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Because I facilitate team sessions for a living, I've seen lots of team interactions. All kinds of drama, some shouting and tears, but also lots of laughter, joy, and bold action. Much about teamwork has been researched, dissected, and discussed. Yet lately, I've been thinking a lot about an unexplored topic: how to get team members to disagree.

What do you do as a team member, if, after all the discussion and debate, the hours the team talked about a new direction, plan, or policy, you still disagree? What I see happen on most teams is acquiescence – giving in or just going along. It's hard to

know the line between sticking to your views and aligning with the team. Are you a

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During the first two steps, team members share their views, voice concerns, ask probing questions, debate, and discuss. I ensure people know it's a safe environment to dissent and challenge. And then, at a certain point, when we have brainstormed and kicked around options, we agree on a future state. Then we move into action planning. Once plans and next steps are identified, well, I deem the team session a home run. We have moved from chaos into order, from theory into action. It always feels like a triumph of team process and alignment.

Until it suddenly didn't. At a recent team session, I didn't like the feeling in the room at the end of step 3. Everyone had dutifully done their breakout work, devising strong, meaty action plans. Yet, the energy was all off. Team members seemed deflated instead of enthused. So I decided to do a check in.

I asked everyone to show, using hand signals from fist to five, how they felt about bringing this plan forward to the organization. Here' the fist to five criteria I used:

Fist = over my dead body

1 – 2 = serious concerns and not really on board

3 = I can live with it but....

4 = feeling pretty darn good

5 = can't wait to get started

Based on the quality of the work they had done to develop strong plans and recommendations, I expected all 4s and 5s. What I saw around the room astounded me. Responses ranged from 2.5 – 5. I couldn't believe there were still 3 team members

with serious – stop the presses – concerns. As we started talking about it, here's some

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team leader. Instead of trying to fix things, I decided to ask some questions. I asked.

“Why did you do the action planning if you still didn't agree with the solution?”

“What made you feel that you couldn't say this earlier in the day? What held you back?”

I learned that team members felt swept along by the process, guilty about not going along with what the team leader so obviously wanted, and eager to demonstrate alignment and teamwork. We ended the day in a completely different place than I expected. We decided to delay any further action on this project until it could be evaluated in the context of the larger portfolio. It was disconcerting to me. If I hadn't checked in when I had, we would have ended the day with timelines and actions that 1/3 of the team didn't believe in, and I (and the team leader) would have left with a false sense of unity.

I wonder how often this unspoken disagreement happens on teams? Maybe all the time? So what can you do to ensure team members don't just give up too early. Here are three ideas you can try:

1. Create real space for disagreement. Ask good questions to promote speaking up such as:

- What's a contrary view?
- What have we not considered?
- Why would this fail?
- What's the one thing holding you back from full support?
- What has not been said that we should discuss before we move on?

2. Check in on how people are feeling. We are focused in business on facts and data. And while we shouldn't make our decisions solely using “gut feel,” we shouldn't

ignore our intuition and our inner voice which usually expresses our fears and

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Audrey Epstein is a partner at The Trispective Group and the co-author of *The Loyalist Team: How Trust, Candor, and Authenticity Create Great Organizations*. For more information or to take a free team snapshot assessment, please visit, [www.trispectivegroup.com](http://www.trispectivegroup.com)

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