

## Four Pathways to Yes!

By  
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During the past year while working with individuals, congregations, and denominational groups, I have had the opportunity to experiment with a dialogue framework that affirms what is right about a given proposal or idea, and builds on it. It assumes it is more possible to move toward consensus if dialogue focuses around what is right about a certain proposal or idea, rather than what is wrong.

Often dialogue is not dialogue at all, but debate seeking to discover who is right rather than what is good. In spite of suggestions to the contrary, many people's absolute, non-negotiable truths are actually their subjective positions on the proposal or idea being discussed.

**Four Pathways to Yes!** is superior to a problem-solving approach that focuses on where participants disagree rather than where they agree. Seeking pathways to **Yes!** is a collaborative model that can build a leadership community with the capacity to handle many opportunities and challenges.

Here are the **Four Pathways to Yes!**

### **Pathway One: I can say Yes! to some or all of the proposal or idea right now.**

Often there is immediate agreement on many aspects of a proposal or idea. These early wins should be affirmed from the beginning and throughout the dialogue. Each round of dialogue should assume the depth of consensus already achieved. Participants should be held accountable for the decisions in those areas where they have affirmed the proposal or idea.

### **Pathway Two: I can say Yes! to the proposal or idea if I have more information.**

Frequently the presenters of a new proposal or idea do not provide enough background information, or do not know the information most desired by participants in the decision-making process. Or, participants want to ask questions to assure themselves that various perspectives or interests have been included in the development of the proposal or idea. Also, if a new proposal or idea develops in the midst of dialogue it usually will require more information to discover any systemic impact it may have on the individual or organization.

### **Pathway Three: I can say Yes! to the proposal or idea if I have more time for dialogue.**

Persons presented with a new proposal or idea often have a **process deficit**. They have not had the same time or opportunity to process the proposal or idea as have the presenters. By providing time and good facilitation to those receiving a proposal, it is possible that saying **Yes!** to the proposal or idea will be possible within a reasonable amount of time. Also, if a new proposal or idea develops in the midst of dialogue it may require significant dialogue and facilitation to build a consensus.

### **Pathway Four: I cannot say Yes! to the proposal or idea in its current form, but I would be open to future dialogue.**

Some people have legitimate problems with a given proposal or idea. They need to be able to express that they are not prepared to say **Yes!**, without being the focus of disapproval from the remainder of the group. Often their inability to say **Yes!** is because they need additional information or dialogue. At times it is because the proposal appears to violate their core values. When core values are violated, saying **Yes!** can be tough and involve *soul-searching* efforts to re-evaluate previously non-negotiable perspectives.