# how to speak up as a group at work

by ALISON GREEN *on* FEBRUARY 19, 2018

I sometimes suggest that letter-writers who are concerned about a problem at work get a group of coworkers to all speak up about it together — because there's strength in numbers and it can be harder to blow off a group than a single person. But I want to talk more about what that looks like.

The first question is how to get this group together in the first place. This doesn't have to be a big formal thing where you're sending memos and organizing clandestine meetings. Just talk to people and see what they think of whatever the issue is, and ask if they'd be willing to join you in asking for it to be reconsidered. For example:
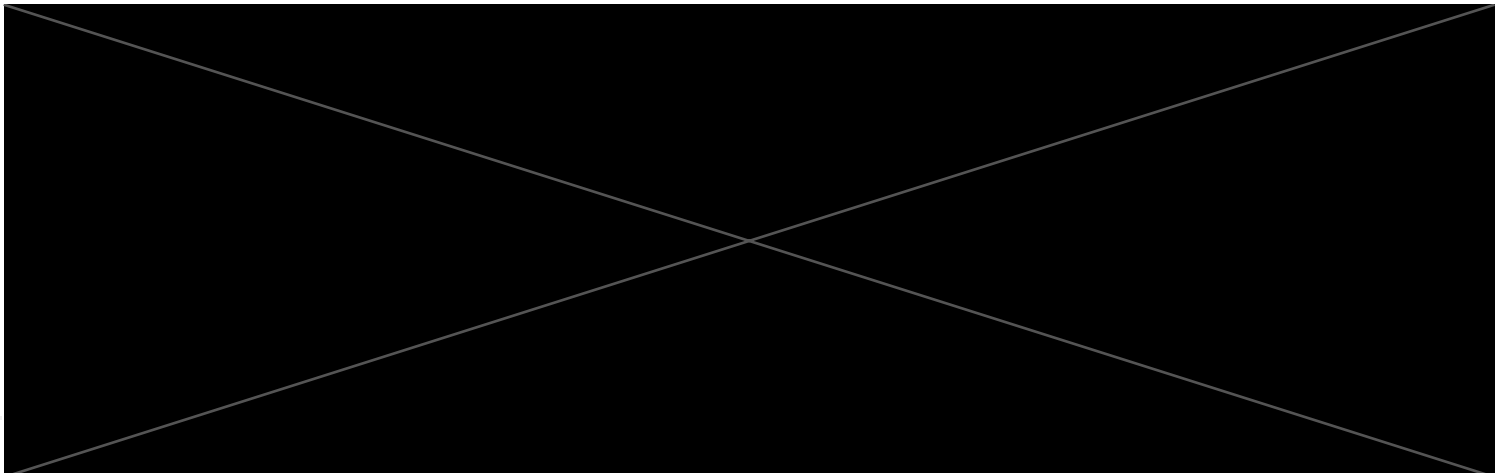
You: "Hey, I've been thinking about this new request that we all have our tonsils out in order to cut down on sick days. It seems invasive and wrong to me, and I wondered what you thought of it."

Coworker: "Yeah, I'm not happy about it either."

You: "What do you think about several of us going to Jane as a group and pushing back on it? If a group of us spoke up about it, I think she'd take it seriously and we'd have a good chance of getting the policy changed."

Coworker: "Yeah, I'd be up for that. But would it just be me and you?"

You: "Let me check with a few other people and we can see who else is up for it."

From there, the group of you talk to your manager or HR or whoever the decision-maker is that you're trying to influence. Do it in-person, though; this isn't a memo thing or an email thing.

If you already have regular team meetings, it can make sense to bring it up there while everyone is present, and multiple people can easily chime in.

Or, depending on what the issue is, sometimes it makes more sense for multiple people to each bring it up individually with the manager. If you do that, you can be transparent about the fact that you've all talked. You don't need to make it seem like it's a coincidence that everyone's raising it — it's okay to say "I was talking this over with Jane and Bob and realized I think X." You generally don't want to speak for Jane and Bob, but it's okay to acknowledge that you talked about it, and that that was part of developing your thinking on it.

For something more serious, you might say, "My sense is that a lot of us have concerns about this. Could we set a time to sit down as a group and talk it through?"

In general, though, I wouldn't recommend having one spokesperson going and talking to the manager one-on-one on the group's behalf. There might be a rare time when that makes sense, but most of the time it will be less effective. The manager is likely to wonder why a spokesperson was necessary, and how accurately other people's viewpoints are being represented, and if the person is really speaking for everyone else they say they're speaking for.

For the same reason, if you're meeting with your manager (or HR, or whoever) as a group, avoid having one person do all the talking. You don't want to create the impression that there's one person who really cares and the rest are just there for moral support. You want

sit there silently, figuring that you've got it covered. Ask people to agree ahead of time that they're all going to actively participate so that it doesn't end up looking they're not as invested.

In the meeting itself, the basic framework you want is this:
* "We're concerned about X."
* "We're hoping we can share our perspective with you. Here are our concerns."
* "Given those concerns, can we change the way we're doing this/can this be reconsidered/would you be willing to try Y instead?"
* "Thanks for hearing us out."

You don't want to use this approach for every concern that comes up at work, of course! In most cases, it will make more sense to talk to your manager one-on-one. But when something is a particularly big deal or affects a lot of people, or when your manager has a tendency to personalize disagreement, this is sometimes the most effective way to go.