

**Training & Executive Coaching on:**

- *Building Better Decision Making Teams*
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- *Demystifying the Rules of Order*

**Published Books:**

- *“101 Boardroom Problems & How to Solve Them”*
- *“Mina’s Guide to Minute Taking”*
- *“The Complete Handbook of Business Meetings”*

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## **“We’ve Got to Stop Meeting Like This...”**

A Seminar on Meetings, Rules of Order, and Informed Voting

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## **1. Council/Board Effectiveness (Informed Voting)**

To be effective, elected members should cast fully informed votes, contributing their own insights, while learning from the insights of others. Using the jigsaw puzzle analogy:

- Members fully review meeting materials and develop some of their own insights and observations, thereby strengthening their individual ‘pieces of the puzzle.’
- As the meeting unfolds, individuals with different ‘pieces of the puzzle’ share them.
- All members come to the meeting with open minds. They always welcome and assess any relevant input, even if it appears to conflict or compete with their own input. This creates a safe learning environment, removes barriers to legitimate input, and enables needed ‘pieces of the puzzle’ (factual or opinion-based) to emerge and enrich the debate.

### **Habits that can Negatively Affect Council/Board Decision-Making**

- a. A member blurts out a motion ‘on the fly.’
- b. Silent members withhold ‘out of the box’ observations.
- c. The ‘playing field’ is not level. Some members are much more informed than others.
- d. Members commit their votes before a meeting (pre-meeting promises).
- e. Members send text messages or post entries on social media during meetings.
- f. Some members block Management’s input when it’s not supportive of their causes.
- g. When a subject expert presents unpopular input, s/he gets asked ‘attack questions.’
- h. Management presents a ‘sanitized report’, blocking politically problematic details.
- i. Members who voted against a motion engage in post meeting attacks on the decision.
- j. The Body allows itself to be bullied by an organized group (The ‘green banana’ story).

## **2. Fundamental Principles for Debates (OFEEDS)**

**Order:** one person speaks at a time; Chair or designated person keeps the speakers’ lineup

**Focus:** focusing on the group’s core mandate; staying on topic; establishing outcomes

**Efficiency:** effective time management, on a per topic basis, and on a per person basis

**Equality:** no one dominates, ensuring equal opportunities to speak and share insights

**Decorum:** remaining civilized and respectful; focusing on issues, not personalities

**Safe environment:** making it easy to share unpopular but necessary points without fear

## **3. Defending the Process**

- a. Treat the process as your best friend.
- b. Everyone, from elected members, staff, and the public should understand the process.
- c. Everyone should follow the process willingly, because they understand its value.
- d. If the process is breached, it must be defended.
- e. If you defend the process, it will defend you and your organization.
- f. See sample scripts for meeting participants and chairs (page 3).

**A quote from Robert’s Rules of Order newly revised, page 250, lines 11-15:**

*“In ordinary meetings it is undesirable to raise points of order on minor irregularities of a purely technical character, if it is clear that no one’s rights are being infringed upon and no real harm is done to the proper transaction of business.”*

#### **4. Sample Scripts for Meeting Participants and Chairs**

The following scripts can help you `defend the process` (your best friend):

<b>If this occurs:</b>	<b>You can say something like this:</b>
Interruptions, or a shouting match	<i>“Point of order.” When recognized: “Can we please have one person speak at a time?” Or “Can we please hear people out without interruptions?” Or “Can we please follow the speakers’ lineup?”</i>
Off topic discussions	<i>“Point of order.” When recognized: “Can we please get back on topic?” or “We’re supposed to debate the amendment. Can we please stay focused?”</i>
Time is being wasted. Moving on or <b>ending debate.</b>	Obtain recognition and say something like: <i>“Can we please move on? It’s getting late and we have a lot to get done.” or “Can we please keep our comments brief?”; or “I move that we end the debate and vote immediately.”</i>
Dominated debate	Obtain recognition and say something like: <i>“Can we please hear from people who have not spoken?”</i>
Personal attacks	<i>“Point of order.” When recognized: “Can we focus on issues rather than personalities?”; or “Can we please remain civilized and respectful?”</i>
An unsafe meeting environment	Obtain recognition and say something like: <i>“Can we please ask the citizens to avoid clapping and heckling? We need to make the meeting environment safe for all views to emerge and inform us.”</i>
The Chair rushes a vote on a motion	Obtain recognition and say something like: <i>“Can we please have the motion read out again, so everyone and the public know precisely what’s being voted on?”</i>
<b>Amendments:</b> The wording of a motion is flawed.	Obtain recognition and say something like: <i>“I move to amend the motion by replacing the words ____ by ____.” Or by adding/inserting text or by deleting text.</i>
<b>Referral:</b> Analysis is needed for an informed vote.	Obtain recognition and say something like: <i>“I move that the main motion be referred to the Director of Public Works for analysis and report back at the March meeting.”</i>
<b>Postponement:</b> The motion is not urgent and it’s late.	Obtain recognition and say something like: <i>“Mr. Chair. It’s late and this motion can wait. I move that the main motion be postponed until the next regular meeting.”</i>

#### **Tips for Presiding Officers:**

- a. Be the chief defender of the process. Enforce it gently, firmly and judiciously.
- b. Speak less, lead more. Check what a problem may be before trying to fix it.  
If you want to debate issues, wait for your turn, like others, and be concise and brief.
- c. Build the team by engaging your partners and helping them perform to their best.
- d. Build leadership capacity by `sharing the stage` with others.
- e. Acknowledge positive contributions and resolve disputes by sharing constructive feedback.

**5 . Self-Evaluation for Council/Board Members**

	<b>Category</b>	<b>Score 0 to 10</b>
1.	I attend meetings regularly, arrive on time, and stay for the full duration, in body, mind and spirit.	
2.	I prepare fully for meetings and perform my pre-meeting duties.	
3.	I keep my comments clear, concise and on topic. I avoid an emotional or personal tone.	
4.	I do not hesitate to constructively raise unpopular but needed questions, ideas or points.	
5.	When I observe a damaging boardroom problem, I do not hesitate to speak up.	
6.	I make room for others to contribute and treat everyone as valued partners in decision making, regardless of any annoying habits they may be displaying or whether I agree with them or not, or whether I like them or not.	
7.	I listen with an open mind. I seek to learn from others and make fully informed decisions.	
8.	I am guided by our mandate and mission, strategic plan, and core values.	
9.	I place organizational interests ahead of personal or constituency interests. I disclose conflicts of interest as soon as I become aware of them.	
10.	Post meeting ethics: I accept majority decisions as collective decisions, and keep the proceedings of closed meetings confidential.	
	<b>GRAND TOTAL : Minimum = 0. Maximum = 100.</b>	

## 6. Common myths about Parliamentary Procedure

THE MYTH	THE TRUTH
The mover of a motion owns it forever.	The maker of a motion stops owning it once debate on it begins. From then on, the group owns it, and the mover no longer has the right to unilaterally withdraw or amend the motion (which can be done by the group collectively).
A person must support a motion in order to second it.	Seconding only indicates that the person agrees that the motion should be discussed, and not that he or she supports it.
If a motion is moved and seconded, it is automatically open for debate.	A motion is open for debate only after the Chair states it and places it before the assembly. The Chair may refuse to allow a motion on the ground that it is out of order (violates a rule, bylaw, or law) or that it is poorly worded (e.g.: motion made ‘on the fly’).
The Chair never votes, except to break a tie.	Unless explicitly prohibited (possibly by legislation) the Chair, also being a Council/Board member, votes like others.
The Chair never speaks in debate, unless he or she vacates the Chair.	This is only true if a Bylaw or Policy stipulates it. Robert’s Rules of Order allow the Chair of a small board to speak in debate, but <b>on the same basis as everyone else</b> .
If a member ‘calls the question,’ debate automatically ends. ‘Calling the question’ may interrupt a person who is speaking and has precedence over anything else.	The decision to end debate is made by the group, collectively, and not unilaterally by the Chair or one member. If a motion to end debate is made formally, it may <b>not</b> interrupt a person who is speaking, and its mover has <b>no</b> special priority in the speakers’ lineup.
The mover may close debate by speaking on a motion for a second time.	No (unless a Bylaw or Policy explicitly says otherwise).
The minutes must include everything that was said at the meeting.	Minutes are primarily a record of what was done by the group, and not a record of what was said by each member.
A member may insist that his or her comments be entered in the minutes.	Minute takers should follow minute taking standards, as established by policy. They should not be subject to random demands by individual members. It is generally not good practice to record verbatim minutes.
Any issue that could be embarrassing or politically uncomfortable to discuss in public can be discussed in an ‘in camera’ meeting.	The Council/Board should follow its legislation and/or policy on ‘in camera’ items. ‘Potential embarrassment’ and ‘political discomfort’ are unlikely to be valid justifications for discussing an item behind closed doors.
There can be no debate until there is a motion on the floor.	The Council/Board may opt to have informal discussion (exploring the nature of a problem) before introducing a motion (a solution).