

SURVIVAL TIPS ON ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

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I. BYLAWS - THE BEST ADVICE:

Parliamentary Procedure is useless to you, unless you are familiar with your organization's Bylaws. The best advice anyone can give you is to become familiar with the Bylaws and Constitution of your organization.

II. ENTITLED TO BE HEARD:

Who is entitled to be heard? When? Any form of discussion on the merits of a motion is referred to as debate. Except for very limited circumstances, you may not make a motion or speak in debate unless you obtain the floor, by being recognized by the chair.

When a motion is pending (during a debate), the sequence of events is as follows:

- A. Seek recognition by standing and stating "Mr. Chair".
- B. The chair recognizes the next speaker:
 1. The first person who stood up AFTER the speaker yielded the floor.
 2. The maker of the motion, if he has not spoken yet.
 3. Whoever has not spoken on this motion, this day.
 4. The person presenting an opposing opinion to the last speaker, alternating between opposing views.

III. TOTALLY WRONG PHRASES!

- A. **SO MOVED!** – This a common statement which means nothing. One must state the actual motion so as to avoid confusion in the audience. Everyone has the right to know exactly what is being moved and discussed. "So moved!" is vague and pointless. Do not allow your members to be vague and pointless.
- B. **I MOVE TO TABLE!** – First of all, the motion is "*Move to Lay on the Table*". **According to Robert's Rules of Order, this motion is in order only as a temporary interruption of the agenda, so as to allow something special and urgent out of turn.** It is not intended to kill a motion. It is non-debatable and only requires a majority to adopt. The correct motion is usually - "*Move to Postpone Indefinitely*" or "*Move to Postpone to a time certain*", both of which are debatable
- C. **CALL FOR THE QUESTION!** – This is not a motion. The member who wishes to stop the discussion does not have more rights than the members who wish to discuss the issue. The proper motion is either "*I move to terminate debate*" or "*I Move the Main Question*" which would **require a 2/3 vote** to be adopted.

V. UNANIMOUS CONSENT:

"If there is no objection ...". These are the 5 most helpful words a chairperson will ever find. A meeting can move much faster and be more productive if the chair will merely state, "If there is no objection, (we will adopt a motion to do such and such)." When no objection is heard, the chair then calls for a vote.

VI. SIX STEPS TO EVERY MOTION!

Every motion, with some exceptions, requires 6 steps.

STEP 1. A member stands up, is recognized, and makes a motion.

Do not start discussing your motion until you have a second.

Exceptions to being Recognized First: Some motions are so important that the maker can interrupt the speaker and not even wait to be recognized by the chair! - *Question of Privilege, Orders of the Day, Point of Order, Appeal, Parliamentary Inquiry, Point of Information, Division.*

STEP 2. Another member seconds the motion;

Do not start discussing your motion

Exception: Some motions do not require a second - Generally, if Robert's Rules of Order allow you to interrupt a speaker, you do not need a second (except *Appeal*).

STEP 3. The presiding officer restates the motion to the assembly;

Common Mistake: Make sure that the motion stated by the chair was the motion that was made because the motion that is adopted is the one stated by the presiding officer, not the one stated by the maker of the original motion.

Exception: The presiding officer may help a verbose person rephrase the motion.

STEP 4. The members debate the motion;

Exception: Some motions may not be debated because the debate would defeat the purpose of the motion - *Recess, Orders of the Day, Lay on the Table, Limit or Close Debate, Division of the Assembly, Division of the Question.*

STEP 5. Presiding officer asks for the affirmative votes & then the negative votes;

Common Mistake: The presiding officer states 'All in favor' and fails to tell the members what to do as a matter of voting (for example, 'say aye', 'stand up', 'raise your hand', etc.); or the negative vote is never requested or counted!

Exception: Some motions are made and passed without voting - *Question of Privilege, Orders of the Day, Point of Order, Division.*

STEP 6. The presiding officer announces the result of the voting; instructs the corresponding officer to take action; and introduces the next item of business.

Common Mistake: Presiding officer fails to pronounce the result of the voting! No one is instructed to take action. Commonly, dead silence follows because the presiding officer is lost and stares at the assembly.

Exceptions: No exceptions here. The result of the voting must always be announced.

When Six Steps Do Not Apply:

Privileged Motions do not relate to the pending motion, but are of such immediate importance that they take precedence over any Main Motion.

- A. **Question of Privilege:** As a member of the audience you believe that you can not hear or see the proceedings, but you have a feasible solution. You have the right to stop the meeting, and have the problem corrected.
- B. **Call for the Orders of the Day:** You notice that the agenda specifies the time for each portion of the agenda. You notice that the part you are interested in is scheduled for 9:15 am, and the time is now 9:16 am. The meeting is stuck with the 9:05 am item. You 'Call for the Orders of the Day'. This automatically forces everyone to abandon the 9:05 item and deal with 9:15 item.

Incidental Motions do not relate directly to the substance of the pending motion, but rather to the method of transacting the business of the motion. Incidental motions must be dealt with immediately:

- A. **Point of Order:** During a meeting you notice that someone (even the presiding officer) is disobeying Robert's Rules of Order. You state 'Point of Order' and explain your point. The Presiding Officer rules on your point and you help to keep everyone in line.
- B. **Point of Information:** You have the right to stop business and have someone explain the process and consequences of the debate or the voting.
- C. **Division of Assembly:** Whenever you doubt the Presiding Officer's hearing capabilities during a vote by loud ayes/nays, you can have the vote taken by having voters stand instead of yelling. You call for a

'Division of the Assembly' and the vote has to be **retaken** in a more accurate manner.

- D. **Object to Consideration:** This is non-debatable and is put to an immediate vote. The matter is killed if 2/3 agree with you **before it is discussed**.

VIII. MODIFYING A MOTION

- A. **Between the time that a motion is made and before the chair states the motion**, any member may informally offer modifying suggestions to the maker of the motion. The maker may accept or reject that member's recommendations.
- B. **After the motion has been made and the chair has stated the motion**, the motion belongs to the assembly and not the original maker. At this point, the maker of the motion may *request unanimous consent* from the members to modify the motion.
- C. **By means of a motion to Amend**, any member may propose changes to the motion, before the motion is voted upon. These proposed changes must be seconded and may be amended and/or debated.
- D. **If a motion requires further study**, the members may vote to **Refer the Main Motion to a Committee**. When the committee returns the motion to the assembly, the committee normally **proposes** amendments for the assembly to vote upon.
- E. **Sometimes the motion is so complex** that the only way to do it justice is for a member to urge its rejection and offer to propose a simpler version as a **Substitute Motion**. Upon defeat of the complex motion, anyone may propose the *Substitute Motion*.

X. AMENDING A MOTION

During the Debate step of a Pending Motion, one may move to Amend the Pending Motion. All one needs to remember is that there are really **only 3 basic processes of amendments**:

- A. You can Move to Amend by *Inserting* words or paragraphs,
- B. You can Move to Amend by *Striking out* (not deleting) words or paragraphs,
- C. You can Move to Amend by *Striking out and Inserting* words or paragraphs. One can even Amend by *Substituting* (Striking out and Inserting) entire paragraphs or the complete motion.

You can also Amend the Amendment, before it is voted upon: But you can only Amend the Inserted or Struck out **words**.

XI. UNDEBATABLE MOTIONS

There are motions which are non-debateable. The main ones are:

- A. **Lay on the Table/Take from the Table**
- B. **Suspend the Rules**
- C. **Objection to the Consideration of the Question**
- D. **Recess**

XII. COUNTING VOTES; VOTING RESULTS

Majority: Does Robert mean ... the Majority of the entire membership? ... the Majority of the members present? ... the Majority of the Votes Cast? How should you count the blank votes, the illegal votes, the abstentions? Depends on the wording of your bylaws. Absent special wording:

A Majority is 'more than half' of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote, excluding blank votes and abstentions. It is not 51% and in the case of even number of votes for example 50, it is not 25, it is 26.

2/3 Vote: Robert and/or your bylaws will specify which motion will require at least a 2/3 vote for adoption. Generally speaking, a 2/3 vote is required for adoption of any motion which:

- A. Suspends or modifies a rule of order already adopted;
- B. Prevents the introduction of a question to consideration;
- C. Closes, limits, or extends the limits of debate;**
- D. Closes nominations or the polls;**
- E. Takes away membership or office.

FINALLY, Previous Notice: Sometimes there is a further requirement of a **Previous Notice** for a motions. Major examples are:

- A. Amendment of Bylaws,
- B. Removal from Office or Membership,
- C. And, per our bylaws, endorsements.