

# Consensus at Camp Augusta

A unified sense of the whole on a given, important decision  
Latin, *consentire*, to feel together, agree

## Principles

- Solution orientation. The group seeks commonality and compromise over division and differences. The goal is unity over unanimity. Hard lines and raised hairs are rigid, while consensus involves warmth, openness, and appreciation.
- All participants seek to: cooperate, communicate cleanly, be emotionally intelligent, be creative, and practice NVC. Dictatorships and strict hierarchies are very often more efficient. Consensus often trades that efficiency for stronger community.
- The values of the group/entity are considered. The values of individuals are not part of the consideration, unless the group, via consensus, makes them part of the group's core values and beliefs. The decision is about Camp Augusta, not John or Jane. Personal requests within the bounds of the community values are not in need of consensus. Everything on the website, staff manuals, and other guiding philosophy documents are considered standing and agreed upon by all community members.
- Below are some example reflection questions for determining if consensus is an appropriate process.
  - Does this decision affect a majority of people at camp now and into the future?
  - Does this decision have significant weight on the vision, mission, and values of Camp Augusta?
  - In not acting on a decision, is it readily imaginable that campers, staff, or families would be significantly hampered in their experience of the vision and mission?
  - Is there substantial and passionate interest in the decision being made very soon?
  - Does the time it would take to engage consensus outweigh the need of the campers for their time?
  - Is a given individual(s) with designated responsibility for a process/decision unlikely to make a wise choice for the community by themselves? (see Role/Function below)
- Everyone has equal input into the decision; no one holds any more legitimate power (see bases of power) or influence over the decision than another. A group may defer to expert or referent power – see Flat Hierarchy in the next section.

## Decisions that are often made without large- or small-group consensus

The individual/small group may make a decision, and then bring it up for consensus later, if they feel it necessary/prudent.

- Quick decisions safely considered within the bounds of the group's values. Time is of the essence. Often executed by people with a relevant role, but not necessarily if immediacy is critical.
- Minor decisions safely considered within the bounds of the group's values. There are thousands of decisions that given individuals make, believing the large group to be either uninterested in or already considered within existing philosophical/value understandings. Judgment calls without major weight.
- Necessary decisions (emergent) safely considered within the bounds of the group's values
- Role/function decisions are made by people given the power to make decisions by the group. Trusted judgment. That person/small group may feel that the decision in their hand at the moment doesn't fit that granted power, or they may want a second opinion. This is not appropriate for an action that has deep and long-lasting effects. If the person in the role is not trusted, support may be offered, the role's domains altered, or a consensus process begins around role shifting. Clean communication.
- Ad-hoc testing is when an individual or small group tosses out a decision to a few people, often at random, and tests their reaction to a decision. Assuming that goes well enough, the decision may be carried out. As the small group or individual sees fit, sometimes the option(s) may be tossed out to the whole group to test the waters, or find out about strong feelings.

## Large-group consensus

- The below four signposts point to large-group consensus being appropriate.
  - A core value of the community is in question. Personal benefit as a motive is not in the equation. One may benefit from the action, yet a selflessness is apparent, and the benefit to the community is clearly tied to existing values and end goals.
  - Significant and long-term consequences would result from the decision for multiple people. The weight and implications of the decision almost demand large-group consensus – it is that important.
  - There is enough information to make a decision, i.e., reasonable research requests have been carried out. A small-group process/effort proposing a course to the larger group was unsuccessful.

- The number of people in the community who have a passionate and present interest in being part of the discussion exceeds 12. At that break point, the community ascertains the number of people interested in actually participating and decides when the discussion will take place.
- Process notes
  - Everyone need not attend; only those interested
  - The small-group process (next) has been followed, and those individuals present to the group what could not be done prior in writing.
  - A group of more than 12-ish creates increasing discussion friction due to its size. The large group puts forth ideas and considerations, with limited discussion, which the small group takes into consideration. “Podiums and positions” must be collectively watched for and avoided. A “Podium” is someone orating to the group, instead of making a concise point/observation. A “Position” is someone holding a particular space/point, instead of seeking more global understanding and pathways.
  - People from the large group can join the small group. If that number exceeds 8 people total for the group, then concurrent breakout groups are formed, with a mix of people from said groups forming a final working group. This hybrid group returns to the large group, and the cycle continues.
- The large-group consensus process can be an enormous time commitment, which must be weighed by the urgency and benefit of doing so. During the summer, it is very rare to engage this full process. Instead, such discussions occur after the summer at a post-banquet Symposium. Otherwise, meeting after the Saturday meeting or before the Sunday meeting are the only options and come with inherently less time off. When such concerns arise, the community must support consensus with their participation or non-participation.

## Small-group consensus

- An issue is presented to the community that warrants a consensus discussion. Customary approaches of Quick, Minor, Necessary, Role/function, and Ad-hoc testing were insufficient.
- A core value of the community is in question. Personal benefit as a motive is not in the equation.
- Significant and long-term consequences would result from the decision for multiple people.
- There is enough information to make a decision.
- Process notes
  - Passionate people are solicited to join the small, consensus, working group. The group is kept to 8 or less. If the response is double that, the large-group consensus process may be warranted.
  - Keeping consensus principles in mind, the small group discusses the issue until the group is satisfied that most points are on the table.
  - From those points, a proposal is put together for the large group to consider, noting the essence of the small-group’s discussions. The proposal is e-mailed out to everyone, or posted/handed out.
  - Commentary is gathered and the small group revises the proposal. This sub-process may continue for several iterations until no significant new comments are gathered. Strong dissenters join the small group to help work on the proposal.
  - Individuals are assigned to carry out the proposal.
- Time for this process during the summer is limited. It can be scheduled after the children are asleep, during rest hour (unlikely in a one-week session), during Playstation or clinic time, or after the Saturday staff meeting or before the Sunday meeting. Another option is to conduct the “discussion” via e-mail. If the result of the proposal is not immediately significant, it may be tabled for an end-of-summer Symposium discussion.

## Cautions

- The more unclear the values and beliefs, the longer consensus is going to take. For example, if the community doesn’t have guidelines and values in place around competition, a consensus discussion on competition could literally take six or more months. When there are already guidelines, values, and other information present around the topic, it is the responsibility of consensus participants to be extremely well versed in them prior to the meeting.
- Verbal or non-verbal frustration or other emotions that silence or discourage members from being heard or being active are destructive toward consensus. Important dissenting opinions need to be heard and properly considered, to avoid “Groupthink.” It is the responsibility of all of the individuals in the group to both speak their concerns and create a space where others feel safe to come forward and be heard.
- *Believing that every individual will be consulted in most or all decisions is impractical beyond 8-12 people in the total group. As the number of people rise, so do the number of decisions, almost exponentially. Consensus discussions are made known to the entire community, although only a few usually participate in them.*
- Very passionate people join a small- or large-group consensus process. Interested people either trust that their views will be represented by the passionate folks, or they communicate their views to one of them.

- Stickiness in consensus often arises when there are apparently competing values within the same group/organization. Reconciliation may be possible, but often a given value must be assigned weight over another. For example, it would be wonderful to be “off the grid,” but doing so would involve many unsavory consequences, such as lowering the number of staff, number of scholarships, quality of food, number of activities, and/or raising the price of camp. Many decisions involve considerable complexity.
- A given individual may look at many decisions within the community and choose to feel irked by them. If that path is chosen, the person may feel distanced from the community: “So many decisions are not going the way I’d like them to; I wonder if I’m a good fit here?” Or, “I can’t believe they decided that!” Remember that there are a diversity of perspectives in community, and agreement from “everyone” does not happen as often as you might imagine. Keep your eyes on the values and workings of the community, striving for the betterment of all, and knowing that the ideas of one or some both do and do not reflect the whole at times. Clean communication is your agreement – to yourself and the community as a whole.

## Voting

- Consensus is not a formula. It is not a majority, or quantitative. The goal is unity over unanimity. It is qualitative and organic. It is the sense of the whole. Were it a formula or some sort, the intentions of the parties, as well as the process itself, would have strong tendencies toward corruption. And, people would often walk away from the vote feeling unheard and considered, let alone contribute fully. *Thus, consensus is never put to a vote.*
- A “vote” may be taken by anyone to poll the group’s thoughts or feelings on an issue. That vote is not a quantitative assessment of whether or not to continue with a decision, but rather a tool to roughly gauge the sense of the group. Given that it usually has only two points of reference (yes and no), it is of limited utility (primarily a quick test).
- People new to consensus often want to bring more minor decisions to the group for consensus, when a Role/Function decision is more appropriate. Sometimes, the minor issue is brought forward to the group to gain quick consensus via a vote. Remember, consensus is never a vote. See “Principles” above for guidelines on what applies to the consensus process.
- When the testing leadership style is being used (see leadership styles), someone in a role may seek a quick sense of the group via a vote. Often, such a vote is followed by a request for people to feed that person thoughts, individually. If not, consider it a standard, implied request – speak your mind to that person in an aside. As is the way with the testing leadership style, the role/leader makes the “final” call. This process is not consensus, but information gathering for a role/function decision maker.
- If the leadership style being used is joining, someone proposes a vote on an action without high consequence. The group may accept the vote as an acceptable process, and agree that some percentage/majority will be the resulting decision. *Again, this process is not consensus*, but rather another decision making/problem-solving technique. “Do we want to meet about this or not?” “Hands up to work a little longer and eat a little later.”

## Minorities in consensus - three levels

- Declare reservation – the softest form of disagreement, but allowance. The dissenter(s) wishes to be heard and considered, but if the group is not swayed, s/he agrees to allow the proposal to move forward, having been heard. The act is made in peaceful disagreement, but allowance. The decision does not live on emotionally in the dissenter – there is non-attachment, release.
- Stand aside – an individual(s) has a serious disagreement with the proposal, but is willing to let the motion pass. Modifications are often made in such cases. In standing aside, the individual is also agreeing to let the emotions and consequences pass, so there isn’t a “grudge” or “disgruntlement.” The act is made in peaceful disagreement, but allowance.
  - In both of the above positions, the person also agrees to support the proposal by their *actions* as well, since the community has decided it is the path forward. Regardless of the outcome, I am they and they are I.
- Block – the decision may not go forward. A guiding principle with blocks are that a given individual may use four of them in his or her physical lifetime. It is a stand of last resort, reflecting a perceived blindsightedness on the part of the larger group in regard to a shared, community value. Personal values are not relevant. Significant harm to the organization or individuals must be perceived. The blocker holds enormous responsibility to create understanding and solutions; they are not sticks holding the process up, but rather wands creating movement.

## Getting unstuck

- Leave the decision for later or take a break. Enjoy an energizing activity or a cup of tea.
- Ask everyone to argue convincingly the point of view they like the least
- Break down the decision into smaller areas. See which ones you can agree on and see what points of disagreement are left.
- Identify the assumptions, needs, and beliefs underlying the issue. Get to the heart of the matter.
- Imagine what will happen in six months, a year, five year's time if you don't agree. How important is the decision now?
- Bring in a facilitator. If the group is unable to work through conflicts or if similar issues keep coming up, think about bringing in a professional facilitator or mediator who is trained in conflict-resolution techniques.

- Consensus is not an effective way to make either-or-choices between evils, for members will often struggle to agree which is worse. If the group has to choose between being shot or hung, flip a coin.
- Accept a temporary solution. As long as no one is blocking, move ahead and revisit as soon as possible within the principles and framework of consensus. The group may decide that a strong objection is enough to hold up a course of action as well.

## Recent, consensus examples at Camp Augusta

- Competition  
There was a fuzzy understanding of the philosophy of competition at camp. A few people discussed it, one created the initial philosophy document, a small group reviewed and edited it, and then that group proposed it to the whole group for consensus.
- Music  
Similar process to the above. The philosophy document was created by one person, and several, changing small groups contributed to it over weeks during the summer. It was proposed to the entire group via a posted writing for comment, and invitation to continue development.
- Food  
A rough draft was created, loosely proposed to the whole group for comment, and then fine tuned in a small group. Posted for review and commentary to the whole group.
- Staffing proposal  
A small group created a proposal for the large group around the nature of counseling and who is a counselor, and when. The large group discussed it, followed by interested persons working in small group to finalize a proposal. That proposal went back to the large group for comment and a sense of the whole. Iterations of the final proposal were created based on feedback, and eventually consensus was reached on this fundamental question.

## Reflections on consensus

- Total agreement is complete/full consensus without opposition; that does not occur in practice unless the direction was virtually a "no brainer." Vocal and adamant voices in opposition is the norm, and not the exception. And, sometimes the consensus is wrong! Indeed, the greatest and largest consensus community in history was wiped out by poor consensus decisions.
- A compromise is where everyone walks away pissed, frustrated, or sad. :-) In consensus, we're seeking something different. In a discussion between people or groups where there isn't a shared ideal/value, the arbitration is often seeking compromise; you see this on an international scale all the time. In our case, we do have shared values, ideals (vision and mission), and the guidelines around them. Consensus without that is something for history books and movies, rare and powerful. Thus, we all hold one another accountable in being as impartial and focused on our collective goals/ideals.
- Recognize that consensus is something new to almost everyone; it was not experienced in school, at home, or at other places of work. What a wonderful and joyous opportunity is here then! :-) Consensus is possible on both a small and large scale, and it holds a path for great peace and progress. There is a huge struggle amongst people introduced to the concept – i.e., "my way of seeing the challenge and the opportunity is so right and strong that I really want others to see it and accept it as truth." Taking out the *I* and seeing the *we* is one of the greatest challenges in consensus, community, communication/NVC, personal insight, . . . yet also holds enormous possibility. It does not come standard to the more Western mind.
- Every point in a consensus discussion does not need to be addressed/considered. For example, someone could suggest that we have one counselor for every two cabins, and there are camps that run this way. Such a suggestion/proposal here would not have any traction amongst the group. Holding everyone's points in the final version would look more like a government bill from congress, which are often over a thousand pages long, comical to read, and difficult to implement. Instead, the small group, primarily and ideally, takes the fodder of suggestions and thoughts and considers them, deciding whether or not to include them in the near-final proposal to the large group.
- The idea of "consensus minus 1" (all but one agrees), or some number, is a formal structure clumsily put on top of the ideal it is meant to serve. Often, it is used to be efficient, which it is. The ideal is to see the points others offer and address them as the small group sees fit. It may be that a person(s) does not see the wisdom of moving toward a particular path the group sees as having value, despite efforts to the contrary. That happens fairly often, and sometimes it sits that way for a long time, years even. Largely full agreement by everyone in a consensus process is either the stuff of fairy tales, or the item need not have come up for consensus discussion. If you believe the fairy tale, you'll be frequently pissed by the consensus process. The dual responsibility is for the conflicting person to hold open that the group is wise, and vice versa. Also, consensus does not mean a decision is written in stone, never to be considered again. Consensus is reached even with conflicting viewpoints on the table, and very rarely is that not the case. The sense or will of the whole is still to move forward though.
- As community size increases, consensus of the whole population ceases to be an option. There have been successful communities with several hundred thousand people that used representative consensus, with what, in ideal, the American founders had mostly in mind. That system has been polluted in America, primarily with money and the "I" instead of the "we." Ideally, the large group knows the small group holds everyone's intentions and the values/goals of the community dear.

While individuals may feel strongly in opposition to a small group's actions/decision, they still hold that the action taken was done with pure intention. This nature of trust and practicality becomes progressively more necessary as the group size increases. Newer techniques like "open space technology" allow for larger numbers to be considered. Very roughly, with more than one hundred people, trust in another without a significant, direct voice becomes necessary.

- At Camp Augusta, we are generally not making life or death decisions. Whether we will eat for the week, whether we need to increase our defense spending, whether we need to tax our community more, etc. . . these are not decisions that we need to make here. While a topic of contention is of importance, there are many important goals and processes at Camp Augusta, and sometimes discussions get tabled until the Symposium at the end of the summer, in service of the very demanding daily functioning of camp. Keep this point especially in mind if a point is brought up for discussion on an event/process that is quickly approaching or already being engaged in.
- Consensus is not to be mistaken for passionate and interesting discussions about an issue between a couple/few people. A GREAT many quandaries that require exploration and a decision can take place in less formal and in a more ad-hoc manner. Ask the PDs for appropriate time for the discussion if it seems necessary. A seeming impasse may require another perspective. Consensus is reserved for decisions of considerable weight (see principles).
- People make mistakes. Decisions and courses of action better served by a consensus process (usually in hindsight) may have been made in a role/function capacity, or just a left-field, winged decision. Unfortunate (sometimes very) events may come to pass as a result of that course. There may be complicated and nuanced factors that lead to such an outcome. Hold consciousness around the journey we are all on, perhaps peaceful regret about what happened, and compassionate action to improve our collective state.

# Hierarchies - flat out (so say the experts)

"Flat," "Expert," "Tacit," what? huh?

*. . . An early, misty morning, a day off, out at the magical Madrone Cradle . . .*

**You:**

Hello!, or (\_\_\_\_\_س/ع (peace be upon you)! Hola! Privet! Salut! Hei! Ya'at'eeh! Kia ora! Namaste~)

**Me:**

Hey, I was totally alone a second ago, where did you come from?! And, what are you saying?

**You:**

I am your higher self . . . sometimes we're best friends, and sometimes we barely know one another. Everyone has one, and you seemed to be troubled, so I thought I would pay you a visit "physically" so we could chat. Since I am your higher self, I know that you're struggling with the concept of "flat hierarchy" at Camp Augusta. Tell me what's up.

**Me:**

(I ate those old leftovers in the staff house at midnight last night; that must be what's happening. But hey, this might actually be helpful . . . visions are good enough for wise men, Native Americans, and ancients alike.)

Okay, good enough . . . yeah man, this ain't no so-called "flat hierarchy" as I understand it, and I'm totally bummed out, and sometimes frustrated and pissed off! I mean, if this were really a flat hierarchy, then everyone could go around doing whatever they wanted to all the time, but not like total chaos or anything, cause none of US are crazy or irresponsible or anything.

**You:**

Ah, mmmmm, yes . . . that might work. But I'm not sure what would happen when there were conflicting ideas, or someone had a good idea that they wanted to carry on during and after their time at Augusta . . . ya know, leave a legacy. It seems to me, or rather you (haha), that when two staff had conflicting ideas, there wouldn't be a way to resolve them, and those ideas might be in direct opposition to one another. For example, consider the alcohol policy, Facebook, what skits are cool, and whether or not folks can tell the campers that there is only one true God, and if you don't believe in Him, you're going to Hell.

**Me:**

Aha! True enough, but that's why we have consensus as a guiding philosophy here! :-)

**You:**

Right, right, and consensus for decision making rests on a mountain of community agreements and values that are shared. Without them, we'd have to start from base human needs and build up from there. Those established guidelines and values are the legacy that everyone before you has left. They allow you to reach higher than they could have from the lower, less established perch they were operating from. You're not embroiled in discussions about alcohol, rule of three, organic and local food, behavior guidance agreements, and thousands of other principles and practices because of the work of your past comrades. And, you'll likely add to those, allowing your influence to live on after you're gone.

**Me:**

Okay, so I can't run around doing whatever I want, even though I am very trustworthy and nearly never make a mistake; I get it. BUT, that doesn't mean people can run around and tell me what to do! Knowing the shared agreements and referring to those is enough.

**You:**

Dude, that would be the sweet nectar from the Garden of Eden itself . . . I wonder about a couple things though. One, since we left Eden, people aren't perfect and we make mistakes, sometimes on purpose, and sometimes from ignorance (ultimately always from ignorance). If we were all knowing and all seeing, we wouldn't need others to help us know and help us see. Two, . . .

**Me:**

Yeah, but anyone could point out when we're missing the mark somehow!

**You:**

I knew you (err, I) were a smart cookie! Exactly! In a flat hierarchy, that is precisely the point! Anyone can draw attention to anything to help others know, and help others see -- especially using the established guidelines of NVC and Success Counseling, for example. Anyone can support anyone, and that support may take many forms. Sometimes it does not readily feel like support, or is not delivered with the human perfection we would enjoy. And, let me tell you, sometimes you're self-esteem (= pain) gets in the way of you hearing what others have to tell you, valuable or not; keep working on that. :-)

**Me:**

Okay, so a free-for-all doesn't make sense, and shared agreements help us do more and be more now and in the future. Also, un-perfect people need others (anyone in the community) to help them grow. Now, this is starting to sound pretty inefficient . . . all this understanding that has to happen and conversations and discussions. Man, I'm swimming just thinking about it! It would be so much easier if this weren't a flat hierarchy and the PDs and VLs and such would just tell everyone what to do.

**You:**

Absolutely, it would be easier, and more efficient. If those were those Augusta's (yours, mine, everyone's) primary goals, we'd have a more controlled environment where people were rewarded and punished to dictate their behavior by people who had the right to reward or punish them. From Dictatorships to Monarchies to Oligarchy, that's the main idea. The challenge is that with command and control systems, other benefits are sacrificed on the altars of efficiency and ease. Whether looking at countries or corporations, especially over a long run, hierarchal systems don't perform as well or last as long as systems organized around freedom and the principle that everyone has value to add. Great ideas are available to everyone, and not just with folks with assigned power or the ability to reward or punish. And, since people aren't perfect, an emotional and powerful (reward/punishment) dictator doesn't foster warm fuzzies all the way around.

**Me:**

I'm glad you mentioned that "everyone has value." That brings up several things for me. Chiefly, if it is a flat hierarchy, then everyone has the SAME value!

**You:**

Mmmm . . . let's see . . . what would that look like?

**Me:**

Just that – Jake is no better than Jane, nor is Sandy any better than Jake or Jane, et cetera.

**You:**

Yes, absolutely! Each human life here is precious and equal. It is precisely because of that belief that a flat hierarchy is in place.

**Me:**

RIGHT! If everyone has the SAME value, then NO ONE should tell ANYONE else what to do!

**You:**

Yes, that's correct. In a flat hierarchy, you don't need to do anything you don't want to do, and nothing "bad" will happen to you as a result.

**Me:**

What if someone didn't want to come to breakfast on time; they preferred to sleep in. What would happen? How would the process work from there?

**You:**

Yeah, there are tons of those . . . ranging from what if you decided you were going to walk around naked all day to I'm not going to teach riflery. It's a community of WE, not I. As such, one person's solo actions have effect ripples (or tidal waves) on some portion of the rest of the community. Walking around naked, even if you REALLY wanted to express your personal freedom and values around the body being sacred and beautiful, would violate existing agreements, as well as having consequences for the community as a whole! Not wanting to teach riflery is not inherently a problem; each person's desires are important. If you didn't want to teach riflery, the community would work to make that happen. The community wants to meet everyone's needs as best as it can, as well as the needs of the community as a whole. That's the collaborative part of community (see "Asking for 100%"). Back to the community foundations though, there are existing agreements around expertise.

**Me:**

Expertise . . . so, it isn't a flat hierarchy after all; it is a hierarchy based on existing agreements and expertise!! I knew something was fishy!

**You:**

It is said that all conundrums and paradoxes point the way to a new plateau of understanding. A flat hierarchy has numerous benefits that are ALSO true in an expertise hierarchy – they overlap, hopefully holding the best of both worlds. For example, I put some benefits of a flat hierarchy on the tree here:

- No one can force you to do anything you don't want to do. "Because I said so" utilizes legitimate power, which is not in our community agreement as an acceptable method.
- No one can be dismissed from camp without following an open, existing process created by the community.

- No one person has the power to hire or fire anyone – it’s always a group, and membership to that group is open (following a community-set process as well).
- All information is free and available. Although, sometimes consensus with affected people may be required to access it, like asking to see someone else’s self or camper evaluations.

**Me:**

Sweet! Now, I don’t see why we need to throw expertise in the mix, which by its very definition makes us all not equal!!!

**You:**

This comes back to what I was about to say earlier as well . . . when we were talking about others asking us to do something. I’ll refer to my dear friend Wikipedia:

“Wisdom is a deep understanding and realizing of people, things, events or situations, resulting in the ability to choose or act to consistently produce the optimum results with a minimum of time and energy. It is the ability to optimally (effectively and efficiently) apply perceptions and knowledge and so produce the desired results.”

**Me:**

Oh, right, so now only some people have wisdom?! We’re all wise in our own ways, and all of our wisdom needs to be honored equally!

**You:**

Absolutely! Everyone has a contribution to make to the community. If someone feels they have something to contribute to a specific area of the community, they are invited and encouraged to participate; indeed, the community function is strongest when there is participation by caring people with some value they wish to bring to the table – especially when it isn’t easy or comfortable.

Now, imagine any existing system/group of people that truly operates on a flat hierarchy without expertise or wisdom being taken into consideration (into consideration is key; I’ll come back to that). Think about it . . . what group that exists for a while would that be? Two examples come to mind for me: A very simple, and narrowly tasked collective might, like The Cheeseboard in Berkeley that makes pizza, although they still use an apprentice model. The Quakers are the only other ones that come somewhat to mind, and even they honor relevant bodies of knowledge people may bring to the table. I can’t think of any other standing grouping of people that doesn’t place value on expertise or wisdom. Can you?

**Me:**

Hmmm . . . hmmm . . . mmmm . . . no, I can’t think of anything, but I’ll keep thinking about it and let you know.

**You:**

Great, I’d be most interested to hear what you come up with. Even extreme egalitarian groups honor relevant experience. As group size grows, roles and expertise become more important for higher group functioning. Generally, after 12 people, that is especially true. Let’s look at a few reasons why that might be the case . . . like the clever fable “The Animal School” or “Harrison Bergeron ” (in anthology or google it), absolute equality has significant limitations! ☺ You won’t regret reading either story!!!

Here, I’ve hung up some things on these trees over there. Check them out:

**Knowledge is power**

**Tacit**

Describe the smell of someone you know REALLY well. ☺ Describe blue to someone blind from birth. Tacit knowledge is experience, know-how, insight, intuition, skills . . . between the ears. It’s why you want a surgeon who has actually done hundreds of surgeries, and not simply gone to school to learn about them. 80% of knowledge is thought to be classified as tacit. It is transferred from person to person (modeling, scaffolding). Wisdom and skill are time consuming to acquire. This is one reason why we spend so much time in staff training.

**Explicit**

Knowledge you can touch and see all by your lonesome. It is frequently on paper (articles, summaries, books, etc.), digital (web, word, excel, powerpoint, etc.), viewed on video or photos, or spoken. 20% of knowledge is thought to be classified as explicit.

**Chasing the rainbow**

Generally, the longer someone has been at Camp Augusta, the more tacit and explicit knowledge they have gained about things Augusta. As returners, they are going to learn even more tacit and explicit knowledge,



especially if they are keen to do so, thus often outdistancing a newer person, like chasing a rainbow. While this is often a fact, it holds no emotional or reasoned weight other than the one you give it (see *Your Storied Life*).

*At the same time, new folks come to Augusta with pre-existing tacit and explicit knowledge from their own vast personal learning experiences!* The strengthening of Camp Augusta *heavily* relies on new people to infuse their knowledge into the Augustan consciousness, sometimes via KM, and sometimes via their modeling and scaffolding of others. This is true of hard (physical) and soft (mental/emotional) skills. Returners are the ones seeking to drink up new folks knowledge.

There are numerous domains of knowledge, and as a newer person to a given process/skill, you are unlikely to know as much as more experienced Camp Augustaites. As you bounce from area to area, you'll often find others know more. That may occur with archery, aerial silks, felting, ceramics, fire spinning, drama, transferring KM to OWL, NVC, Clean Communication, consensus, flat hierarchy, success counseling, level 3s, or . . . One's thoughts may drift toward, "I don't know much and it sucks!" Instead, consider the perspective of, "I can learn so much from so many people, cool!" The rainbow remains pretty.

### Learning in action

With nearly 100 hours of processing and learning before a new community member arrives and the longest camp staff training in America, folks know a lot, even though it may not feel that way. There are numerous options for learning more:

- If you know something you'd like to learn before the summer, ask for it (usually explicit knowledge).
- During staff training, seek time to learn what you're interested in.
- During the summer, your time off is available to learn many things you'd like to.
- During the summer, scheduled time is available when the result of your education will serve some communal end - you have plans for the information you're seeking. Shadowing a clinic, reading a KM or OWL document, serving on a working group for a process, being part of a consensus small group, etc.
- Counselors have their VLs as specific people who are interested in being mentors when their skill is higher than the counselors in a given area. It absolutely goes the other way as well! PDs are another resource for their skill domains. A counselor may have a particular skill you'd like to acquire. Modeling and scaffolding are built in to how Camp Augusta operates.

Fresh eyes on a process can elucidate what seasoned eyes have missed. If you want to learn an area and improve how it is presented or enacted, seek it out.

---

### Me:

I'm an expert. Maybe not recognized here, but elsewhere I have experience and knowledge that was considered valuable.

### You:

Domains of responsibility are assigned by the community, and for many roles, that occurs before the summer begins. Those decisions are made with the best intentions/wisdom at hand; often they're wise, and sometimes they are otherwise. With the latter, the community often experiences some pain. If that pain threshold is breached to the point that the role/domain of responsibility is considered not in the best interest of the community, then a community process to look into that gets set into place - very rare. Usually, there are support options that best serve the community and the individual.

Now, that isn't exactly what you were speaking to . . . the community is strongest when everyone's strengths are well harnessed to our collective goals. If you have a domain of expertise that you see as providing value, and it isn't being utilized/valued, then that's an important discussion to have, which may occur on a village level, program level, community agreements level, or some combination therein.

Honor what is here, created by people like you who care immensely and who had the best intentions in mind. Consensus! The entire document, and especially small and large group consensus processes. Get fully into that space, and then bring forth the challenge! Without that, there is slow to no growth.

**Me:**

Final say . . . come on now, don't feed me bullshit and call it a cherry! If a PD, VL, or Randy said it absolutely has to be done this way, then that's what would happen; there is nothing anyone could do about it.

**You:**

It is seductive to think that, because then you get to be right and the other person(s) wrong, and you get off the hook for taking responsibility. It's a "Racket," that leaves you pissed and the community suffers, either through less commitment, or the energy-sapping internal angst. When you do something you don't want to do, someone – yourself or others, is going to be made to suffer for that indignancy. Remember, Responsibility = Power = Choices.

And, every decision is open to challenge, seeking our way, not my way. You're unlikely to get what "I" want, and more likely to get what "WE" want.

Also, when there is a beef, look and see if it is with (a) The Person, (b) The Decision, and/or (c) The Process.

**Me:**

Okay, I'll test that out and see if it holds water. If it does, I'm sure glad I'm part of this flat/expertise-based hierarchy. Now I can be happy.

**You:**

No, I'm afraid it doesn't mean that you'll be happy.

Coerced power (of a reward, punishment, or legitimate (assigned) base) results in you're being happy *at the expense* of the other person. That is necessarily so. What is tricky about an expertise hierarchy is that it is entirely possible that one person's happiness (needs met) comes at the expense of another/others (needs met). The difference is that it doesn't have to be that way; there are avenues to express, be heard, and seek common ground – the consensus process.

Everyone is not the same, and the values/beliefs are not the same across the board. Where your beliefs and ways differ from the community, in small or large group form, is where you'll likely experience the pain of separation and not getting *your* way. Remember that *our* way does not, and cannot, mean that everyone's *my* way is met. We are a community, and need shifting is part of any non-dictatorial We. Harken back to "Asking for 100%" and the very important, related sentiments there.

**Me:**

Mmmm . . . yes, and, people are imperfect, and they make mistakes. When mistakes happen, it's easy for me to take that mistake and blow it out of proportion, extrapolating it to the person as a whole. I liked what you said a moment ago about breaking down my assessment to (a) The Person, (b) The Decision, and/or (c) The Process. And, what baggage/assumptions am I bringing to the table?

**You:**

Ah, sweetness. I know you want to get to the Yuba and meet folks for a dip and some lunch, so let's call it a chat.

**Me:**

Yeah, I am looking forward to that and will leave in a minute . . . two more things that still stick for me. One, in a flat hierarchy, would evaluative feedback flow in all directions, and two, how does expertise get challenged?

**You:**

Okay, two of your questions, and then two final things I'd like to mention . . .

Yes, evaluative feedback flows in all directions . . . counselors give feedback to their VLs, VLs give and receive feedback from the VL Mentor and others, PDs get feedback from counselors to VLs to the MF&G and so on. There is explicit space and time for some of that feedback process, but largely it happens on the fly and by request. Whether or not the latter happens is dependent on the person, and golden invitations are not forthcoming. Ask for time to give or receive feedback and it will be granted. The community is strengthened by everyone taking an active role in supporting one another, which takes many forms.

For challenging expertise, I'll give you some info for the road and you can get back to me if it isn't all clear – time is short.

The two other pieces I want to leave you with are "Balance" and "Decisions under Uncertainty." When you're triggered and off-balance, your needs are what is most present for you, and seeing past those to others, or how needs interact and intertwine, is difficult. Decisions under uncertainty – the "right" answer may not be known, and another "right" answer may or may not have yielded a better outcome. Most decisions are fuzzy and nuanced . . . that understanding opens the door to understanding, insight, and compassion.

**Me:**

Mmmm . . . I'll let all that simmer and see where I'm at. I'm off to the river!

**You:**

Peace be with you, and I'll see you again when you're pondering marriage in a couple years! ☺

# Reflections on Flat Hierarchy

## Decision Efficiency

Ideas brought forth by members of the community are all heard. If an idea is brought forth for an area a small number of people have responsibility for, the decision to implement the idea is made by them with the understanding they have expert knowledge in their area and that they are working within the organization's philosophy. The alternative is community paralysis. It is possible to challenge any decision, if so desired, by anyone. If it is an area that involves large groups of people, or will dramatically affect the community as a whole, the idea is brought to the entire community and often involves a consensus decision - see consensus for a more thorough description about the rubric here.

## Examples in Action

I ask the program director for a van on a day off as their area of responsibility includes overseeing transportation needs. They say "you can't take the van this weekend because it's needed to go to Piedmont with the bus." If another solution is possible, the requester may propose it for consideration. A "no" without reason or openness is unacceptable.

The EQ Director has the responsibility for running the EQ program as well as advanced knowledge in working with horses. They have a lot of experience in that area. It would be appropriate to speak with them first before changing the standard way of doing something, because it is an area they are responsible for. I also might have a great idea! Two minutes before the lesson may not be an appropriate time to present that information, so the request of the EQ director might be "please run it the way you have in the past for this clinic and let's meet tonight and talk about your ideas." The idea would be given fair consideration; do it my way because I said so would not fly. A discussion regarding the ideas at a more appropriate time would ensue.

As the CCM (Climbing Course Manager), your vote actually does count more than theirs, assuming they aren't certified or highly experienced as well. The CCM is responsible for the safety of the courses and has done classes to become certified. They are both the person responsible for that area, and carry certifications that give them expert power. Discussion of the policy would take place, but the CCM would be able to override the vote. As a side note, a majority vote is not consensus. Outside experts could be consulted for other opinions, if desired.

You work in the kitchen and would like to prepare a meal a different way. The kitchen manager (the expert) thinks this will take longer than the current practice. If the staff wants to try this other way, they would be welcome to, but the concerns of the kitchen manager would need to be addressed. People may need to come in earlier during the trial, for example. Another avenue would be to seek an outside expert's opinion on the matter to the contrary. Any discussion needs to be entered with openness to one another's view and a curiosity from all parties, rather than "this is THE way!" Situations that could be overridden by the expert would be ones related to a safety issue that was unpreventable, a reasonable concern that couldn't be worked around, or a legal issue. With experts conflicting, the group will see if reason of the group offers some direction, as well as weighing the risks of one direction or another. Further experts can be called as well. With risks more even and reasons weighing out, flip a coin :-). A remaining disagreement of significance in these regards would follow a juried decision (consensus with a small group assembled to decide).

## What about ideas that cross multiple areas or changes to the philosophy of the organization?

Changes to something that is multiple people's responsibilities would need to be discussed with those people. A decision may then be made among them. Changes to the philosophy of the organization would involve the people in the organization, in this case the camp community members. This would likely be a consensus discussion. See the previous pages for more information on that process.

## The Trump card

In playing cards, a trump card is one of a suit that changes the nature of the game. In street parlance, "playing a trump card" fundamentally changes the experience or outcome of a social situation.

There is a skillful and less skillful trump card to be played. The less skillful card is dirty communication and a "Racket" (see that document in the staff manual). The other person(s) is wrong, bad, foolish, stupid, crazy, \_\_\_\_\_. Some reason or justification follows that judgment/evaluation. In action, a person(s) will bitch and moan to someone else, stew in their own head, talk to the "offending" person and get "now here," and repeat over and over again in frustration, or until quiet resignation. Here are a few examples of what that looks like in this context:

- "Hey, that really gets my goat!"
- "Hmmm, that doesn't sit well with me." (sentiment=you did me wrong)
- "I really don't understand why things ended up the way they did."
- "That's not fair."
- "That's not right."
- "I would have done things differently if I were in their shoes."
- "I wasn't consulted in that decision, and I would have had something to say about it if I was."
- "I work harder than that person, how did they get that role at camp?"
- "That person isn't as competent as I am; I should have their job." (or, "They shouldn't have their job.")
- "I went to talk to her about it, and it didn't go the way I wanted it to. I'm still pissed, but there's nothing I can do about it now. She said no, and that's that."
- "I don't get why it works the way it does."
- "Hmmm, I feel railroaded into doing this. I wouldn't do it if they didn't make me."
- "It's for the good of the community that I do this, even though I don't want to and I'm upset about it."
- "They . . . . (followed by a complaint)"
- "It's done now, and there is nothing that can be done for it."
- "Why did they ask me about that, make a decision, but not involve me in the result?"

Judgment and criticism (shoulds and whys) are fears around more base needs. Competence and security, for example. Perhaps a fear of punishment of some kind. Maybe a need for ease, or a need for community and belonging. There are lots of options, and no peaceful one views another person as wrong, bad, or stupid.

The skillful trump card is Clean Communication, preferably with NVC and then openness (written about in the communication section of this manual), all with the intention of connection and understanding. Leading the conversation with a judgment/evaluation or an attachment to a specific strategy is particularly acidic - see "Asking for 100%."

Remember, all clean communication requests are honored within 24 hours. If you've got something to say, you will have a dedicated opportunity to say it. Tell a PD you want clean communication time and with whom, and they'll make it happen.

## What's in the box?

Write below what can not be challenged at Camp Augusta. Not what the community is unlikely to want to change, but what can not be challenged.

Now, within four days (a single day would be even more delightful), it is your obligation to the community to build consensus around your observation, following the small-group-consensus process. The forming of the group is something the entire community is aware of, and people who are very passionate become members of the group. The small group will propose its findings to the entire community.

### **Full Circle - why a flat hierarchy?**

Look to politics . . . to countries run in a hierarchical fashion . . . to groups . . . to organizations . . . all where some coercive power is the way for how many (never all, and rarely most) things happen. What would a political system look like if money (a reward/punishment base of power) were not the reason for actions? When values conflict, and strategies to meet needs are in opposition, power and conflict arise. Where there are agreements around consensus, and the many ways of being that serve life, there are avenues for expression and change that don't meet a wall. There will be no peace without that basis. How do people learn those tenets? By experience. Your experience . . . here, and that you understand and are able to apply it elsewhere. Get passionate. Get involved. It's what moves Augusta. It's what moves the world. If you don't act here, under what specialized conditions are you willing to act?

Friedrich Schiller.	A merely fallen enemy may rise again, but the reconciled one is truly vanquished.
Fyodor Dostoevsky	While nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer, nothing is more difficult than to understand him.
Indira Gandhi	You can't shake hands with a closed fist.

Consider that fear is the kernel of all uses of coercive power. Where does that fear come from? From the idea that one's needs are not going to be met, or met to the level desired. Coercive power is often the most direct route to getting one's needs met. To exit the hamster wheel of conflict, a different approach is necessary, especially when it is difficult to do so.

The opposite side of outward coercive power is fear turned inward, as with dirty communication #4, not approaching someone about a need, because you are afraid. Sometimes the fear manifests itself as dismissing one's idea as unworthy, without being grounded and at peace. Such fears benefit from support, for the fear itself, and as aid to approaching one's unmet need.

Cheri Huber:	Every time we choose safety, we reinforce fear.
Marie Curie	Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.
Marilyn Ferguson:	Ultimately, we know deeply that the other side of every fear is a freedom.
Marianne Williamson	Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

Camp Augusta is very interested in freeing the human soul, both campers and staff alike. Wish, Wonder, Surprise . . . fostering and reclaiming the beauty, wonder, awe, potential, and innocence of childhood . . . success counselor . . . consensus . . . choice in clinics, playstations, cabin activities, CAPP . . . freedom. Control based on coercive and solely legitimate power shackles the freedom of the human spirit, and sometimes body. The long-lived, positive development of both people and societies requires freedom tempered with wisdom.

### Quote of the week

"The most basic test of democracy is not what people do when they win; it is what people do when they lose. Citizens bring their deepest passions to a public debate—convictions they regard as morally self-evident. Yet a war goes on. Abortion remains legal. A feared health-reform law passes. While no democratic judgment is final, respecting the temporary outcome of a democratic process is the definition of political maturity. The opposite—questioning the legitimacy of a democratic outcome; abusing, demeaning, and attempting to silence one's opponents—is a sign of democratic decline. From the late Roman republic to Weimar Germany, these attitudes have been the prelude to thuggery."

*Michael Gerson in The Washington Post*

"Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. Those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience."

*C.S. Lewis, quoted in The Huffington Post*

## How sports now defines our culture

Neal Gabler  
*The Boston Globe*

Who won today, Obama or the Republicans? Is the stock market on a losing streak? What actor or movie is the odds-on favorite to win an Oscar? "Something has happened to America," said Neal Gabler, "that has made sports into a metaphor for the entire society." Our abiding love of baseball, football, and other athletics is nothing new, but in the age of round-the-clock competitions on TV, and SportsCenter to recount it all, sports permeates the national consciousness like never before. Politics, finance, religion, movies, gossip ... we now discuss every topic as if it were a game, with a winner and a loser. Just turn on the TV after a presidential address, or tune in to the talk shows on cable TV or radio, and you'll see the sports "template"—the running commentary, the experts' debate, the eye-popping graphics, the "endless post-game analysis." Everyone has an opinion and "a rooting interest," and they're loud; there are no shades of gray. It's more entertaining that way. Americans now follow the news not just to find out who "won," but to be reminded of what team we're on.

■ The frequency of filibusters has increased by a factor of 50 since South Carolina Sen. Strom Thurmond famously talked for 24 hours straight to stop a civil-rights bill in 1957, according to new UCLA research. The Senate averaged one filibuster every two years during the 1950s. In 2007 and 2008 (the 110th Congress), there were 52 filibusters.

*USNews.com*

### UNITED KINGDOM

## The EU's death knell for Britons

Melanie Phillips  
*The Daily Mail*

"Belonging to the European Union can literally kill you," said Melanie Phillips. Since last year, when Britain first implemented EU rules that prevent anyone from working more than 48 hours a week, hospitals have been disgracefully understaffed. In fact, patients are dying due to "the doctors' legal requirement to clock off." Just last month, at a Somerset hospital, a man admitted with shortness of breath "was forced to wait for more than five hours to see a doctor—by which time he was dead." In another case, an elderly

patient dropped dead because there was just one junior doctor to care for 100 patients. Even patients who survive long enough to get treated receive subpar care, since new doctors, ignorant of their case histories, are "parachuted in" every few days to provide treatment. The government will try to get an exemption for British doctors from the EU, but it's unlikely to succeed. In the past, British citizens died defending our sovereign powers. "Now they're dying because Parliament gave those powers away."

Dalai Lama: "The more you think about your own self, the more self-centered you are, the more trouble even small problems can create in your mind. The stronger your sense of 'I', the narrower the scope of your thinking becomes; then even small obstacles become unbearable. On the other hand, if you concern yourself mainly with others, the broader your thinking becomes, and life's inevitable difficulties disturb you less."