

Running Meetings and Robert's Rules

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Overview

- Core Concepts
- Role of the Chair
- Controlling the Meeting, But Not the Debate
- Common Pitfalls
- Effective Chairing Strategies

Core Concepts

Rules are needed to avoid chaos - without order, you do not have democracy, you have the tyranny of the masses.

Robert's has several “design goals”

- Encouraging careful consideration and thoughtful debate
- Maintain efficient meetings
- Ensure the minority has a right to be heard
- Prevent super majorities from having their time wasted by small minorities

Core Concepts

- Keep a consistent rule system by making core rules changeable only by super majority
- Encourage committees to conduct most of the heavy lifting
- Give the assembly ultimate control, via toolkit of motions
- Allow the chair flexibility to maintain efficiency

Basic Motions

- **No debate without a motion!**

Common motions

- Main motions
 - Introduce legislation, bring up measures
- Motion to amend
 - Needed to change a pending motion
 - No friendly amendments!
- Refer
 - Send to a committee - handles poorly formed resolutions
- Postpone definitely
 - Good to allow time to evaluate, but don't need a committee report
- Limit/Extend limits on debate
 - Can be creative - number of comments, time, etc
- Previous question
 - Ends debate immediately - powerful way to drive forward business
- Table
 - Often misused!

Basic Debate Rules

Only the chair may dictate who speaks when

- The maker of a motion make speak first
- No one should speak twice before everyone had a chance to speak
- Robert's (strictly) only allows two opportunities to speak
- Debate must remain on topic
- Chair should never enter debate

Role of the Chair

Planner, Referee, and Advisor

- Know Robert's and your own rules thoroughly
- Enforce the rules consistently
- Remain impartial!
- Prepare by anticipating tricky debates
- Have a very good knowledge on all measures being voted on
- Be ready to suggest actions based on the course of debate

Control the Meeting, Not the Debate

Neutrality is crucial!

- Without trust, open debate breaks down

Without control, there is chaos

- Keep speakers on topic
- Ensure only you denote who may speak
- Do not allow one person to take over the room
- Enforce formality of motions
- Consistency is key!

Advising and Assisting Members

What to do with those who know nothing of Robert's?

- Remain friendly, stay patient!
- Clarity is crucial in preventing confusion
- Consider holding start of year training
- Help formulate motions for members who are struggling
- Recommend motions to members who don't know they exist
- Do not fall into trap of relaxing the rules for the inexperienced
- Maintain the rules, but educate while doing so

Common Pitfalls

- Allowing debate without a motion
- Allowing imprecise motions
- Letting others determine who may talk
- Allowing a few people to dominate debate
- Allowing dilatory motions
- Applying rules inconsistently

Saving Time

A good chair can speed up meetings by encouraging efficiency

- Robert's gives chairs great flexibility and power
- Little tricks add up fast

Useful shortcuts

- Assuming motions expedites procedural portions of meetings
- Counting a vote is only necessary if it appears close
- Unanimous consent should be checked in non-controversial votes

Saving Time

- Move quickly from item to item
- Keep the flow of debate moving, procedural votes should be swift
- Educate members that they may second without your prompting
- Recognize when members want to make a motion but don't know how to frame it
- Encourage referring motions to committees when debate becomes circular

How to be Effective

Remember: remain neutral, never be afraid to use your power

- Make sure you can recall the rules at will
- Retain your control over the order of debate
- Handle procedural situations rapidly
- Rule dilatory motions as out of order
- Be helpful and courteous to inexperienced members

Questions?

Questions? Comments? Discussion?