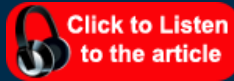


Association Executives of North Carolina

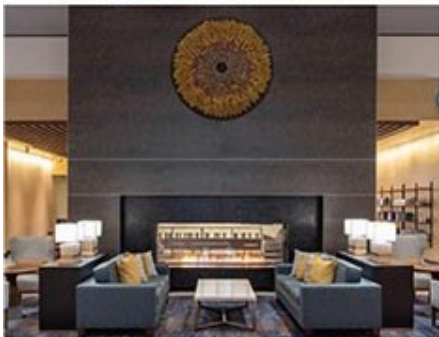
Success *Live*

BY ASSOCIATION

The below educational content of this edition of *Success by Association Live* is sponsored by Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort.



SPACES DESIGNED
TO MAKE AN IMPACT



CaesarsMeansBusiness.com | 855-633-8238



Association Meeting Myths

Jim Slaughter

February 2, 2022



Click [here](#) to listen to the article instead!

SHARE THIS CONTENT



MORE...

Association Meeting Myths

Jim Slaughter

Has your experience been that your board and member meetings are organized, properly run, and stay on track? If not, it may be that your meeting is spending time doing things it doesn't have to. Or not doing things it should.

Listed below are ten well-known “facts” about meetings. But as Mark Twain warned, “It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.”

Myth #1: Parliamentary Procedure Doesn't Matter

Many nonprofit associations dictate in their governing documents, such as bylaws, that a certain parliamentary book will be followed when transacting business. For that matter, North Carolina and many other states now have statutes that require certain groups (governmental bodies, homeowner and condominium associations, nonprofits) follow specific rules or even *Robert's Rules* during meetings. Ignoring or incorrectly applying these procedures can lead to embarrassment, hard feelings, and even lawsuits.

Myth #2: Any Robert's Will Do

There are lots of books with “Robert's Rules” in the title. However, most of these books are earlier editions of *Robert's* or knock-offs. There is always one official Robert's that is the successor to earlier works. Each new edition brings changes to procedure. The current edition is *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (12th Edition)*. If your organization's rules specify the “latest edition” of *Robert's*, this is your book. The newest *Robert's* came out in late 2020 and can be identified by “12th Edition” on its cover and the fact that it's 714 pages long.

Myth #3: Rules Are the Same for All Meetings

Rules aren't one-size-fits all. Problems are common when large meetings behave too informally or small meetings behave too formally. Rules should be like clothes—they should fit the organization they are meant to serve.

Most parliamentary manuals provide that board meetings and membership meetings are conducted differently. Large meetings must be fairly formal. However, formality can hinder business in smaller bodies. As a result, *Robert's* recommends less formal rules for committees and smaller boards (where there are not more than about a dozen members present), such as:

- Members may raise a hand instead of standing when seeking to obtain the floor.
- Members may remain seated while speaking or making motions.
- Motions need no second.
- Discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending.
- When a proposal is clear, a vote can be taken without a formal motion.
- There is no limit to the number of times a member may speak to a subject or motion.
- Occasions where debate must be limited or stopped should be rarer than in larger meetings.
- The chair is typically a full participant and can debate and vote on all questions.

- Votes are often taken by a show of hands.

Smaller boards that dislike this informality may wish to follow more formal procedures. Even informal boards may choose to be more formal on important or controversial matters.

Myth #4: Seconds Always Matter

In a larger or more formal body, a second to a motion implies that at least two members want to discuss the motion. If there is no second, there should be no further action on the proposal, so seconds have their place. However, after any debate on an issue, the lack of a second is irrelevant. For less formal smaller bodies or on motions coming from a committee, seconds aren't even required.

Myth #5: Debate and a Formal Vote Are Required

Many noncontroversial matters can be resolved without debate through "general" or "unanimous" consent. Using this method, the presiding officer asks, "Is there any objection to ...?" For example, "Is there any objection to ending debate?" If no one objects, you're done. Debate is closed. If a member objects, the matter is resolved with a motion and vote. Unanimous consent allows an assembly to move quickly through non-contested issues.

Myth #6: 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 speaking, the maker has no more rights to speak than other members. In fact, the maker cannot speak a second time unless everyone else who wishes to speak to the issue has had a chance.

Myth #7: "Old Business"

"Old Business" is not a parliamentary term and suggests a revisiting of any old thing ever discussed. The correct term "Unfinished Business" makes clear the term refers to specific items carried over from the previous meeting. A presiding officer never needs to ask, "Is there any Unfinished Business?" but simply states the question on the first item ("There is one item of Unfinished Business . . .") Annual meetings generally have no unfinished business.

Myth #8: Yelling Out "Question!" Stops Debate

The Previous Question (or motion to close debate) is often handled wrong. Shouting "Question!" from the back of the room is not only bad form, it's ineffective. The motion to close debate is like any other motion. A member wanting to close debate must be recognized by the chair. The Previous Question requires a second and a two-thirds vote. Only the assembly decides when to end debate.

Myth #9: "Lay on the Table" Kills Sticky Issues

"Lay on the Table" is often misused to sweep difficult issues under the rug. *Robert's* provides that the motion is out of order if the intent is to kill or avoid dealing with a measure. Properly used, the motion temporarily delays a matter when some other urgent issue has arisen, such as an emergency or an important guest who is to speak. Once the urgent matter is over, the group can resume the tabled matter. Because the motion to Table is undebatable and only requires a majority vote, it should not be used to get rid of a matter.

Myth #10: The Chair Rules the Meeting

The chair is the servant of the assembly, not its master. Put another way, the chair can only get away with what the assembly allows. If the rules of the assembly are being violated, any member can raise a "Point of Order." Once the chair rules on the Point of Order, a member can Appeal from the decision of the chair. If seconded, the Appeal takes the parliamentary question away from the chair and gives it to the assembly. The assembly is the ultimate decider of all procedural issues.

Conclusion

If you lead or attend meetings that conduct business, you should learn at least the basics of *Robert's Rules* and parliamentary procedure. The benefits of a well-run meeting go beyond legal concerns. Proper procedure can turn long, confrontational meetings into short, painless ones. Eliminating these myths will bring your meetings more in line with proper procedure and result in shorter, more effective meetings.

Jim Slaughter is an attorney with Law Firm Carolinas. In addition, he is a Certified Professional Parliamentarian, Professional Registered Parliamentarian, and past President of the American College of Parliamentary Lawyers. Jim is author of two books on association meeting procedure, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Parliamentary Procedure Fast-Track* and *Notes and Comments on Robert's Rules, Fourth Edition*, and two upcoming books, *Notes and Comments on Robert's Rules, Fifth Edition* (2022) and *Robert's Rules of Order: Fast-Track—The Brief and Easy Guide to Parliamentary Procedure* (2022). For many free charts and articles on meeting procedure, visit www.jimslaughter.com.

If you would like to have one of your articles featured in *Success by Association Live* or have interest in sponsoring please contact Madi today at madi@aencnet.org.

Association Executives of North Carolina

Mailing Address: 514 Daniels St., PMB #352, Raleigh NC 27605
Phone: 919.848.8255 | Fax: 919.848.8525

