

# COMMANDANT'S GENERAL DISCUSSION TECHNIQUES

## 1-2-4 WHOLE GROUP

Many times in my career I've been in these professional circles and only three or four people would contribute while others just sit there observing, but these observers have so many insights to share with the group that usually will go unheard. This exercise will assist the leader in gaining maximum participation in any professional leadership setting.

1-2-4 Whole Group is adopted by The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures<sup>1</sup>. This is an iterative group activity designed to solicit and improve upon ideas and input from all participants, as well as to generate new ideas. Starting with each individual's own idea, group members participate in successive conversations to share, discuss, and improve upon individual ideas. The effort creates an environment where individuals can offer their original ideas without influence from others, gradually exploring and sharing ideas so that all are heard, and everyone contributes to the outcome. This tool also allows for ideas to merge into something new, or to spark ideas not realized in the initial round.

Use 1-2-4 Whole Group when a group needs to critically review an issue of importance, seek new solutions or approaches to a problem, and highlight the vast range of views that surround a certain issue or hear ideas/solutions from all individuals.

**Facilitator:** Prepare one well-defined question to position the issue. Review my General Discussion Guide for some example questions.

**One:** Each participant reflects on the question within the allotted time (a few minutes to overnight, if possible), and then pre-commits by writing down their answer or idea before they have heard from or been influenced by any other participant.

**Two:** Each participant finds one partner and discusses the information to which they have pre-committed. From this starting point, they share feedback and add any new thoughts or insights prompted by the discussion. This can be a refinement, a merging of ideas, or a new idea prompted by the discussion. Ten minutes is usually sufficient.

**Four:** Each pair joins one other pair and repeats the process, covering those elements the participants found useful from the previous conversation. In addition to sharing observations, they identify biases, frames and missing information.

**Whole Group:** All participants come together in a single group to discuss insights discovered during the process. Discussion should include new discoveries, novel solutions, and an understanding of how their view of the issue has changed.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless, The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures (Seattle, WA: Liberating Structures Press, 2013).