



How to Run an Effective Meeting—

PART II:

DURING THE MEETING

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IN LAST MONTH'S HOWTO ARTICLE ON RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING, WE REVIEWED THE ACTION ITEMS YOU NEED TO TAKE TO PREPARE FOR A

SUCCESSFUL MEETING. NOW YOU'RE AT THE MEETING. WHAT CAN YOU DO, AS CHAIR, TO FACILITATE AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE MEETING?

START ON TIME, STAY ON TIME

Your agenda has a published start time—stick to it! If you make it a practice, meeting participants will come to expect it. Realize that a delay in starting also causes a delay for subsequent meetings. In addition, attendees have based their schedules on the published agenda and failing to follow the agenda inconveniences them, may cause you to lose valuable participants to other obligations, or may rush the conclusion of the meeting.

Hopefully you were able to accurately gauge the time that each topic should be discussed and the agenda will reflect your expectations. If discussion of a topic takes longer than anticipated, however, consider limiting discussion or debate to a designated number of comments or a specific timeframe, saying, for example, “We’ll take three more comments on this topic before moving to the next subject,” or “Each commenter has one minute for comments.”

DELEGATE!

As chair, your focus is the conduct of a successful meeting. Don’t allow yourself to be distracted by other responsibilities. If you don’t have a regular secretary, or the secretary is not present (something you should know in advance), then delegate the task of taking minutes. When additional information is required to make an informed decision, assign the task to an individual or establish a task group and assign responsibility for providing a recommendation at the next meeting. Delegating tasks is a good way to develop leadership potential, engender participation and ownership of the process from the attendees, and avoid an overload of tasks on any one person.

FOLLOW THE AGENDA

Track the agenda as it was published. This will allow you to dispense with routine administrative items quickly and ensure that the balance of time is reserved for the substantive issues. It is important to take an early

ToolBox

Robert's Rules of Order: The Rules appear in their entirety on the Web at <http://www.arts.state.tx.us/library/roberts.htm>; or you can borrow or purchase a copy.

Your Committee's Bylaws: Ask your committee chairman or staff manager for your committee's procedural bylaws. Many of them are based on the ASTM Model Bylaws, which is Appendix B of the Regulations Governing ASTM Technical Committees, and which can be accessed at www.astm.org (click on Technical Committees/Membership, then on ASTM Standards Development Tools) or contact your staff manager.

opportunity to state the objective of the meeting and to ask for any changes to the agenda. This facilitates a clear understanding of what is expected and also allows you to plan for any necessary changes.

CONTROL THE MEETING

When chairing a meeting, it is important to remember a few guidelines.

- ▶ Remain neutral;
- ▶ Recognize all participants who wish to address a topic;
- ▶ Maintain order;
- ▶ Summarize discussions and future actions; and
- ▶ Where appropriate, use Robert's Rules of Order.

ASTM's Model Bylaws, after which many committees' bylaws are fashioned, call for the use of Robert's Rules. This version of parliamentary procedure is appropriately used for a formal meeting or a meeting where there may be controversial discussions or need for a formal vote. (However, if you are chairing a task group meeting or a creative brainstorming session, there is less likely a need for such formal procedure. And in fact, following procedures may stifle the creative purpose of the meeting.)

In your role as chair, it is also important to help the participants follow rules of order by:

- ▶ Requiring a motion when presenting a topic for consideration or vote;
- ▶ Requiring a second in order to discuss a motion;

- ▶ Monitoring and facilitating debate to ensure all have an opportunity to participate;
 - ▶ Facilitating presentation of opposing points of view;
 - ▶ Closing discussion at the appropriate time;
 - ▶ Repeating a motion so that all participants clearly understand the purpose of the vote; and
 - ▶ Announcing vote results.
- If you are unsure of procedures, don't hesitate to ask your manager for guidance.

KEEP AN EYE ON THE CLOCK

Some of most common time consumers at a meeting are:

- ▶ Repetition and re-visitation of previously discussed and decided topics;
- ▶ Discussion of topics that are not listed on the agenda or approved at the start of the meeting;
- ▶ "Sidebar" conversations;
- ▶ Lengthy discussions of controversial issues;
- ▶ Excessive wordsmithing of draft documents; and
- ▶ Failing to reach a definitive decision on an item.

Everyone wants to state his or her point of view. After all, ASTM provides an open forum. However, there's no added value to hearing several people repeat the same concept. Be sure that participants are offering information that hasn't already been stated. Don't allow unscheduled topics to distract you from the meeting's

objectives and quickly quell any sidebar discussions that may start. Remember, the opportunity to add topics to the agenda is presented at the start of the meeting. And though we may be interested in our colleague's latest vacation adventure, such discussion won't contribute to the success of the meeting. Avoid any attempts to excessively wordsmith a draft document during the course of a meeting. Such a task should be delegated to a group. Finally, be sure that all topics have an assigned action or are concluded before the meeting adjourns. This might include establishment of a task group, assigning an action item to an individual, or recording the action and related information for non-persuasive or non-related negatives.

COMING TO CLOSURE

Shortly before the meeting ends, reinforce the accomplishment of meeting objectives by summarizing the results. Review the action items, assignments, and deadline dates agreed to during the course of the meeting. There is no more effective way to discourage future meeting participation than to allow the meeting participants to leave the session without a clear idea of what was accomplished. Ask if there is any uncertainty about the action items. Inquire about new items of business for consideration at the next meeting. Announce the time and date of the next meeting. And finally, officially adjourn the meeting.

Many skills are required to manage the personal and professional aspects of a meeting, but using a little forethought and the guidance of well-established rules of order can be the ounce of trouble prevention your group needs. //



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