

## Value the Dissenting Voice

From Peter Block, author of *Community: The Structure of Belonging*

Dissent is the cousin of diversity: the respect for a wide range of beliefs. This begins by allowing people the space to say "no." If we cannot say "no" then "yes" has no meaning. The leadership task is to surface doubts and dissent without having an answer to every question.

A critical task of leadership is to protect space for the expression of people's doubts. . . . When we think we have to answer to people's doubts and defend ourselves, then the space for dissent closes down. All we have to do with the doubts of others is get interested in them.

This then is a key role of leadership: get interested in people's dissent, their doubts, and find out why this matters so much to them. Dissent becomes commitment and accountability when we get interested in it without having to fix, explain, or answer it.

*Community*, pp. 130-132

From the world of backcountry skiing and snowboarding:

Alternative decision-making paradigms [can make] for safer decisions—listening to the one viewpoint that says no-go.... giving credence to the one dissenting viewpoint and avoiding rationalization.

From Becky Lomax in  
"4 Steps to Avalanche Safety"

## Why Structure?

### Structure

#### 1. Promotes group effectiveness:

- Focuses energy on the task
- Respects limited time
- Allows for growth in skills for group work

#### 2. Provides psychological safety:

- Reduces affective conflict
- Supports group's ability to engage in cognitive conflict
- Makes space for everyone in the room (balanced participation, equity of voice)

### NOTE

- It's NOT about control, nor is it used as "punishment" for "misbehaving" groups.
- It automatically helps a struggling group, and it doesn't hurt those who don't need it.

Protocols are structures and processes for framing a discussion designed to promote dialogue and inquiry. They

- support productive thinking and conversation.
- Clarify WHO is talking with WHOM, WHEN, ABOUT WHAT.

*Protocols become patterns, patterns become habits, and habits become norms.*

Lipton and Wellman in *Groups at Work*

### Key Elements of Structure

- Agenda
- Activation strategy (on time - on task - on topic)
- Intentional groupings and processes
- Text as the expert
- Public charting