



### Summary of issue:

We have used every tool provided to us and we still can't agree on specific decisions. It seems like each of us is "digging in our heels", even to the point of refusing to talk about the issue. While some decisions can be delayed for a long time, others need to be decided now. When an immediate decision is required, and we are refusing to talk about it, a unilateral decision by either of us causes conflict and hard feelings.

### Making it personal (take turns answering each question):

Does the above paragraph resonate with me? If so, describe the topic(s).

For how long have these topics been an issue?

Who generally makes the decision when there is no agreement?

What efforts have been made over time to resolve ongoing disagreements?

### Suggestion of improvement:

If a decision can be delayed, take the time to seek a mutually acceptable decision. This is especially true for big ticket items such as a car or boat. Many decisions in life seem urgent, but often it's not a matter of urgency but rather one of impatience. Your marriage relationship is far more important than acquiring some possession or having an experience. Carefully consider if the decision is really urgent, or can we delay making the decision for the benefit of our marriage.

With that being said, many decisions cannot be delayed indefinitely. Some decisions give us a little lead time, while others require immediate attention. The thoughts offered below cater to both time sensitive and immediate decisions.

Evaluating the quality of a decision process is important. Let's look at two decision "goals" that will not work, and one that has a chance of working.

**Agreement** on every issue is a romantic notion, but not very realistic. While "pretend agreement" may be common during the engagement and honeymoon period, marriage tends to expose differences that can't be ignored. Agreement, while a good goal, is not a viable test of a good decision. **In many cases, agreement will never happen.**

How about **compromise**, is it a suitable decision goal? Probably not, because with some decisions compromise is not possible. For example, say your daughter wants to spend the night at a friend's house. Mom says yes, dad says no. What is the compromise?... That she can stay until 3:07am and then she is brought home? Sadly, even when a compromise is established, both spouses generally feel they got the short end of the stick. **Compromise is often not an option.**

So, what is the proper goal to rate a decision when there is no agreement and no possibility of compromise? There is a business word that has lost most of its meaning over time... **Consensus**. Today consensus is generally assumed to be agreement. Historically consensus meant "**100% support without agreement**". Effective board of directors use consensus as their goal for a

successful decision. Board level executives are usually successful, opinionated, and stubborn, but they understand that the good of the company is more important than getting their own way. They understand that there is a higher calling than getting my way. The ultimate goal is the unity of the governing group. The exact same is true in your marriage. The unity of you as a couple is critical for your marriage, and especially important if you have children watching the two of you. To put it another way: a bad decision with unity is better than a good decision with disunity.

**Decisions based on consensus have the best chance of success when faced with disagreement cast in concrete.**

The other benefit of consensus decision making is increased intimacy in marriage. Supporting your spouse's decision when you disagree is a sign of unconditional love. This involves never "back biting" or saying "I told you so" when the decision fails. Having your spouse's back in this way demonstrates that I care more about you and our relationship than I do about getting my own way.

Who is the "tie breaker" if a consensus decision cannot be reached? There is no simple answer to that question. The Bible says the husband is ultimately responsible for protection and provision for his family. If a decision would put his family at risk, the husband should step up and protect the family. In other situations, the "tie breaker" should generally be the spouse responsible for the area under discussion. For example, the author makes decisions about oil for the car, and his wife makes decisions about cooking oil.

### **Homework:**

Take time to discuss agreement vs. compromise vs. consensus decision making.

Seek to agree upon topics where consensus decision making is normally required.

If you have young children, discuss when and how consensus decisions should be employed.

### **Follow up (discuss at next marriage mentor session):**

Describe what came out of your homework.

Was there a joint decision to utilize consensus decision making?