

Lesson 10

DECISION MAKING

SUMMARY

Quakers approach to decision-making emphasizes collective discernment over voting, sometimes referred to as "Quaker business method." Here's an overview of how Quakers make decisions:

Worshipful Listening: Quaker decision-making begins with a period of worshipful listening and reflection. Participants in a decision-making meeting come together in silence to center themselves and seek spiritual guidance. This period of silent reflection allows individuals to attune themselves to the divine and approach decision-making with a sense of humility and openness.

Clerk: Quaker meetings typically have a Clerk, who serves as a facilitator during decision-making sessions. The Clerk has no authority other than to help guide the process and ensure that it is conducted in an orderly and respectful manner. However the Clerk is charged with testing when a "Sense of the Meeting" has been reached and trying to articulate it.

Speaking from the Silence: When someone feels moved to speak on a matter, they rise and share their thoughts or concerns. It's important for speakers to speak briefly and to the point, allowing time for others to respond and for the group to collectively consider the issue.

Seeking Unity: Quaker decision-making seeks to achieve unity rather than majority rule. The goal is to reach a decision that reflects the collective will of the group, guided by a sense of what is right and in accordance with our spiritual beliefs. The emphasis is on finding common ground and resolving differences through discussion. However this form of decision making is also experiential and can be passionate and sharply divided. A proposal, once on the floor, is no longer considered to be from an individual, but as having entered a space for consideration on its own merits. The point is to find the "Sense of the Meeting" rather than what more or fewer people want. Those who find themselves not in "Unity" with a sense of the meeting are expected to "Stand Aside", meaning they will not oppose the proposal and they will not work against it once passed. This process hinges on participants' discipline, sincerity, humility, and their willingness to approach the decision making without giving undue precedence to their own opinions or consciences. Quakers sometimes say "Way opens" when a way forward has been discerned.

Testing for Clarity: Throughout the discussion, the Clerk may periodically summarize the emerging consensus or ask if there are any objections or concerns. If someone has a serious objection, the group will further discuss the matter until a resolution is reached. This process can take time, and there is a commitment to patience and perseverance in seeking unity. The Clerk, in determining the sense of the meeting, takes into

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consideration each member's experience and wisdom when making their final determination.

Silence and Reflection: At times during the process, the group may return to periods of silence for further reflection and seeking of divine guidance. This allows individuals to discern more deeply and may lead to shifts in perspective or consensus.

Recording the Decision: Once unity is achieved or a decision is made, the Clerk records the decision and may read it aloud to confirm that everyone is in agreement. It's important that all members feel comfortable that the decision reached is the sense of the meeting, even if it's not what they wanted. All are expected to support the Meeting in the implementation of the decision.

Follow-up and Implementation: Quaker decision-making doesn't end with the meeting. Once a decision is made, it is important to carry it out and evaluate its effectiveness. If necessary, adjustments can be made through the same consensus-seeking process in future meetings.

Quaker decision-making is (hopefully) characterized by its patience, respect for each individual's perspective, and reliance on the guidance of the Spirit. It is used not only in matters related to religious worship but also in the governance and decision-making of Quaker organizations and communities. This approach attempts to foster a sense of community and collective responsibility, however Quakers often find themselves in need of all the usual conflict resolution skills when an issue is contentious. With no hierarchy in the organization decision making can quite often take considerably longer and result in heated debates before a decision can be made.

“Si Hay Trato, Pueden Ser Amigos Perro y Gato.”
(If there is a deal, even a dog and cat can be friends.)

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LESSON

Quakers have a different way of making decisions, different from just voting. They believe in something called "collective discernment," which means they all work together to figure things out. Let's play a game and try to make decision using this method.

Divide the Loot. There is a pile of monopoly money. Make up some ridiculous scenarios and put them on slips of paper. Each person has to choose one blindly and then make up a story and try to convince the group to give as much of the fake money to them. Use the story telling guidelines learned before but use as much imagination and silliness as you like.

- Quaker decision-making starts with everyone sitting quietly. Let's listen to our inner feelings and thoughts. Let's see if we can hear a still, small voice telling us how to make this decision. Can we come to a "Sense of the Meeting" as to how to spend the money? We might decide to use it for another purpose altogether, but we can't keep it for ourselves.
- When someone wants to say something, they stand up and talk. They don't talk for a long time because they want everyone to have a chance to speak and listen to each other. They use their T.H.I.N.K.S. tools.

QUERY: Can most people agree on what to do with the loot?

Here's another game:

Stranded at Sea in a Lifeboat. We have been stranded at sea in a lifeboat. After taking inventory, we have found the following "survival items," listed below, as well as a pack of matches. What do we need to keep? There is very little room in the lifeboat. Rank together the following items in order of importance. Let's see if we can make this decision together.

Item	Group Ranking	US Coast Guard Ranking
Rope		
Chocolate Bars		
Can of gas		
Floating Seat Cushion		
Shark Repellant		
Mosquito net		
Shaving mirror		
One Plastic Sheet		
Water container		
Emergency Food Rations		
Radio		
Sea Chart		
A bottle of Rum		
Fishing Rods		

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When finished, compare our list to the list below provided by the US Coast Guard:

1. A shaving mirror (this can be used to signal passing ships using the sun)
2. A can of gas (could be used for signaling as it could be put in the water and lit with the pack of matches)
3. A water container (for collecting water to re-hydrate)
4. Emergency food rations (critical survival food)
5. One plastic sheet (can be helpful for shelter or to collect rainwater)
6. Chocolate bars (another food supply)
7. Fishing rods (helpful, but no guarantee of catching food)
8. Rope (can be handy, but not necessarily essential for survival)
9. A floating seat cushion (usable as a life preserver)
10. Shark repellent (could be important when in the water)
11. A bottle of rum (could be useful for cleaning wounds)
12. A radio (could be very helpful but there's a good chance you're out of range)
13. A sea chart (this is worthless without navigation equipment)
14. A mosquito net (unless you've been shipwrecked somewhere with a ton of mosquitos, this isn't very useful)

QUERY: Were we able to make a decision together? How well did we do compared to the Coast Guard list?

Consider reading the book "Approved!" by Nancy L. Haines at this point to more clearly point out Quaker decision making process.

ACTIVITIES

Marshmallow Spaghetti Tower. This game involves working in teams to build the tallest possible freestanding tower using only marshmallows, uncooked spaghetti, tape, and string. Allotted timeframe: thirty minutes.

Make some decisions. Ask POC for some money to make a decision. Use your decision making skills to discern how to spend it. Would you like to go on a field trip? Shall we plan a party for the community? Should we get matching T shirts? Should we buy for the POC library?

FIELD TRIPS:

New York Yearly Meeting – Children's Meeting

Powell House – Retreat

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READING AND RESOURCES:

Approved! A story book about quaker business meeting by Nancy L. Haines

Into the Uncut Grass by Trevor Noah