

Manage: **Building Consensus**

An agreement based on consensus represents a win-win outcome, collaborative problem-solving, and effective conflict resolution. A consensus implies that debate has taken place, that the solution is generally accepted rather than arrived at through grudging compromise, and that the agreement is deep-rooted enough that it can stand for some time without the need to revisit the issue.

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The **“Fist of Five”** is a system of voting which achieves consensus in decision-making; expresses various degrees of support from participants; provides opportunities for adjusting to opposition and responding to dissatisfied members of a group; and eliminates the all or nothing system of for and against voting.

THE PROCESS:

When faced with a decision, all members of a group vote with their hands, indicating their support or opposition to a decision by signaling with 1-5 fingers or a closed fist. The hand signals have the following meanings:

ALL FIVE FINGERS: Strong support and enthusiasm for the decision; indicates that one is willing to take leadership around the decision and work energetically toward enacting the decision or achieving the goal.

FOUR FINGERS: Strong support and enthusiasm for the decision; will work energetically toward enacting the decision or achieving the goal.

THREE FINGERS: Lukewarm enthusiasm for the decision; will be helpful in working toward enacting the decision or achieving the goal.

TWO FINGERS: Not very enthusiastic; won't object; won't hold up the decision; but won't work toward enacting the decision or achieving the goal.

ONE FINGER: Basically objects to the decision; but won't block it; doesn't support it and will not work toward enacting the decision or achieving the goal.

FIST: Strenuously objects to the decision and is willing to personally boycott it.

If any one person in a group uses their fist to block the decision, it is defeated. At that point, the facilitator of the group can turn to the person who blocked it, and/or to anyone raising just one finger, and ask them what it would take to make the decision acceptable to them.

The process continues until an acceptable consensus decision is reached.