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**Dear Sage:**

Sometimes my company's officers have widely **differing opinions on what direction we should go**, and we don't always have a satisfying way to make our decision. Help!

**Dear Entrepreneur:**

Don't feel lonely; probably every company has that problem from time to time. There are two issues: how to have productive discussions that use all pertinent insights, and how to make good decisions. We'll deal with productive discussions here and save the decision making process for another time.

Most of us have gotten really good at going for what we want. To paraphrase author, professor and consultant Chris Argyris, we act in ways to get what we want, we emphasize the use of logic, often ignoring emotional aspects of arguments, and we try to suppress others who bring up negative viewpoints.

If we're really good at this, we may get our way most of the time. Unless we're also supremely all-knowing, that may not be the best for our company. Others have good ideas, too -- perhaps better than ours at least sometimes -- and few of our colleagues like it when we run roughshod over their ideas.

So what are we saying? That you've got to be strong, visionary, and a wimp, too?

Not at all. You can still push for your position as strongly as ever. To help your company do even better, just add a few explicit new values to your conversations: make company decisions based on good, tested data, give everyone involved the freedom to participate freely and openly in the decision-making (no more making them agree with you just because you outrank them!), and hold yourselves mutually accountable for your actions in support of these values.

Easy to say, not easy to do, but it can create a potent business dynamic!

Sincerely,  
Bill Harris, Facilitated Systems  
**for the Sage**

May 2003

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