



Fist of Five

The Fist of Five approach combines the speed of thumbs up/down with the degrees of agreement from the Decision Spectrum. Using this approach people vote using their hands and display fingers to represent their degree of support.

A small problem with this approach is that two standards have emerged and so you really need to be clear upfront if 5 fingers means “full agreement” or “no, stop”. One model (popularized by the American Youth Foundation) registers **support** by finger votes, a fist (no fingers) means no support, 5 fingers means total support and a desire to lead the charge.

The other popular model registers **resistance** or objection to an idea, one finger means total support, two fingers means support with some minor reservations we probably need not go into, 3 fingers means I have concerns that need discussing, 4 fingers means I object and want to discuss, and 5 fingers (an extended palm like a stop sign) means stop, I am against this decision.

At the recent APLN board meeting in Salt Lake (the subject of a future post) David Spann facilitated a decision process using the Fist of Five method (having first explained which version we were using) and greatly speeded along the decision and consensus building process.

So next time you are faced with decision making in a group setting consider these tools. While they will not guarantee the conversion of that stubborn team member (you need five fists for that!) they will at least provide a quick and effective process.



To use this technique the Team Leader restates a decision the group may make and asks everyone to show their level of support. Each person responds by showing a fist or a number of fingers that corresponds to their opinion.

Fist

A no vote - a way to block consensus. I need to talk more on the proposal and require changes for it to pass.

1 Finger

I still need to discuss certain issues and suggest changes that should be made.

2 Fingers

I am more comfortable with the proposal but would like to discuss some minor issues.

3 Fingers

I'm not in total agreement but feel comfortable to let this decision or a proposal pass without further discussion.

4 Fingers

I think it's a good idea/decision and will work for it.

5 Fingers

It's a great idea and I will be one of the leaders in implementing it.

If anyone holds up fewer than three fingers, they should be given the opportunity to state their objections and the team should address their concerns. Teams continue the Fist-to-Five process until they achieve consensus (a minimum of three fingers or higher) or determine they must move on to the next issue.)

Remember: not involved => not committed. We need to find ways to get people involved and committed to important project decisions.