Tool 8 – Consensus

TOOL: **Consensus** is a form of Decision-Making.

WHEN: The **Consensus** form of Decision-Making is a good model for large groups, particularly when documenting the decisions made by the group is important. It could be adopted into the by-laws of the group as the way decisions are to be made.

HOW: The following are the characteristics of **Consensus** Decision-Making.

- **Consensus** is a general agreement among several people.

- **Consensus** occurs when <u>all</u> team members can support the decision without compromising important needs or values.

- Not every decision needs to be made by consensus - sometimes it is best to have an "expert" make the decision, or to vote on the issue, with the understanding that everyone will abide by majority rule. Agree on which model is best for a particular decision.

- The secret to gaining consensus is to make sure <u>all</u> concerns are on the table.

- Begin with an agreement on what the needed decision is.
  - agree on the wording in the form of a question *("What is …")*
  - convey the purpose of the decision - not the options *(<u>not</u> "Which is …")*

- Determine the guidelines, or criteria, for the decision.
  - brainstorm "must haves" and "nice to haves"
  - narrow down to true "essentials" and "desirables"
  - "check egos at the door"
  - keep an open mind and heart
  - listen, listen, listen
  - confront ideas and issues, <u>not</u> the people who voice those ideas and issues

- Identify and evaluate the options.
  - stay focused on the purpose of the decision
  - stay focused on the customer's needs

- Formulate the apparent agreed upon decision.
  - avoid the urge to wrap things up too quickly
  - if it bothers you, say so
  - test the group members acceptance of the wording and meaning of the decision

- Have each Team Member's commitment to the decision.
  - go around the table, one by one
  - document that all agreed to accept the group's decision

- Plan Action Steps and Follow-up

NOTE: **#1 -** The primary source of this tool was training material developed by Zinger-Miller, now AchieveGlobal.

TIPS: **1.** Make sure every group member understands the meaning of the decision as written

2. Make sure every group member verbally made a commitment in front of the others to support the decision.

3. If a member is struggling to join the consensus, the facilitator could allow for the listing of "caveats or concerns". This is tricky as it could create an uneasiness with the members of the group who have already expressed their wiliness to support the decision.