Encourage open, constructive dissent

“All the first-rate decision-makers I’ve observed had a very simple rule,” says Peter Drucker: “If you have quick consensus on an important matter, don’t make the decision. Acclamation means nobody has done the homework.”

How’s that again?

Here’s what the wise man of management means: If a decision is important and risky, it should be controversial.

“There is a very old saying,” Drucker continues. “It goes back all the way to Aristotle and later became an axiom of the early Christian church: ‘In essentials, unity; inaction, freedom; and in all things, trust.’ Trust requires that dissent come out in the open.”

Every organization needs a healthy atmosphere for dissent if it wants innovation and commitment. You have to encourage honest and constructive disagreement—and you must never punish naysayers—precisely because you want it understood that everybody on your team is operating in good faith. Without genuine encouragement, people have a tendency to avoid tough decisions.

Another reason to encourage dissent: You don’t want everybody thinking the same way. What you do want is a diversity of opinion, flexibility in thinking and an openness to change.

Finally, open discussion uncovers flaws. After vigorously vetting an idea, your decision won’t have to be “sold” to anybody. Improvements on it can be incorporated, objections addressed and the decision itself will become a sturdy, three-legged stool instead of a wobbly pogo stick.