

# Consensus Decision Making



In the Phoenix Fellowship  
of Narcotics Anonymous




## **A Working Definition of Consensus**



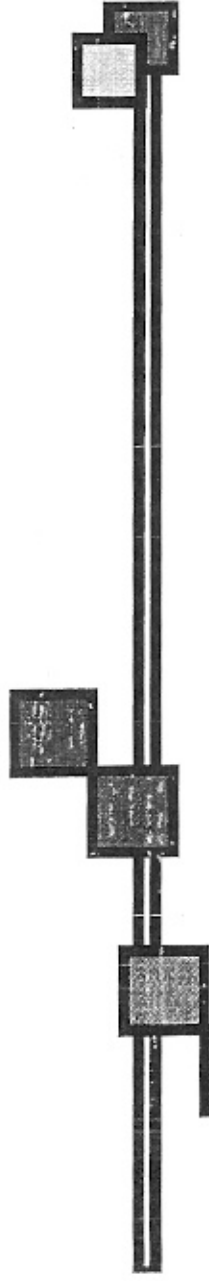
Derives from the Latin *con* meaning "with" or "together with" and *sentir* meaning to "think" or "feel".

So, "*consensus*" means to "*think or feel together*."



Consensus is a process by which a common mind of the meeting is sought about the wisest way forward on a particular issue at the time.

"Consensus" refers to both the PROCESS and the OUTCOME/DECISION

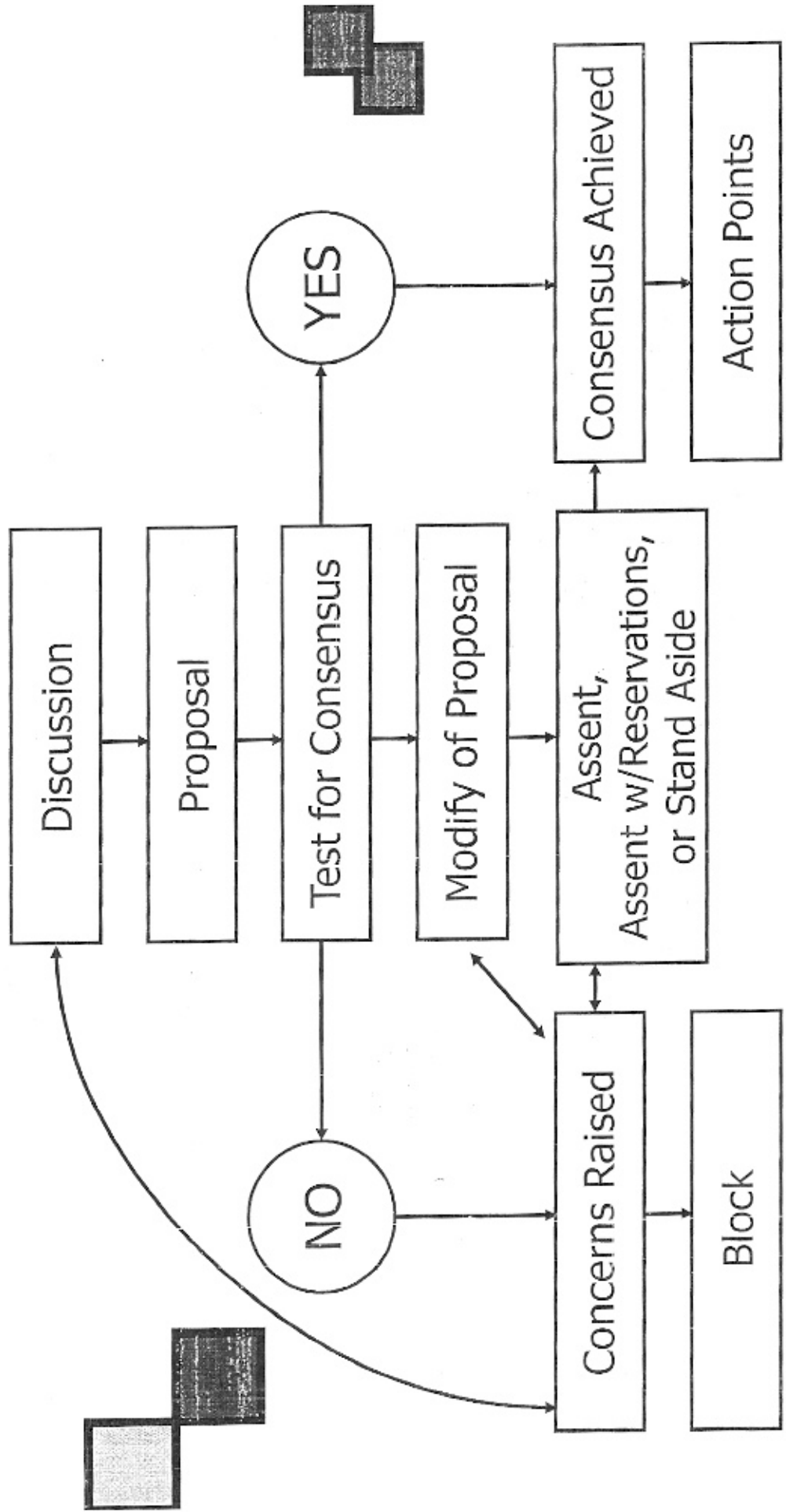


## **Consensus decision making is...**

- A cooperative process for making decisions in which everyone consents to the decisions of the group
  - Not everyone's first preference necessarily, but true consent
  - Decisions should reflect the integrated will of the whole group
  - Preserves the interests and integrity of all participants
- A problem-solving orientation for people who wish to work together
  - Not a process for determining whose ideas are best, but searching together for the best solution for the group
  - A questioning process, not the "okey-doke"
  - The decision is in this room — our job is to find it
  - Have respect and enjoy creative conflict



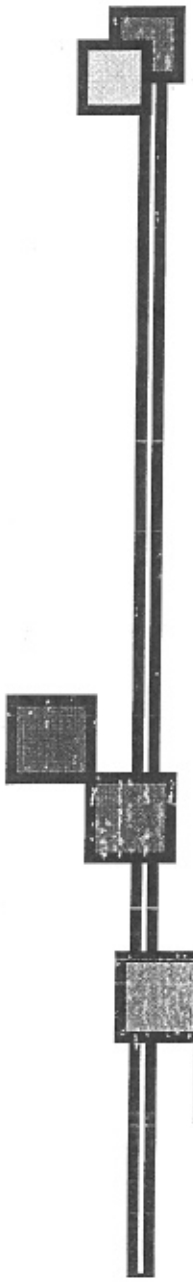
# How It Works:





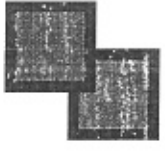
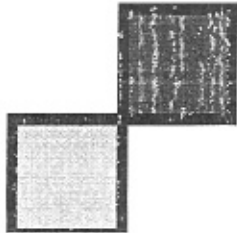
## Ideally...

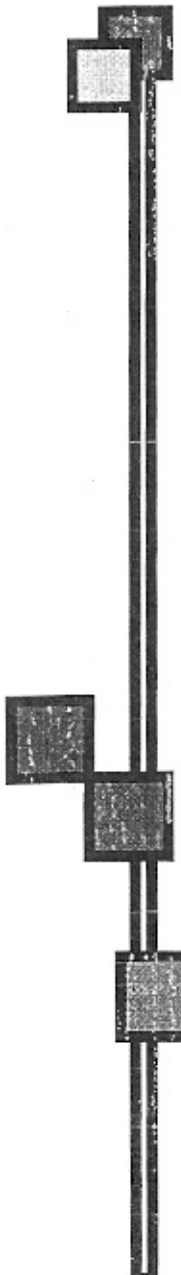
- concerns and reservations will be identified and addressed through the consensus decision-making process
- When the call for consensus on a proposal is made, you should ASSENT if you support the proposal, all things considered.
- Assent does not indicate that you may agree with every aspect of a proposal, but that you...
  - have heard the discussion,
  - have had a chance to participate in the process of finalizing the proposal, and
  - are prepared to support the final proposal.
- Assent is signified by remaining silent.



# Three Degrees of Dissent

- Assent with Reservations
- Stand Aside
- Block





## Three Degrees of Dissent

- Assent with Reservations

*"I think this may be a mistake but I can live with it"*

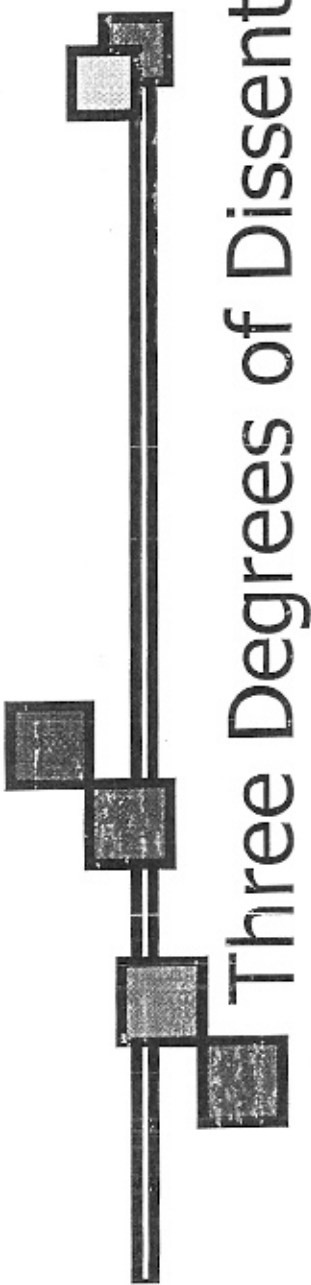
- Assent with Reservations if you are willing to let a motion pass but want to register your concerns
- Do so by raising your hand and, when called on by the facilitator, simply saying "Assent with Reservations."

The assumption is that the reservations have been heard already, and you are simply noting that you can support the proposal and continue to have these reservations.

- If there are significant reservations about a proposal, the body may choose to modify or re-word it.

- Stand Aside

- Block




## Three Degrees of Dissent

- Assent with Reservations
- Stand Aside

*"I personally can't do this, but I won't stop others from doing it."*

- Stand Aside if you have a serious personal disagreement with a proposal, but are willing to let the proposal pass. The concerns of group members standing aside are usually addressed by modifications to the proposal.
- a sizable number of Stand Asides (~33% or more) of those present will indicate that a consensus to adopt the proposal is too weak. The proposal is then either dropped or delegated to the maker of the proposal or an Ad Hoc Committee for reworking.

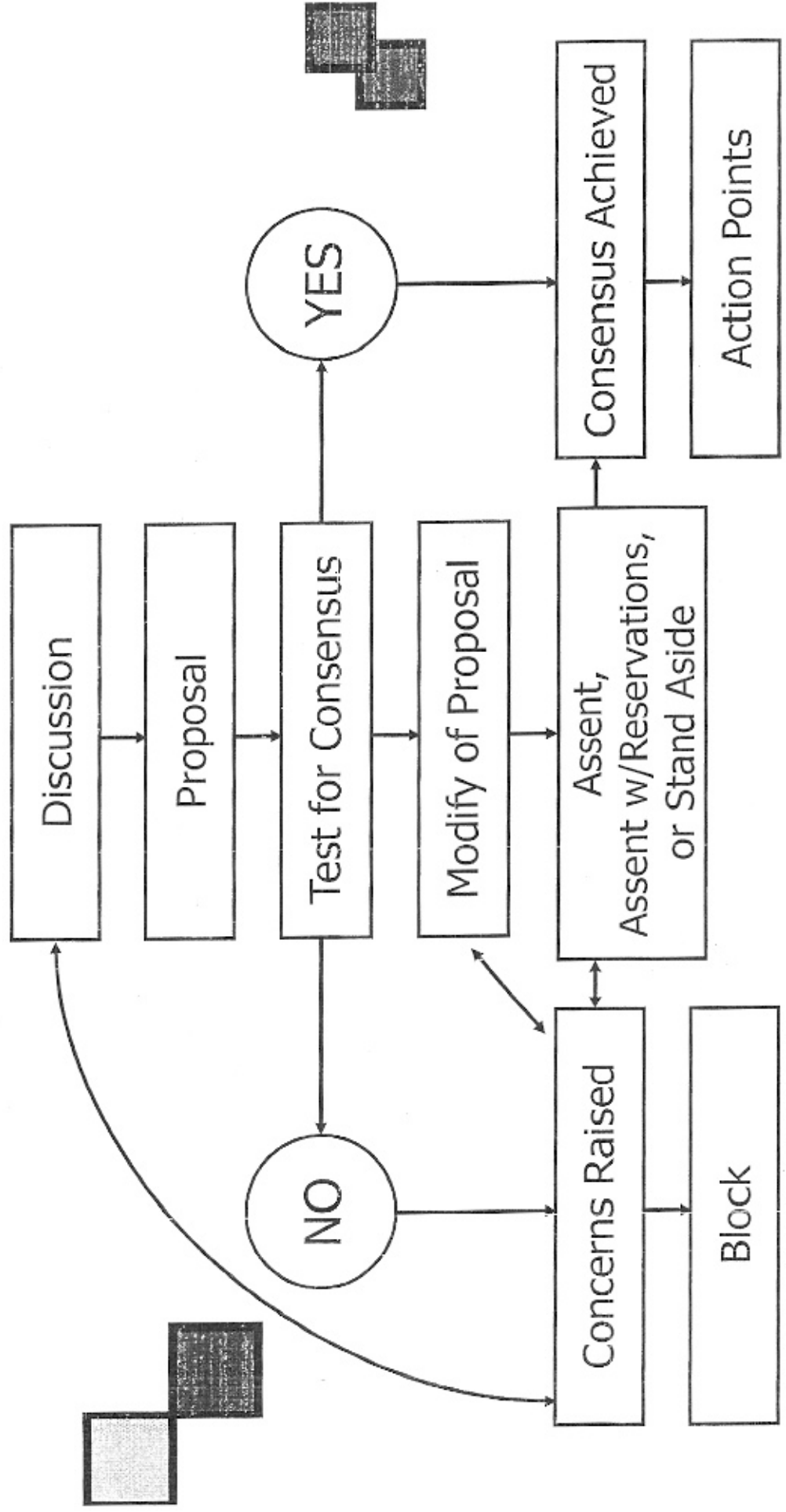
- Block



## Three Degrees of Dissent

- Assent with Reservations
- Stand Aside
- Block -- *"I cannot support this or allow the group to support this. It is against our principles."*
  - A rare and extreme form of dissent taken only if you honestly believe that one of the Traditions or Concepts is directly violated by a proposal or that some very fundamental moral position would be violated.
  - A GSR who blocks must be able to articulate which Tradition, Concept or Spiritual principle fundamental to NA is violated by the proposal.
  - We will apply the "Unanimity minus five" (or U-5) system which recognizes the ability of 5 or more GSRs to actively block a decision.
  - If consensus is blocked or no reasonable consensus can be reached, the group stays with whatever the previous decision was on the subject or does nothing.

# How It Works:



## Robert's Rules of Order

## Consensus Decision Making

Competitive, win/lose

Problem-solving, cooperative

Discussion constrained by motion

Multiple concerns and info can be considered

Discussion takes the form of a debate with a win-lose approach.

Discussion involves active listening and sharing information.

Few constraints are placed on the order or frequency of speaking.

Norms limit number of times one asks to speak to ensure that each speaker is fully heard.

Differences resolved by voting on motion.

Differences resolved by discussion. Facilitator identifies areas of agreement and names disagreements to push discussion deeper.

Chair calls for a vote.

Facilitator articulates the sense of the

Winners and losers are identified. Decision belongs to the winners.

discussion, asks if there are other concerns, and proposes a "minute" of the decision.

Group as a whole is responsible for the decision, and the decision belongs to the group.

Chair's vote can determine the decision when votes are tied.

Facilitator can discern if a minority concerns' warrant a delay in a decision.

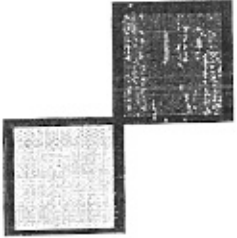
Dissenters' perspectives suppressed in majority vote.

Dissenters' perspectives are embraced and incorporated into decisions.



## CDM Requires Practicing Spiritual Principles

such as...

- Patience
  - Open-mindedness
  - Trust
  - Faith
  - Good will
  - Honesty
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