daishonin writes: “This spiritual bond (many in body, one in mind) is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren’s propagation (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 23). “Similarly, you should also reconfirm the fundamental path of faith, practice and study,” notes SGI President Ikeda during his historic visit to the United States in 1990, “and make a fresh departure based on the unity of many in body, one in mind — the starting point of our movement. This is the key to the reconstruction of [SGI-USA] as a model organization” (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p. 51).

As essential as it is, building a clear and solid consensus is not an easy thing. The following are some practical tips for making the process work in your organization.

1. Begin with a clear purpose. The prime point or purpose of our activities should always be the *Major Writings* and the practical guidance of President Ikeda. Confirming the purpose and objectives of each activity or event at the beginning of the planning process sets the foundation for effective planning and action.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

DO

- Determine the purpose and expected outcome.
- Determine what needs to be done to achieve these goals.

DON'T

- Confuse actions or means with the goal or purpose.
- Lose sight of the objective.

2. Create open dialogue. “Discussing things openly as siblings or members of a family, please proceed hand in hand, step by step, toward construction and growth” (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p.49).

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

DO

- Keep the facts separate from the assumptions.
- Discuss the situation from various perspectives.
- Take the time to discuss alternative proposals.

DON'T

- Assume your proposal is best.
- Confuse opinions or assumptions with facts.
- Dismiss alternatives too easily, focusing only on one idea.

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3. Be an active listener. “It is important for leaders to be fair and impartial and to hear out opinions that differ from their own. By giving sincere consideration to diverse opinions, you can develop a broad, flexible outlook and make stable progress” (*Ibid.*, p. 49).

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

DO

- Pay attention to each speaker.
- Summarize what you believe the person has said.
- Ask for further clarification if what’s being said is not clear.

DON’T

- Interrupt each other.
- Engage in more than one conversation at a time.
- Jump from one subject to another.

4. Create an atmosphere supportive of dialogue. “I would like to emphasize the importance of fostering an atmosphere where members feel free to speak their minds to leaders and say what they feel has to be said” (*Ibid.*, p. 50).

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

DO

- Give positive, warm and friendly acknowledgment to others’ ideas.
- Actively invite others to express different views.

DON’T

- Get defensive, angry or frustrated, debate or attempt to control others.
- Focus only on what’s wrong with an idea.

5. Handle differences of opinion or confrontations. “Although to criticize and censure someone out of petty emotionalism is of course incorrect, it is necessary that constructive and valuable opinions be aired. If a leader is broad-minded enough to listen with a sense of appreciation, both he and the person sharing his opinion can expand their state of life” (*Ibid.*, p. 51).

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

DO

- Focus on the problem, not on the person.
- Question your own assumptions.

DON’T

- Retreat rather than try to understand differences.
- Don’t agree simply to reduce conflict.

6. Participate in the dialogue. “From the standpoint of faith, to keep silent when one sees something amiss is tantamount to lacking mercy” (*Ibid.*, p. 51).

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

DO

- Try to involve the quieter members, giving all an equal chance.

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- Protect others from being interrupted or attacked.

DON'T

- Be dominated by one or two people or allow two people to argue while others watch.
- Withdraw from the discussion or defer to more aggressive people.

7. Commit to the process. “It is my belief that the essence of goodness is the aspiration toward unity, while evil directs itself toward division and sundering” (April 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p. 51). For the consensus building process to be effective after open dialogue, each participant must have the intention to reach consensus, be able to put aside their own ideas and commit themselves to making the agreed upon plan work.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

DO

- Clearly restate what has been agreed upon.
- Commit ourselves to the plan.

DON'T

- Vote or use majority rule — this can only create compliance, not consensus.
- Force or manipulate others.
- Refuse to unite with others or pretend to agree then act on your own.

8. Chant daimoku and take courageous action. Finally, no matter how wonderfully successful the consensus building process may be, unless each participant is determined to pray and take action for its success, nothing will be accomplished. “It is also important that we establish clear and concrete goals for what we hope to achieve each day and then pray and challenge ourselves to achieve each of them. This earnest determination gives rise to wisdom and resourcefulness, thereby leading to success. In short, to win in life we need determination and prayer, effort and ingenuity (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 251).”

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