

To Sit in Council

By Michael Magleby - Priesthood and Family Department

Bringing Greater Power to Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society Meetings

Before this world was created, Heavenly Father accomplished His work through councils (see [Doctrine and Covenants 121:32](#)). Beginning with Adam and Eve, God's people have sought His counsel in councils. In fact, God referred to Himself as "Man of Counsel" ([Moses 7:35](#)). Early in this dispensation, Joseph Smith began restoring "the order of Councils in ancient days."¹ Today, the Church is governed by councils at every level.

The *General Handbook* invites elders quorums and Relief Societies to bring the power of counseling into their Sunday meetings: "The meeting begins with a presidency member conducting any business. For example, the sisters [or elders] may counsel together about aspects of accomplishing the work of salvation and exaltation" ([9.2.1.2](#); see also [8.2.1.2](#)).

The following principles can help you discover how counseling together invites revelation, increases unity, and brings power. Consider how these principles might bless you, your ward or branch, and your quorum or Relief Society.

Power in Purpose

"As ye have assembled yourselves together, ... and are agreed as touching this one thing, and have asked the Father in my name, even so ye shall receive" ([Doctrine and Covenants 42:3](#)).

Councils are an avenue through which we "collectively seek the Lord's will."² In other words, it's not enough just to share ideas; by counseling together, we invite revelation so we can learn what the Lord wants us to do in our situation. We will have more success in having such a revelatory experience as we remember the following:

1. *Focus—start with a specific, meaningful issue or need.* Focusing on a single issue or need increases our ability to make meaningful progress. Focus also helps us to see beyond visible symptoms (what is happening) and seek for understanding about root causes (why and how something affects people). For example, we might counsel about how to mentor and connect our youth with heaven rather than discussing the time youth spend looking at screens.
2. *Perspectives—frame the issue or need as a question.* A topic phrased as a question can draw out doctrinal insight. We might ask, "How can we address the situation in a helpful and healing way?" or "What doctrine, if better understood, would help resolve the issue?"
3. *Power—seek revelation.* While councils may brainstorm solutions, the purpose of the council is to discover God's will, not just to list best practices or to say, "This is how it was done in my last ward." As Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, we don't need meetings; we need revelatory experiences.³ Counseling together reveals powerful solutions leading to action.

Power in Participation

"Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege" ([Doctrine and Covenants 88:122](#)).

In councils, the interests of individuals and the organization—the ward or branch—come together in a unique way, especially if participants understand the following:

1. *Each council member has a vital role.* Council members should actively participate in but not dominate the council. As Paul taught: "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary" ([1 Corinthians 12:21–22](#)).
2. *Council members seek to add light.* The Prophet Joseph Smith taught "that every man, before he makes an objection to any item that is brought before a council for consideration, should be sure that he can throw light upon the subject rather than spread darkness, and that his objection be founded in righteousness."⁴
3. *Council members seek to be unified.* Despite different perspectives, council members unite in seeking to "receive guidance from the Holy Ghost."⁵ Joseph Smith once said during a council that "to receive revelation and the blessings of heaven it was necessary to have our minds on God and exercise faith and become of one heart and of one mind."⁶

Power in Action Plans

“Every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him” (Doctrine and Covenants 101:78).

A council is incomplete without plans to act on revelation received. Council participants should be invited to make specific commitments that they will act upon. “At the end of your council, you need to have assignments,” said President Jean B. Bingham, former Relief Society General President. “The most important work happens between meetings.”

The leader guides the council toward understanding and consensus. Then he or she leads out in making and recording assignments for later follow-up. Sister Sharon Eubank, former First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency, adds: “The power is in us. As we bind ourselves to act, the Lord will sanctify our efforts (see [Doctrine and Covenants 43:9](#)). Volunteering for and reporting back on assignments is the meat of covenant action.”

Role of the Leader

“The preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal” (Alma 1:26).

To improve our councils, we avoid worldly concepts of leadership. In the Lord’s kingdom, the leader is “servant of all” ([Mark 10:44](#)). Similarly, the council leader, whether a presiding authority or a teacher, provides focus but is not the focal point. He or she avoids being the dominant voice or taking a position before hearing from the council.

The council leader plays an important role in framing the purpose, facilitating discussion, and inviting participants to make commitments to act. The council functions better as the council leader listens, guides, invites, protects, and validates.

1. *Listen.* Good leaders listen to the speaker and to the Holy Ghost. “I believe the gift of discernment operates more effectively,” said Elder Bednar, “when we’re listening as opposed to when we’re talking.”⁷
2. *Guide.* A council leader guides the conversation, allowing ideas to build. As necessary, the leader reframes the discussion or lovingly redirects it.
3. *Invite.* The Lord scatters revelation among members of a council. Inviting everyone—including the reticent—to offer ideas increases the potential of learning the will of the Lord.
4. *Protect.* A council leader creates an environment for sharing safely and appropriately by caring for those who share and protecting against criticism and judgment. Sensitive topics require careful guidance. Matters that are confidential remain so.
5. *Validate.* As participants share thoughts and ideas, a leader validates input by offering appreciation and connecting related ideas. This validation helps participants feel part of the revelatory process and stretch themselves to ensure that their input is helpful.

More Than Just a Lesson

Sunday elders quorum and Relief Society meetings should include “sufficient time” for “meaningful gospel instruction and discussion” about recent general conference messages (*General Handbook*, [8.2.1.2](#), [9.2.1.2](#)). But an elders quorum or a Relief Society is not a class or a lesson. We have a work to do, and we do more than just talk about that work. Rather, we “sit in council” and promote righteous action—action that will help us all progress along the covenant path “with songs of everlasting joy” ([Doctrine and Covenants 66:11](#)).