



## *Reasonable Voice*

### **Time for a Chief Integration Officer**

Over the last several years, I have facilitated hundreds of groups for multiple reasons – CEOs, board members, consumers, members of the U.S. military, marketing and communications leaders, students, faculty members, and others. The groups have considered how to approach a strategic opportunity, key market decisions, or how to work their way through a difficult and sensitive situation. Sometimes the role of facilitator has been assigned to me - other times it was simply something that seemed to occur.

Throughout these experiences, I've come to learn that people are really just people in any setting - their status or rank really doesn't matter. They each hold the same kinds of things in high regard - their families, their personal integrity and pride... and their strong views on what they feel is the right answer for given situation. They don't want to be sold something – but they may be very interested in buying. And more than anything, they want to be understood as much for what is not being said. The key is to treat them with respect and dignity, and blend-in everyone's input to create a fabric that can be woven into a useful garment.

That's where the work comes in.

Certainly you've experienced the person in your group that tries to dominate the discussion. They have all the answers, and they are glad to tell you about them, whether anyone wants to hear them or not. At the same time, there are those who seem to fade into the background, and you sometimes wonder if they are even aware of the discussion. Chances are they are more than aware, and are simply feeling marginalized by the strong personalities in the room. Or, they are truly just thinking - not quite ready to verbalize their thoughts.

Give them a little nudge and ask them why something is important, or if it is important at all. That's when you'll get to what's not being said that represents the real issue. You might be pretty amazed at what these quiet participants are thinking. Still water runs deep.

Your role with groups can be most effective when you shift from simply facilitating to taking on the position of "integrator." In this role, you have to do more than just listen. You need to find ways to synthesize the input from group members in a way that gets them working together, building on one another's thoughts and ideas so that they create that "1+1=3" equation, and cooperating through their understanding of one another in a way that enables them to find the common ground and path forward. And then it is their path... not yours.

Every organization needs an integrator. It offers a great opportunity to learn more about your company or non-profit, build consensus, and emerge as a leader.

Why not take on the role? Once you do, you'll never look at the organization or its mission the same again.

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