

Stifling Debate

There are some who believe that dissent is a challenge to the homogeneity of a group or its plans. They see the dissenting party as a nay-sayer - someone injecting a negative vibe into what might otherwise be a positive environment. Certainly there are times when this is actually the case.

The other possibility is that the dissent is justified because the group or its plan is somehow flawed and in need of improvement. The dissenting party may merely be engaged in an effort to push the others involved to greater excellence, hoping that through the criticism being voiced, the urge to respond and rectify will be found.

Assuming the aim is true and the dissenting party is only seeking to encourage the remedy of flaws he/she recognizes. The communication of those flaws – in how it is transmitted – is equally as important as the validity of the comments. The dynamics of a group intent on moving forward and excited by the conclusions they have reached can make the introduction of criticism a tricky and delicate situation. The advice (criticisms) cannot be heard and will not be acted upon if the group responds defensively, as opposed to willingly.

The responsibility for making the introduction of criticism palatable falls primarily on the person seeking to share the challenging views. The old adage that it is not what you say, but how you say it, comes into play. However, this does not remove all responsibility from the receiving party – meaning that they too have to be open enough and receptive enough to the idea that their plan may have room for improvement and be eager to hear suggestions for how to make it even better.

If the very idea of dissent is anathema to the group or the level of confidence (or arrogance) is such that there is no room for suggestion opportunities for improvement, then the chances of reaching maximum excellence is diminished. The idea that there is always room for improvement is healthy, and the search for ways to that improvement is wise.

The old expression, don't shoot the messenger needs to be heeded when a critical statement is presented. By allowing the discussion to flow and working through the negative comments, you may find the results to be actually quite positive.