

“So... where do you guys want to go to dinner tonight?” This innocent sounding question can be the beginning of a brutal foray into consensus building. It only takes two individuals to participate in this tango, but to get the full flavor of how difficult making a simple decision can be, it really takes 3 couples... preferably friends.

On one such occasion, my wife and I and four of our friends were enjoying some wine and cheese, some great conversation and some laughs, when someone finally ruined everything by asking “So, where do you guys want to go to dinner tonight?” Bob sat up in the recliner that had up until that time taken away his will to move, “Let’s go for barbeque!” “Oh No!” Sue complained, scrunching up her face and holding her stomach. “I can’t eat all that heavy food, not tonight.” “Well, how about Italian?” offered Jim. “There’s this great place...” His wife Pat quickly pounced, “Jim, you know Italian gives me heartburn,” then she added “But I could go for a salad.” “You can get a salad at the barbeque place!” grumbled Bob, whose arms were now crossed. “Salad? At the barbeque place?” said Pat. “If you want a salad, that place in North Naples has a great salad bar.” Sue slumped her shoulders and rolled her eyes “Oh, I’m not going all the way down there.” Silence. Lori and I look at each other and then the clock. We’ve seen this show before. (my stomach growled... better to lay low... have some more cheese.) Suddenly, Jim jumps up, finger pointed in the air. “I’ve got it.... Chinese!” “WE HAD CHINESE LAST TIME” yelled everyone else in the room. Silence again. “At least they’ve got those little barbeque ribs there” mumbled a dejected Bob. Pat threw her hands in the air, surrendering. “Let’s just go to that new restaurant we heard about. The food is good and they have a little of everything.” Everyone looked at each other, nodding or shrugging unenthusiastically. “Great!” I said, polishing off the last square of cheese as I slid off of the bar stool and headed towards the door. Suddenly, a chill ran down my spine. I stopped and turned slowly towards the others, “Whose car are we going in?” I actually heard the “Twilight Zone” theme music.

Building a consensus can be a difficult ordeal. Whether it is between a group of friends or an entire City, it can test our ability to work together as one. When the decision calls for us to express our personal tastes, we are all sometimes guilty of giving our opinion, while dismissing the validity of others. Considering our diverse backgrounds and interests, it’s a wonder that we ever make a collective decision that is widely embraced. I suppose it takes the ability to realize that although our lone voice is important, sometimes our personal preferences need to give way to the collective consensus and the search for reasonable compromise. Or, we can simply eat alone.