



Silence Is Not Always Golden: Speaking Up In Meetings

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In yesterday's [Corner Office feature](#) of the *New York Times Sunday Business* section, the chief executive of a pharmacy benefit management company offered "rules of the road for engagement" in meetings. I want to highlight one of them—silence will be taken as consent. If you disagree with something said or done in a meeting, in other words, you can't come back later and express your disagreement. "Come to the meeting, let your feelings be heard, and a decision will be made." This is an easier rule to apply if everyone in the meeting is a peer, but it may be harder if there is a significant power differential among the participants. I want to encourage the use of this rule in our meetings, which will mean supporting some staff members who are reluctant to disagree publicly with faculty members. It also will mean supporting junior faculty members who are reluctant to express a view that is not shared by senior faculty colleagues.

It should be clear from the budget roundtables that we need to shift some elements of the School's culture, and I believe that this is one of them. We need to hear everyone's ideas in public so that others can support, challenge, and improve them. It is impossible for that to happen if ideas and opinions are shared only with me after the meeting. I recognize that there may be occasional exceptions, but adhering to this rule of engagement to the greatest extent possible will improve the quality of our decisions. It also will make us more efficient if we can hear all views at the same time and move forward with a decision. This will be increasingly important as we need to make time-sensitive decisions about budget and revenue that cannot wait for perfect information, and that cannot wait for vetting in multiple rounds of meetings. If everyone feels that our meetings are a safe place to express their views, including disagreements, then it will be reasonable to assume that silence equals consent. It also will be easier to move forward. What needs to happen for our meetings to be viewed by everyone as a safe place to express their views?