

Meeting Myths

Some rules are made to be broken—especially when they aren't really rules in the first place. Things are done a certain way either because “they've always been done that way” or because they are “supposed” to be done that way.

What follows are “meeting myths” that need to be put to rest.

MYTH: “WE DON'T USE PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE.”

Whether you are aware of it or not, both your board meetings and monthly general meetings should follow parliamentary procedure. Your club should adopt a rule that they will follow a particular procedural book, such as *Robert's Rules of Order*, during meetings.

MYTH: PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AND ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER ARE THE SAME THING.

Parliamentary procedure includes all the rules that govern the transaction of business in meetings. Parliamentary procedure is not identical to *Robert's Rules of Order*. Instead, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* “RONR” is the most popular of several parliamentary books. *RONR* is also an excellent resource and includes sections on presiding, the duties of officers, taking minutes, running elections, writing and amending bylaws, and holding board and committee meetings.

MYTH: RULES ARE THE SAME FOR ALL MEETINGS.

Board meetings and general meetings should be conducted differently. The level of procedure usually varies by the size of the group and board meetings are generally smaller in number of members for most clubs. Meetings with the entire membership must be fairly formal. Informal discussion of matters is impractical due to the number of members present. Limits on debate must be observed to keep the meeting on time. Formal votes help avoid challenges while smaller boards and committees can be less formal.

MYTH: THE ABSENCE OF A QUORUM IS OKAY IF NOBODY BRINGS IT UP.

One of the quickest paths to serious trouble is to ignore quorum requirements. A “quorum” is the number of voting members who must be present to have a valid meeting. This number is typically established by the by-laws.

There is a belief that the lack of a quorum can be ignored if no one raises the issue. Not true! The general rule is that any business transacted without a

quorum (except for a few procedural motions) is null and void, regardless of whether or not any member raises the issue.

MYTH: DISCUSSION FIRST, MOTION LATER.

For groups following formal procedure, no discussion should occur without being preceded by a “motion” to take action. A motion is a formal proposal for consideration and action. In formal meetings, all items of business are initiated by proposing a motion.

MYTH: VOTE ON ALL REPORTS.

Committee reports are often for information only. In such instances, no motion is necessary following the report. A motion “to adopt” or “to accept” a report is seldom wise except when the report is to be published in the name of the your club or your state federation. In those cases, the reporting member should end by making a motion if the committee has a specific recommendation for action.

In contrast to common practice, treasurers’ reports seldom require action. When a treasurer is simply reporting the cash on hand or receipts minus disbursements, no action is necessary. Such a report should simply be filed for reference.

Treasurers often make more detailed yearly financial reports. Such reports should always be audited (either externally by an accountant or by an internal audit committee, depending on the association’s size and resources). The auditor’s report is then considered and adopted.

MYTH: A MOTION IS ALWAYS NECESSARY.

Many matters can be resolved through “general consent” or “unanimous consent.” Under this method, the presiding officer asks, “Is there any objection to . . . ?” For example, “Is there any objection to ending debate?” If no one objects, debate is closed. If a member objects, the matter should be resolved with a motion and vote.

Unanimous consent allows an assembly to move quickly through non-controversial issues, so that more time can be spent on controversial issues. Reports and motions can be adopted, minutes can be approved, and debate can be ended with general consent.

A similar concept is the “consent agenda, ” which is often on the agenda near the start of the meeting. The consent agenda (such as the adoption of the minutes) should include all non-controversial items. Any member can request that an item be removed from the consent agenda and transferred to the regular agenda for

consideration and vote. The remaining consent agenda items are then unanimously approved as a unit without discussion.

MYTH: THE MAKER OF A MOTION GETS TO SPEAK FIRST AND LAST.

The maker of a motion has the right to speak first to a proposal. After that, the maker has no more rights than anyone else with regard to the motion.

MYTH: “OLD BUSINESS.”

There is no parliamentary concept of “old” business. The term suggests a time that any old thing ever discussed can be revisited.

What is sometimes misnamed “old business” is actually “unfinished business.” Unfinished business refers to questions carried over from the previous meeting and includes:

1. any matter that was pending when the previous meeting adjourned;
2. any matter on the previous meeting’s agenda that was not reached; or
3. any matter that was postponed to the present meeting.

MYTH: THERE ARE TOO MANY MOTIONS IN PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE.

Granted, there are a lot of different motions. However, most business in meetings is accomplished through the use of about a dozen motions.

The **Main Motion** brings business before the members and is permitted only when no other motion is pending. Many issues can be resolved with this one motion. If you like the proposal, speak in favor of and vote for the main motion. If you dislike the proposal, speak against and vote against the main motion.

Other motions regularly used in meetings include:

Amendment – allows changes to another motion by adding, deleting, or changing words.

Refer – allows a matter to be sent to a committee to consider and report back.

Postpone – delays consideration of a matter to a specific time or date.

Limit Debate – places a limit on the time or number of speakers.

Previous Question – ends debate immediately.

Recess – permits a short break.

Adjourn – ends the meeting.

Point of Order – calls attention to an error in procedure.

Point of Information – allows a member to ask a question.

Division of the Assembly – demands a rising (but not counted) vote after a voice vote.

MYTH: “LAY ON THE TABLE” GETS RID OF STICKY ISSUES.

The purpose of the motion to Lay on the Table is to temporarily delay a matter when something else of urgency arises. Once the urgent matter is over, the group can then resume the matter that was tabled. Because the motion to Table is undebatable and only requires a majority vote, it should **not** be used to get rid of a matter. In fact, Roberts Rules of Order, provides that the motion to Lay on the Table should be ruled out of order if the evident intent is to kill or avoid