

# The Art of the Meeting

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presented by  
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Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

-- Henry Ford,  
industrialist

## COMMON PRONOUNCEMENTS (LIES) ABOUT MEETINGS

- ✚ Meetings always must occur at the same hour, on the same night of the week.
- ✚ Meetings always must be held in the same place.
- ✚ Meetings must *always* have a speaker. (Variation: Meetings must *never* have a speaker.)
- ✚ Meetings always must be for members only.
- ✚ Meetings always must be for adults only.
- ✚ Meetings always must follow the same agenda and format.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF BAD AND GOOD MEETINGS

(from *Community Organizing and Development*,  
by Herbert J. Rubin and Irene Rubin)

### Bad meetings

- ✓ are long and boring.
- ✓ alienate people, who sit there but don't really feel part of what is going on.
- ✓ accomplish *nothing*.
- ✓ are often chaotic
- ✓ make people feel inadequate and can increase hostility
- ✓ create a sense of the impossible ("*How can we solve this problem if we can't even run a simple meeting?*")

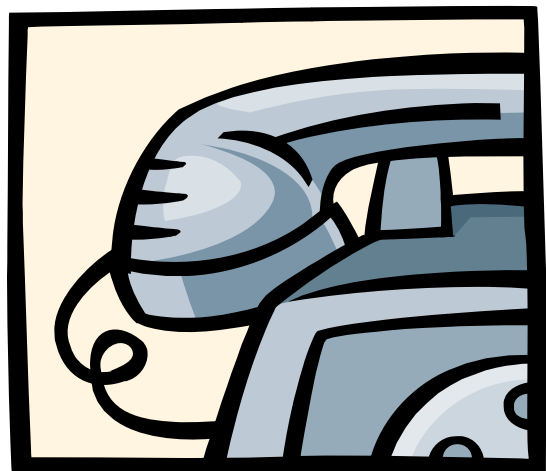
### Good meetings

- ✓ are exhilarating
- ✓ flow from issue to issue in a fast-paced, logical progression
- ✓ allow members to interact and to increase their sense of competence
- ✓ increase the group's sense of unity ("*How can anyone stand in our way since we are so strong together?*")

## BEFORE YOU MEET

### The Agenda

1. Develop an agenda that include the issues you and the other members want to discuss.
2. Attach any documents relating to the issues in order to facilitate decision-making.
3. Arrange the issues on the agenda in descending order of importance.
4. The agenda may include a Meeting Action Plan so everyone knows what was expected of them and as a reminder of what is to be accomplished before the next meeting.
5. Distribute the agenda well before the meeting so people have a chance to review the issues and the materials that go with them. This helps you focus on decision-making.
6. If possible, call everyone to remind them of the meeting.



## MEETING LOGISTICS

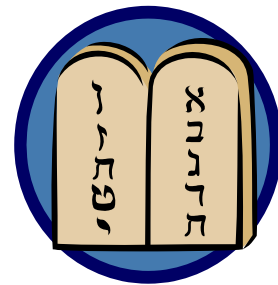
- ✚ The meeting should not run more than two hours - shorter is better.
- ✚ Have extra agendas at the meeting.
- ✚ Hold the meeting in a quiet place to minimize disruptions.
- ✚ Turn off the phones.
- ✚ Meet around a large table.
- ✚ Provide drinks and snacks to help everyone feel comfortable.

## At the Meeting

- ✚ Facilitate the meeting (more on this later)
- ✚ Stay on track
- ✚ Arbitrate if necessary
- ✚ Let everyone know the ground rules for the meeting

### Ten Commandments

1. Thou shalt participate fully
2. Thou shalt actually listen to what others say.
3. Thou shalt accept what others say as valid.
4. Thou shalt share responsibility for making this meeting a success.
5. Even if thou art the expert, thou shalt not dictate.
6. During brain-storming, thou shalt not censor thyself or others.
7. Thou shalt encourage fresh ideas, new perspectives and crazy notions.
8. Thou shalt ensure that the words are captured on the flipcharts.
9. Thou shalt respect the process.
10. Thou shalt realize that this meeting is only the start and that you must be committed to follow-through.



## DISCUSSION MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Occasionally, groups get caught up in intense discussion. The intensity of discourse can sometimes even escalate into a full-blown confrontation. Confrontation that isn't managed well can undermine a group's stability and may even destroy it. Therefore, it is essential for those who assist group leaders and the leaders themselves learn how to view disagreement as an essential part of positive growth processes. They in turn must help the members of the group learn to disagree without being disagreeable.

Following are some techniques for helping groups deal with conflict productively.

### The Quaker Rule



To avoid heated exchanges where people barely let someone finish talking before they shoot off, use this old Quaker method: *Establish a rule that there must be silence for 10, 20, or 30 seconds after someone has spoken. When people spout off, they're not really listening but are instead responding only to the first few words of the other person's statement. The Quaker method forces people to slow down.*

### The Speaker's Ball

Here's another way to control discussion and focus attention on the speaker: *With people sitting around in the group, bunch up a piece of paper into a ball and say, "Only the person holding the ball can respond. If you want to respond to what Fred has just said, you signal him to toss you the ball, and then you can be the speaker."* This method confers a privilege and a responsibility on the speaker. Since he or she doesn't have to fend off anybody who's quicker with words, the speaker has the group's undivided attention. At the same time, the speaker has to use the time without burbling on.



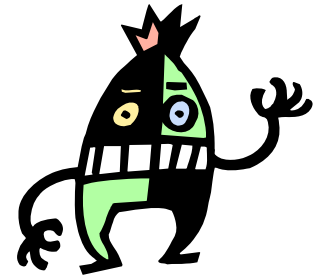
### Spend a Penny



If you have a limited amount of time and must ration it to get business done, use the Spend a Penny Technique to regulate dialogue. The group leader provides each member with three pennies (or tokens) and says, "In the next half hour, you've got three pennies to spend, three opportunities to make a contribution. And when you've made them, when you've spent your three pennies, that's it." Some people will spend their pennies right away; others will save them. People who are normally quiet will feel obliged to spend their three cents by asking a question or making a shy contribution. People who tend to do most of the talking will suddenly realize just how much time they spend talking. This technique shows that everyone in the group has equal weight, equal opportunities, and equal responsibilities.

## NEVER ... NEVER... NEVER

- ✚ Fail to listen and pay attention
- ✚ Fail to give people a chance to speak (even the quiet ones)
- ✚ Put people down roughly ... no matter how bad the idea or how poorly it is expressed.
- ✚ Yell back at people who get excited.
- ✚ Respond with rudeness with rudeness.



## ALWAYS

- ✚ Arrive early. Make sure there are enough chairs and other materials for the meeting.
- ✚ Start the meeting within five minutes of its agreed upon start time.
- ✚ Be prepared for the meeting.
- ✚ Introduce new people.
- ✚ Follow the agenda, with consideration for those who came for just part of the meeting. If possible deal with their topics first so they can leave early.
- ✚ Encourage participation by all those present. Allow people responsible for specific issues to present and respond to questions regarding their issues. Avoid the temptation to dominate the meeting. Make sure the discussion focuses on the relevant issues. It is necessary to strike a balance between not letting people ramble or digress from the main topic versus being too rigid and curtailing the discussion to the point where it is uncomfortable for people to express themselves.
- ✚ Clearly restate the outcome and action to be taken after each issue has been discussed. To avoid any misunderstanding, state where the issue now stands (whether it is resolved and this is the action to be taken, or if additional information is to be provided by this person and we will review the issue at the next meeting.)
- ✚ Set the time, date and place for the next meeting. Note what items will be addressed at that meeting.
- ✚ Thank everyone for their involvement and concern.



## AFTER THE MEETING

- ✚ Follow-up with people who have committed to take action.





## ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER – IN A NUTSHELL

**Making and seconding a motion.** A motion begins discussion and debate on a particular subject.

- ✓ The proper form for making a motion is: "Mr. President, I move that ...".
- ✓ Once a motion is made, another board member must second it or the motion dies.
- ✓ Once seconded, board discusses the motion and then votes on it.

**Amending a motion.**

- ✓ Any motion may be amended as follows: "Mr. President, I move that we amend the motion by (adding, striking out, etc.) the words ...".
- ✓ If seconded, the amendment can be discussed.
- ✓ When discussion ends, first vote on whether to accept the motion to amend.
- ✓ Then, if the amendment passes or fails, the original motion is subject to further debate and a vote.

**Change by a substitute motion.** Another way to change an original motion is by using a substitute motion.

- ✓ A substitute motion is just an amendment that changes an entire sentence or paragraph.
- ✓ It can be discussed only after being seconded.
- ✓ It differs from an amendment only in that it entirely replaces the original motion if the substitute motion passes.
- ✓ A substitute motion may be amended.

**Postpone a motion.** Sometimes the board may wish to defer action on a motion. One way to accomplish this is to postpone to a certain day the consideration of a main motion.

- ✓ This is done simply by making a motion to postpone consideration of the motion until a definite future date.
- ✓ When seconded, the motion to postpone is open for discussion.
- ✓ Following discussion, the board votes.
- ✓ If the motion to postpone fails, discussion on the main motion continues.

**Lay a motion on the table.** Another method of delaying a decision is to lay a motion on the table.

- ✓ When discussion on the main motion has ended, or is about to end, it is proper to move that a main motion be laid on the table.
- ✓ For something to be laid on the table, it must be moved and seconded.
- ✓ A vote, without discussion, is taken immediately.

Once the board decides to lay a motion on the table, the motion cannot be brought up again until the board votes to do so. Although a tabled motion may be brought from the table during the same meeting, this usually occurs at a later meeting when the board considers unfinished business. Rather than tabling a motion, it is often better to postpone a motion to a certain time. This makes it unnecessary to recall the motion.

**Motion to refer.** A motion to refer the main motion to a committee or person for further study can also delay a vote.

- ✓ After a motion to refer is made and seconded, it is open to discussion and to motions to amend that specify where the main motion should be referred.
- ✓ The motion to refer, as amended, is then voted on.
- ✓ If it passes, the main motion is referred; if it fails, discussion on the main motion begins.

**Point of order.** Whenever a member believes an incorrect procedure is being used, he can interrupt with a point of order to require the president to decide the correct procedure.

**Suspension of the rules.** Occasionally board members may want to discuss an item of business without the constraint of any rules.

- ✓ To do this, the members must move and second a motion to suspend the rules.
- ✓ Unless the board's rules require otherwise, two-thirds of the members present must vote to suspend the rules.
- ✓ The motion is not debatable and must be voted upon once seconded.





## RULES OF NON-PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

**Point of Personal Outrage.** At any time during a meeting when a participant becomes extremely upset, he or she shall have the right to interrupt any other speaker, will not be required to wait for recognition from the Chair, and is obligated to speak at a volume considerably higher than required for normal conversation.

**Point of Irrelevant Interjection.** Irrespective of the motion on the floor, the participant shall have the right to monopolize the meeting for not more than five minutes as they discourse on a point the relevance of which escapes all other participants.

**Point of Personal Attack.** In response to a point raised by another speaker, the participant shall have the right to reply by launching a personal attack. At no time shall the point itself be addressed.

**Point of Associative Guilt.** The participant shall have the right to impugn the membership of any other member by alleging that he or she is, was, might be, has a third cousin who is, or may have great-grandchildren who will belong to any and all organizations designated by the participant as dedicated to the destruction of this association.

**Point of Contempt.** The participant shall have the right to grunt, throw papers down on the table, shake his or her head vigorously, or otherwise demonstrate contempt for the proceedings.

**Point of Harassment.** The participant shall have the right to introduce irrelevant motions for the sole purpose of delaying the meeting. It is only permissible to resort to a point of harassment when the outcome of an imminent vote is obvious.

**Point of Redundant Information.** This is not be confused with the more familiar "point of information." Whereas a point of information is a request for information from the Chair, a point of redundant information entitles the participant to tell those in the meeting something they already know.

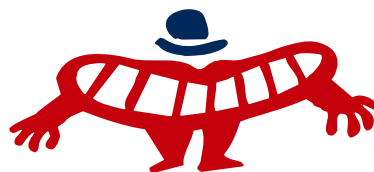
**Point of Redundancy.** This is a motion that entitles the participant to make a point made by another participant no more than five speakers earlier.

**Point of Pious Posturing.** This motion entitles the participant to make reference to any By-Law that allegedly supports his or her point of view. A correct quotation, however, immediately disqualifies the point.

**Point of Grudge.** This entitles the participant to raise an issue debated by the organization not less than five years earlier, for which the participant has not yet forgiven those involved.

**Point of Personal Confusion.** To be called when the member in question has lost complete track of where the discussion is going due to the extreme tangent that it has taken. For example, a motion to clean up the organization's mile that it has "adopted" is on the floor. After several rounds of debate the conversation is now centered on whether the members are living up to their obligations (oaths, requirements, etc.). At this point member X calls "POINT OF PERSONAL CONFUSION, WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?"

**Point of Personal Weirdness.** This is to be called if the member in question feels that the subject being discussed is of an extremely weird nature. For example, a discussion as to whether the Chair would look better covered in Spam or grape jelly is going on. At this point member X calls "POINT OF PERSONAL WEIRDNESS, this is really weird!"



# DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PERSONALITIES IN YOUR MEETINGS

"If you want to be a group of one, let your meetings get out of control, and soon your members will all have better things to do with their time."

Pamela Bailey

## What about conflict?

- ❑ Understand that conflict isn't all bad.
- ❑ People get to understand themselves and others better.
- ❑ Better decisions are likely to be made.
- ❑ Working to resolve problems can be interesting and stimulating.

## Different kinds of conflict:

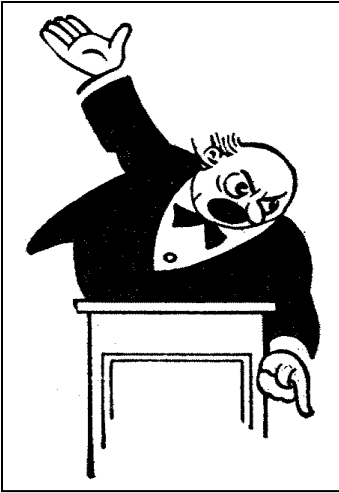
- ❑ *Affective* - assertions, personal beliefs
- ❑ *Substantive* - conclusions based on reasoning or understanding the facts or on evidence
- ❑ *Values* - fundamental beliefs about what should be

## Practice positive ways to anticipate problems and personalities:

- ❑ Prepare for meetings.
- ❑ Have a written agenda and stick to it.
- ❑ Use *Robert's Rules of Order* and a gavel.
- ❑ Maintain control of the meeting.
- ❑ With group input, develop a code of conduct.
- ❑ Always start a meeting on time. Don't be late. End the meeting on time, too. (No meeting should last more than 1.5 to 2 hours.)

## Practice positive ways to deal with your own reactions:

- ❑ Presume that all members are sincere in their actions. Give them the benefit of the doubt.
- ❑ Pay attention to your own body cues.
- ❑ If you're leading the meeting, use eye contact to help control discussion.
- ❑ Take deep breaths.
- ❑ Think about what you're going to say.



- ❑ Confront the issue, not the person.
- ❑ Describe your views objectively. Speak formally, calling the person by name, if you know it. Be concise and clear with your reactions.
- ❑ Don't acknowledge sarcasm. Don't overreact.
- ❑ Make sure you know all the facts. Agree when possible. Ask questions and listen. Disagree only when you know you're right.
- ❑ When you have been wronged, make it easy for the other person to apologize.
- ❑ When you are wrong, be quick to apologize.

## The Leader as a Facilitator

The very essence of community organizing is change. Intense discussion and problem-solving meetings are sometimes filled with conflict -- disagreement over direction, over process, over participation, over funds, over personalities. The list of possible sources of friction varies with the group itself. How a group manages those discussions productively in order to achieve consensus may mean the difference between the group's ultimate success or failure. Here are some step-by-step tips for those who are responsible for assisting a group toward achieving success.

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### The Leader as a Facilitator

The function of a facilitator is to "do with the group" -- it is not to "do for the group." Thus, the leader/facilitator should:

- Stay neutral in discussions. (Don't evaluate what someone has said but do summarize and restate to clarify meaning.)
- Provide equal opportunity for all persons to be heard
- Encourage those who are silent to speak up.
- Prevent discussion from deteriorating into personal attacks
- Have other members of the group perform key functions, such as recorder or timekeeper

#### **As discussion gets underway, maintain flexibility.**

- ✓ Give few directions; let the group decide where to begin and how
- ✓ Watch members' body language
- ✓ Make sure transitions from one process to the next are clear

#### **Decide when to move or when to slow down**

- ✓ Slow down when the group seems to be going too fast, is overlooking important issues, making hasty decisions
- ✓ Energize the group by being positive and encouraging; use laughter and smiles; make a physical change

### **When a group gets stuck**

- ✓ Move up close to members to attract attention
- ✓ Remind members of the last line in collective memory (a segue)
- ✓ Try not to speak too often, but when you do speak, be short and concise

### **When a group falls silent**

- ✓ Determine if the silence is due to non-production
- ✓ Ask a question; if there's no response, don't say anything immediately, just wait awhile
- ✓ If no suggestions come forth, then offer a menu of alternatives
- ✓ Offer your own opinion **only** as a last resort.

### **Be gentle but firm**

- ✓ Move with the energies of the group
- ✓ Allow disorganized and fragmented ideas
- ✓ Protect the group from individual domination
- ✓ Try deftly interrupting dominant individuals

### **When conflict happens**

- ✓ Recognize the difference between creative and interpersonal conflict
  - Creative conflict* occurs over ideas
  - Interpersonal conflict* occurs between opposing personalities
- ✓ Try to refocus destructive discussion back to problem resolution

### **See yourself as others see you**

- ✓ Be aware of nonverbal messages from your body posture and movement
- ✓ Try to maintain a neutral aura
- ✓ Don't place anything between yourself and the group
- ✓ Make eye contact, use positive body signaling



### **Deal with difficult individuals**

- ✓ Address an interruption; don't ignore a problem person
- ✓ Listen to the problem person's feelings/thoughts
- ✓ Legitimize the feelings behind the behavior
- ✓ Don't try to resolve an issue during the meeting; try later
- ✓ Record the concern
- ✓ Explain to the problem person why you are deferring the concern
- ✓ Use the least threatening intervention and graduate as necessary

### **Remember, success doesn't depend on you**

- ✓ Don't assume responsibility for the group
- ✓ Do what the members want, they can change direction
- ✓ Do offer to step down if level of trust is low
- ✓ Do occasionally step out of role to offer opinion
- ✓ Don't offer opinions too often; focus on neutrality
- ✓ When stepping out of your role, be aware that people can become confused about how to relate to you as a facilitator

### **Other ideas for large and small group meetings**

- ✓ Do use the idea of dividing a large group into small focus groups to better manage meetings (the meeting space must be large enough to accomplish this)
- ✓ Do get the ideas recorded, assign a "reporter," and bring the large group back together
- ✓ Do use a trained or skilled facilitator to manage large and small group meetings

