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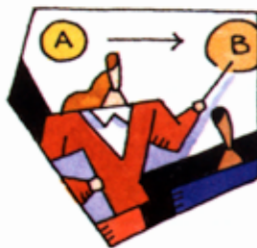


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Using Debates to Improve Strategic Decisions

The next time you face a strategic decision, try staging a debate to release new energy, creativity and excitement around the decision. You may also speed up its adoption and ultimate success. In a healthy work environment, debates are helpful because they pull people together and get them moving in the same direction. The key is having an argument that everyone can win.

Stage a debate around the specifics of the decision. Assign executives to each side of the issue, based upon their knowledge and passion for the argument. Because the participants will most likely view the debate more as a game than a formal presentation, the kind they are accustomed to making when defending their views on an issue, they will approach it on a more objective level. As a result, each side of the issue will have a voice and provide thoughtful examination and advocacy. Several members will be able to listen to all sides of the issue and consider new viewpoints that could



influence their vote. This debate strategy incites the best thinking and perspective from executives, while also making them comfortable with the subject. When a decision is made there is an intellectual understanding and emotional belief in the reasoning behind the decision. Because this exercise requires people to adopt the contrary viewpoint, they are free to bring their intelligence—both cognitive and emotional—to the table, resulting in an environment where all sides of the issue can be weighed and examined, without the fear of being wrong that can cause discomfort in many leaders.

Previously the CEO would have made the decision in isolation, or after talking with only a few members of the executive team, and spending an enormous amount of time explaining the decision and convincing others to implement it. The lasting empathy this exercise develops ensures that the senior team is in alignment and makes faster and more effective strategic decisions.

Source: Adapted from "Can Everybody Win an Argument?" by Dr. Michael J. O'Brien, founder and CEO, O'Brien Group, a national healthcare CEO/senior-level executive coaching and change leadership firm in Cincinnati; michael@obriengroup.us.

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

— Henry Ford



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