

It's Open To Debate

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You might want to sit down for this one. It could be a little painful.

Think back to your last staff meeting. (We warned you this could be painful.)
Either the staff meeting that you sat in with your boss or the one you held with your own team.

What was the highlight of that meeting?

1. The donuts or other foodstuffs
2. A recap of the NFL playoffs
3. The big news about celebrity breakups
4. Rumors about layoffs or cost cutting measures
5. The rousing discussion surrounding a decision that needed to be made

We'll bet it's one of the first 4, because if your meetings are typical of most staff meetings, number 5 never happened. In fact, number 5 rarely happens at any level of an organization inside or outside of staff meetings.

For the last several years businesses across the globe have struggled with a number of factors including slowing economies, the high cost of labor, the realignment of the internet and the presence on the World Wide Web. Moving down a few levels in the organization, managers and leaders have struggled with productivity and process issues, turnover of key employees, morale problems; the list goes on.

With all of these issues to face, why do so few organizations engage in loud, long, healthy debate on issues that are critical to the success of the business? Managers and leaders sit in meetings and report the status of their projects, trying to call as little attention to themselves as possible. Or, they sit at the head of the table like the high priest and make pronouncements about the direction of the business like they have all of the answers at their fingertips.

At some point in time, businesses seemed to decide that harmony is the key to success. People were encouraged to be "team players" and to "get along" with others around them in a well-intentioned, but wrong-headed attempt to streamline the decision process.

Instead of actively debating issues that come up, we all try to find "common ground" and "compromise" in an attempt to please everyone around us.

What happens when we cut off discussion and debate to promote harmony?

For one thing, we drive the real decision-making process underground. How many times have you sat in a meeting and listened as everyone seemed to agree on a plan of action, only to find out later that no one took the actions that they agreed to. In reality, they didn't believe in the agreement and therefore felt no compulsion to keep their commitments. Often, a lack of debate also represents a lack of buy-in from those present. Rather than fight the issue publicly, those not in agreement express their discontent through a passive aggressive process that causes the idea to never be implemented.

An active, lively debate on a topic allows for multiple opinions to be aired and for ideas to be developed and improved upon. As a leader you should encourage your team's input and thoughts. Concerns should be expressed; solutions bandied about; and honest debate should be required.

All of this is not to imply that we are encouraging members of the team to sit around and argue without cause. But team members should feel open to express whatever real issues, thoughts, and concerns they have. And that active debate, the role of honest conflict in the workplace, separates good teams from great teams.

An engaged and energized workforce leads to higher productivity, reduced costs, improved customer service, and increased profitability. Employee engagement happens when your Corporate Culture, Leadership Style, and Employee Expectations are in synch.

The Fusion Program from ECI Learning Systems is designed to align these 3 concepts in your organization – engaging your employees and creating positive energy that will propel your company to new heights.

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