

Holding Effective 10-Minute Meetings

Association representatives who hold regular building meetings - especially in difficult times - have the best shot at strengthening membership rapport.

"But they won't stay for a building meeting," you complain. "They say they're too busy."

Try promising a 10-minute building meeting - timed by the clock. You have to rule with an "iron hand" and few words, but you can do it.

Of course, it's easier for the association representative to vote in Rep Council by merely "sensing" the opinion of members, but have you really done anything to build member consensus? Ask members their opinions on association matters. Let them have a voice and the feeling that their opinions count in the decision-making process.

How to Keep Your 10-Minute Meetings to 10 Minutes

Never allow a debate to degenerate into a donnybrook. Insist that all speakers wait to be recognized by the Chair before speaking (unless someone is raising a privileged motion which may interrupt discussion) and require that they direct their remarks to the Chair, not at each other (unless the group is very small and discussion is informal). Members must speak to issues, not to personalities. Don't let anyone make derogatory remarks about another member of the group.

Help members do what they're trying to do. If you must rule someone's motion or remarks out of order, tactfully explain why and, if possible, also explain how the speaker can accomplish his purpose.

Example 1: "The Chair must rule that amendment out of order, since its effect would be to alter the intent of the original motion significantly. However, if you wish, the Chair will accept it as a Substitute Motion."

Example 2: "I must rule your motion out of order, Betty, since you spoke on the main motion before moving the Previous Question. Anyone who wishes to close debate and vote must move to do so as soon as recognized." (NOTE: Diplomacy dictates that the Chair should rule the motion or remarks out of order -- not the member.)

Encourage brevity. If members insist on making long-winded speeches, appoint a time-keeper and announce that "unless the group objects, the Chair will require that all speakers limit their remarks to three minutes." They may extend the time limit only by consent of the group.

The group will usually accept the limits gratefully, and you'll be amazed at how succinct speakers will become.

Remain impartial. As president, you are entitled to present recommendations during your report, and on important issues, you should. However, you may not make or second motions while you are presiding. If you feel that you must speak on a particular motion, hand the gavel to your vice-president, and don't resume the chair until the issue has been decided. If you are a member of the group, then *technically* you have a right to vote on any motion. However, in the interest of maintaining an image of impartiality, you should vote only on those important questions where your vote will either make a tie (thus defeating the motion), or break a tie (thus passing the motion), or when you feel you must let your constituents know your position.

Adjourn on time. If an adjournment time has been printed on the agenda, you should adjourn by the stated hour. As adjournment time draws near, it's perfectly legitimate for you to point out which items must be handled before adjournment, and ask if the group will vote to extend the meeting. Usually, if the remaining items really are important, the group will grant the extension -- but they will appreciate having been asked. Nobody likes a meeting that seems to drag on forever.

A Dozen Criteria For Effective Meetings

Ideally, every organizational meeting should:

- Have clear, legitimate, attainable objectives (which can't be gained better by some other means).
- Provide effective incentive for people to attend.
- Be held in a comfortable setting, and one which enhances the status of those in attendance.
- Start promptly -- within five minutes of the announced time.
- Actively involve everyone present immediately.
- Provide some fun, entertainment, or at least moments of surprise, mystery, suspense, or humor, or camaraderie.
- Move at a fast pace, and provide a variety of activities -- or at least a varied format.
- Provide decision-making opportunity; challenge participants to engage in creative problem-solving.
- Meet some need which individual participants feel is important to them
- Lead to some follow-up activity(ies) and result in personal commitment of participants to engage actively in that follow-up.
- Accomplish the initial objective(s), and end on time, with a definite conclusion.
- Leave participants feeling good, both about the meeting itself and about their part in it.

Before each meeting, go over this list with other chapter leaders, and try to plan how to achieve each of the goals above. After each meeting, review the list, identify those goals that were achieved, and those that weren't -- and analyze why not, and how they could have been realized.