

# PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

Parliamentary procedure is of great importance to service organizations and volunteers. Parliamentary procedure helps make every moment productive. Parliamentary law is simply the courteous way of discouraging the irrelevant while giving everyone the opportunity to be heard. There are three basic reasons for parliamentary rules:

- To establish orderly procedure
- To protect the opinion of the minority
- To express the will of the majority

In Sertoma, the immediate past president often serves as chair of the board and presides over the board of directors' meetings, while the president presides over club meetings. Since most of the club's business is transacted at board meetings, parliamentary procedure should be studied with board meetings in mind. By using parliamentary procedures, the presiding officer may have more efficient and productive meetings.

## **Tips for the Presiding Officer**

The presiding officer should not debate motions while presiding; they should preside with impartiality.

The ability of the chair to vote should be defined in the bylaws. If not otherwise restricted, the chair can vote with the assembly when a vote is determined by ballot. The chair must vote at the same time as the rest of the assembly unless otherwise approved by the voting members of the assembly. In other cases, the chair may vote when their vote would change the result.

At board meetings, a member may remain seated and raise their hand to be recognized. At other times, the member must stand and identify themselves to be recognized. It is the chair's responsibility to recognize those who wish to address the group. The chair does this by saying, "*The chair recognizes (name)*" or "*The chair recognizes the member in the first row.*" The chairperson repeats a motion that has been made and seconded. This helps assure that the motion is understood and properly recorded. Debatable motions may be debated only after having been made, seconded and stated (repeated) by the chair.



The chair is responsible for maintaining order and conducting meetings with proper decorum. The chair may remain seated at board meetings; otherwise, they should stand when:

- Opening a meeting
- Welcoming or introducing guests or officials
- Putting motions to a vote
- Formally addressing the assembly
- Answering points of order, parliamentary inquiries, appeals from decisions, etc.
- Seeking to better control the proceedings
- Declaring the meeting adjourned

The gavel should be used sparingly (one rap at a time) and only to:

- Call a meeting to order
- Maintain or restore order
- Give to someone temporarily acting as chair
- Give to their successor in office

## How to Manage Meetings

The use of parliamentary procedures in a meeting can significantly reduce the length of the meeting, as well as the degree of friction associated with meetings that encounter strong minority opinions. If implemented correctly, the following principles based on *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* should significantly increase the productivity of your meetings.

### Motions

Members never “make a motion.” A motion begins with a member *moving* that something be done. If the motion is recorded and the chair repeats the motion, then the assembly has a motion to consider. The assembly has technically “made a motion.” A member can only offer an item of business – they cannot make a motion.

How many motions can be on the floor at the same time? If you said one, you obviously have some knowledge of parliamentary law, but you didn't read the question carefully enough. Although there can only be one main motion on the floor at one time, there are almost limitless possibilities to having several privileged, subsidiary or incidental motions on the floor at the same time if they follow the order of precedence.

### Seconding the Motion

The purpose of seconding a motion is to ensure to the body or assembly that at least two people believe the action should be considered. It is improper to second a motion if you don't agree with what is being offered. Let the motion die unless you want a vote recorded on the issue. According to *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, once a member has

debated the motion, the member has in effect seconded the motion. It would then be improper for the chair to rule the motion out of order.

### **Results of a Vote**

It's not uncommon, particularly in committee meetings, for the presiding officer to announce, "All those in favor of the motion, say 'aye.' All those opposed, same sign." This is, however, an incorrect usage. The chairperson is required to announce the results of the vote. This is possible only when they take the vote in a method that clearly distinguishes the affirmation vote from the opposition vote, such as "yes" and "no" or "aye" and "nay."

### **Stopping Debate**

What does it mean when someone in the assembly or body shouts out "question" or "call for the question?" All it means is that the person who shouts "question" is ready to vote. The chair does not have to recognize the member, who is actually out of order. If the member obtains the floor properly and then moves the previous question and the motion is seconded, then the chair has a properly constituted motion that is not debatable under parliamentary procedure, and the presiding officer is required to take a vote.

To adopt or pass a motion to cease debate, the motion must receive a two-thirds vote. Stopping debate removes a right reserved to the members and, therefore, requires more than just a majority. If two-thirds of the members are either finished debating or do not want to hear further debate, then they can cease debate with the adoption of the motion. The presiding officer, however, can offer that they believe members are ready to vote and, without objection by the members, can proceed with taking a vote. Careful attention by the presiding officer when it is time to vote can help shorten meetings.

### **Motion to Table**

One of the motions most often misused in meetings is the motion to table. A motion to table to a later time or to stop debate or to kill a motion is out of order. Remember, the motion, not the member, is out of order. The only acceptable reason to table a motion is to handle an item of business that has become more important than the motion on the floor. The proper motion to kill a motion is called "to postpone indefinitely." The proper motion to set something aside for a future time is the "motion to postpone to a certain time." Another way to postpone a motion is to refer the action to a committee for a report back. However, there are also limitations on this action.

This complex tabling procedure could be the basis for a three-hour seminar. To keep things simple, just remember the key points above. Chairs who understand the proper use of the motion to table and motions to postpone will save a great deal of time in their meetings.

### **Withdrawing Motions**

A member who has offered a motion that has been seconded and repeated by the chairperson has caused a motion to be placed before the body. It is the property of the body or assembly and does not belong to the "maker" of the motion. Therefore, the

member who has offered the motion cannot withdraw the motion without permission of the assembly. While this procedure is logical, try to explain it to a member who is embarrassed when they try to withdraw a motion that they realize is not well conceived. However, the chair can quickly save this member by saying, “Without objection, the motion will be withdrawn. Hearing none, the motion is withdrawn.” As this example illustrates, a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure is important to the success of every chair.

### **Unanimous Consent**

The chairperson in the above example relied on general or unanimous consent to expedite matters. This procedure can be used in many instances to greatly speed up meetings. Approval of minutes is perhaps the best example. You’ve probably been in many meetings where the chair requests a motion to *approve the minutes*. Not receiving a motion, they say, “Won’t someone please make a motion to approve the minutes?” After pleading, a member will usually offer a motion to approve the minutes. Then the pleading begins again.” Won’t someone please second the motion to approve the minutes?” Usually, after a short period of pleading, the chair receives a second. All of this is unnecessary and wastes time. The chairperson just needs to ask, “Are there any corrections to the minutes as read (written, mailed, etc.)? Hearing none, the minutes stand approved as read.”

This form of voting – unanimous consent— could be used with at least 50 percent of the business appearing before most committees or assemblies. Consider this: How many times have you heard a 15-minute debate on a motion only to have it pass without a single negative vote? If the chairperson had offered the unanimous consent option, it would have saved 15 minutes of the meeting. Take that 15 minutes and multiply it by 100 members at \$50 an hour (as the value of the time your members give to the organization), and you save \$1,250 worth of your members’ time.

## **Methods of Voting**

### **Voice Vote**

This is the most used method; note when it is not used, however. Chair: “Those in favor of the motion will say ‘aye.’” (Pause for response.) “Those opposed will say ‘nay.’” (Pause for response and then announce the result.) “The ‘ayes’ have it; the motion is carried.” Or, “The ‘nays’ have it; the motion is lost.” A voice vote should not be used:

- When the bylaws specify another method of voting
- When the vote could be close
- When a two-thirds majority is required
- After a member doubts (questions) a voice vote

### **Hand Vote**

Hand vote can be used when the vote could be close, when a member doubts a voice vote, and/or when a two-thirds majority is required. Chair: “Those in favor of the motion will raise their right hands.” (Votes are counted, the number stated and members instructed to put

hands down.) “Thirty affirmative, hands down. Those opposed will raise their right hands.” (Votes are counted, the number stated and members instructed to put hands down.) “Seven negative, hands down.” (The result is then announced.) “The affirmative has it; the motion is carried.” Or, “The negative has it; the motion is lost.” A hand vote should not be used:

- When the bylaws specify another method of voting
- After a member doubts a hand vote

### **Rising Vote**

Rising vote may be used when a member doubts a hand vote or when a more positive display is desired. A rising vote cannot be doubted. Chair: “Those in favor of the motion will rise.” (Votes are counted, the number stated and members instructed to be seated.) “Thirty affirmative; be seated. Those opposed will rise.” (Votes are counted, the number stated and members instructed to be seated.) “Seven negative; be seated.” (The result is then announced.) “The affirmative has it; the motion is carried.” Or, “The negative has it; the motion is lost.”

### **Adjournment**

Chairperson calls for necessary business as described above. If there is none, they declare the meeting adjourned. “It has been moved and seconded to adjourn. Those in favor will say ‘aye.’ Those opposed say ‘nay.’ The ‘ayes’ have it; the motion is carried. Is there any necessary business to come to the floor?” (Pause) “There being no further business, the meeting is adjourned.”