



**Leadership Lab #4: Consensus Building**  
**August 12th, 2025**

**Core function of the Council: making decisions as a group**

**When you reach consensus, everyone agrees they can live with the final decision and support it publicly.**

**When guiding a meeting, your members should have a mutual purpose and mutual respect.**

- *mutual purpose*: you care about the other person's concerns
- *mutual respect*: you care about the other person

You can model both mutual purpose and mutual respect to your council members as a council leader. **Through modeling this, your members learn how best to interact with each other.**

- *Idea*: have your council members create their own ground rules.
- This can function as a team-building activity and help build mutual purpose/respect.
- There will also be more investment in upholding the ground rules from the members if they create the rules versus being given them by the staff.

**When guiding your members through a difficult conversation, you need to be able to tell the difference between someone's demand and motivation.**

- *demand*: what people say they must have
- *motivation*: the need or reason behind the demand — why they say they need it.
- *example*: A person says, "I need to find a vending machine." This is their demand. The motivation might be: "I'm hungry."

When guiding people through difficult conversations, it's important that you figure out the motivations behind their demands, because it gives you the information you need to find a solution and build consensus.

**Consider this situation:**

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*This information is intended for everyone. Reading ease level: 8.5.*

- Council Member A demands: “We need to increase pay for Direct Support Workers.”
- Council Member B objects: “We can’t—there’s no money in the state budget.”

At first, this seems like a deadlock. But instead of stopping at their demands, figure out their motivation.

- Ask Council Member A: Why do you want to increase pay?”
- And they might say: “Because we need *better quality* support workers”
- Then maybe a solution could be: *better training for Direct Support Workers*.

Now the conversation can shift. If the motivation is about quality, not pay itself, a new solution becomes possible — like offering better training for support workers. Training could improve quality without increasing costs. **Without understanding people’s motivations, you don’t have enough information to find the best solution. Asking “why?” gives you the information you might need to build consensus.**

One of the biggest barriers to consensus is avoiding difficult conversations. **As a council leader, it’s your responsibility to engage in these challenges—just as it’s your duty to attend meetings.**

**Here are some key points about difficult conversations:**

- Being uncomfortable is not always a sign something is going wrong. Sometimes, difficult conversations can be both productive *and* uncomfortable.
- Being effective on the Council means being able to sit through difficult moments, hear different views, and still move forward.
- Your willingness to engage in difficult conversations sets a positive example of leadership for your council Members.