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Chairing a meeting

An important job of the Chairperson is chairing meetings.

This information sheet looks at what Chairing a meeting involves, and how to do it. There are some useful tips and advice to help improve and develop your chairing skills.

What makes a good Chair?

A good Chair helps the meeting to run smoothly and efficiently.

They will make sure that:

- | all the business is discussed
- | everyone's views are heard
- | clear decisions are reached
- | the meeting starts and finishes on time.

A good chair will also:

- | always be thinking about the meeting overall, not just the topic under discussion. This can make it more difficult for you to participate in the discussions.
- | always aim to draw a balance between hearing everyone's views and getting through the business.
- | *never* use their position as chair as an opportunity to put forward their views to the exclusion of others, or to dominate the meeting.

No one can do this without the co-operation and agreement of the whole meeting - the chair person is not a miracle worker!

Everyone can learn how to chair well, it just takes a bit of thought and practice. You will get more confident with experience. Try watching how other people chair meetings, and seeing what works and what doesn't.

Do you need a Chairperson?

Some groups don't have a formal role of Chair, or a named Chairperson. However, even very small or informal meetings need some direction and organisation.

You could decide to rotate this role. This has the advantage that it spreads the responsibility and gives everyone a chance to be involved with the running of the group.

A potential disadvantage of rotating the Chair is that no one takes responsibility for the role, or that the same person always ends up chairing without a proper agreement about this.

If you do decide to have a rotating Chair, work out collectively what is expected of them and agree from the end of each meeting who will Chair the next one. This gives them the opportunity to think about the meeting and their role in it.

Chairing a meeting

Before the meeting

To Chair a meeting well, you need to think about the meeting before you arrive at it.

Ask yourself the following questions in advance of the meeting:

- | Why are you having the meeting?
- | What end result do you want from it?
- | What will you discuss at it?
- | Do you want speakers?
- | Do you need to get more information to inform the discussion?
- | Do you want to ask someone to prepare an introduction?
- | Do you want to distribute any information in advance of the meeting?

It isn't the Chair's job to figure all this out on their own. Work together with the Secretary and other Committee members. Find out what people want to discuss, and think about how you can raise issues in a clear and informed way.

Agenda

An agenda is simply a list of the things you want to discuss in your meeting. As well as helping you plan, it is a useful way of making sure you cover everything you need to at the meeting.

A clear agenda, with timings, really helps when you are chairing.

Timing is important to the success of the meeting. Disorganised and unexpectedly long meetings can demoralise people. Productive meetings of 2 hours or less can be an experience which builds morale, and strengthens your organisation.

At the start of the meeting

You want everyone at the meeting to feel comfortable about speaking and putting their point of view. For a meeting to work well, everyone needs to feel welcome, included and informed.

Here are a few tips:

- | Organise someone to welcome people as they arrive. Never let a new person sit ignored while everyone else chats.
- | Make sure everyone has the agenda and any papers - put them on chairs, or give them to people at the door.
- | Introduce yourself and other speakers at the start of the meeting.
- | If it is a small meeting, ask everyone to introduce themselves. Sometimes it works well to get people to say a bit more about themselves as part of the introductions.
- | Tell people what the meeting is about. Don't assume everyone knows as much as you do.

See the Resource Centre sheet "The Agenda: a quick and easy guide to preparing an agenda"

Chairing a meeting

How will your meeting be run?

Every Chair needs some guidelines about how the group wants their meetings to be run. It helps to set out some simple rules - these must be ones everyone accepts and is prepared to work with, or they'll be useless.

Once you've got some rules agreed, it is much easier to chair the meeting, and people are less likely to take it personally when you ask them not to interrupt, or stop them from wandering off the topic.

You need to work out the rules that suit your group, but here are some that are commonly used: -

Examples of meeting rules

- | Ask people to speak 'through the chair'. This means putting your hand up if you want to speak, and waiting for the chair to say it's your turn.
- | Don't interrupt other people.
- | Stick to the item on the agenda.
- | Don't talk amongst yourselves.
- | Respect other people's views - don't groan or pull faces when someone else is speaking. Wait until they've finished and then put your point of view calmly and politely.
- | Keep contributions short and to the point.
- | Start and finish the meeting on time.

Remember....

- | You will need to remind people of the meeting rules at each meeting. There may be new people there, and even regular attendees will forget.
- | A group can take a while to get used to the meeting rules you've agreed. If it doesn't work perfectly first time, keep on trying.

Chairing the meeting

The key tasks of the Chair during the meeting are:

1. Getting through the business on time
2. Involving everyone
3. Reaching decisions
4. Dealing with difficult people

Here are some tips on each of these areas:-

Chairing a meeting

1. Getting through the business

It's very frustrating for everyone if a meeting doesn't deal with the business it needs to, or if it drags on for hours. People leave feeling demoralised and irritated - and quite possibly won't come back.

Here are a few tips: -

- | Have a clear agenda with rough timings
- | Briefly introduce each agenda item (or get someone else to).
- | Never assume people know what you're talking about. Take time to go over the issues and explain why you are discussing them.
- | Always keep an eye on the time, and move items on if necessary. Make sure you've got a watch, or can see a clock.
- | Stick to the agenda item under discussion. If people try to raise other issues, acknowledge them, but don't get drawn in, eg "That's an important point which we can come back to later..."
- | Stop private conversations and asides as soon as they start.
- | Tell the meeting what decisions you are making and why - eg 'I'm going to give this discussion another 5 minutes and then draw it to a close'

Remember:-

- | Don't use your position as an opportunity to impose your views. You are there to facilitate the meeting, not dominate it.
- | Keep an overview - remember your role as Chair.
- | Listen to other people.
- | Make sure all view points get heard - including those you disagree with.
- | Don't be under-assertive. You've been given a role, and people will be looking to you. Don't be afraid of speaking out.

2. Involving everyone

Have you ever been at a meeting where no one spoke out against a particular proposal, but you discover afterwards that lots of people didn't agree with it? This happens far too often, and means there will only be half-hearted support for the group's decisions.

You want to hear everyone's views, and make sure everyone is included and involved in the meeting.

There are two sides to this:-

- | Restraining those who are over keen on the sound of their own voice.
- | Encouraging those who are quiet, nervous, or new to meetings.

Chairing a meeting

Ideally, you want an atmosphere where there can be genuine debate and discussion. People should be able to disagree with each other and listen to different opinions in a way that is constructive and moves everyone on.

This takes time to develop, and requires the involvement of the whole group, but there are things the Chair can do to help:-

Some tips on involving people:-

- | If lots of people want to speak, keep a list of whose turn it is to speak next to remind you. Make sure people know you have noticed that they want to speak.
- | Stop people from talking for too long. Be firm and consistent but not aggressive. If someone is going on endlessly, interrupt them and say something like “thank you for your contribution, you’ve raised some interesting points. I’m going to stop you there for the moment so other people can comment on this issue”
- | Give preference to people who haven’t spoken before. Say something like “I know you’ve got your hand up, John, but I’m going to take Mary first as she hasn’t spoken yet.”
- | Give opportunities to everyone to put their point of view. Ask questions to draw people out, for instance “Does anyone else have any thoughts on this issue?” or “Is there anyone who hasn’t spoken yet who would like to say something?”
- | Try going round everyone in turn to get their views on a topic - this only works in a small meeting.
- | Stop people from interrupting. Step in immediately with, “Hold on, let x finish what they have to say”. Make sure you don’t forget to come back to the person who interrupted when it’s their turn.
- | Make sure you don’t ignore people who have their hands up in favour of those who are interrupting.
- | Listen carefully to what people are saying, and make sure their suggestions are considered by the meeting.
- | Make sure people expressing unpopular or minority views get heard properly and aren’t intimidated out of saying what they think.

3. Reaching decisions

It’s easy for discussions to wander around and then drift away without any decision or action agreed. Or discussions get bogged down, with no one taking responsibility for finding a way through.

Chairing a meeting

The Chair needs to keep an overview, and help the meeting to reach decisions. Don't worry if you can't do this straight away - it's one of the most difficult bits of chairing, and it takes confidence and practise to do well.

A few tips:-

- | Listen carefully to the discussion and jot down key points.
- | At the start of a discussion, remind people what the issue is, and what decisions need to be made.
- | See if you can pull together the points people are making and suggest a constructive way forward. For instance, you might begin 'It seems we agree that...'
- | If there are two or three different points of view, try to summarise each one and present them clearly to the meeting.
- | Before you move on to the next item, go over what's been agreed. This is a way of checking you did all agree the same thing, and helps the minute-taker to get a clear record.
- | Before you move on, check that you've decided *who* will do whatever it is you've agreed on. If you don't, either nothing will happen, or the person who always does everything will end up with yet another task.
- | Don't assume silence means agreement. Make sure people have been able to say what they think.

4. Dealing with difficult people

The Chair can have to deal with 'difficult' people - the non-stop talker, or the know-alls, or those with a particular bee in their bonnet. There are no easy answers, but the general way you conduct the meeting will make a difference.

Here are some tips. Remember that the majority of people at the meeting will be supporting your efforts.

- | Remind people of the meeting rules, and that everyone has agreed to these.
- | Be firm and consistent - don't allow difficult people to get away with things and then come down hard on people you find easier.
- | When two people get into a heated discussion, summarise the points made by each, then move the focus away from the individuals by asking what other people think about the issues.
- | When someone keeps repeating the same point, assure them that their point has been heard, and then turn the discussion back to the group.
- | If someone is continually criticising try to turn the question round to them, for instance "what suggestions do you have for how this could be improved?" or "what would you do in this situation?"

Chairing a meeting

- | On rare occasions you may have to deal with someone who is really disruptive in a meeting, and won't listen to any of your helpful suggestions. If this happens, try asking the group for support - eg 'do people want to spend more time on this discussion or move on to the next topic?' This will make it clear to the person involved that everyone, not just the chair person, wants to move on.

How did the meeting go?

It is always useful to get feed-back on how the meeting went.

One way of doing this is to ask people at the meeting what they thought of it. You can do this at the end of the meeting. Just go round everyone in turn, asking them how they thought it went. You will get some useful feedback, and it makes everyone feel involved. This tends to work best with a small group that meets regularly, but can also be useful in other situations.

If it is a big public meeting, you might want to have comment or suggestion forms for people to fill out at the end of the meeting.

After the meeting

- | Allow time after the meeting has finished to talk to new people, or follow up suggestions and contributions people made.
- | Talk to your committee members about how the meeting went.
- | Start thinking about the next meeting!

How to Chair a Meeting Effectively

What Makes a Good Chair

Below are some general pointers about what makes a good Chair of a meeting. Some of you will have these skills, possibly without realising them, other will have some but not all. They are things to think about and focus on as you develop your role of Chair to optimise your abilities and thus the running of the meeting you chair

- An understanding of the issues and topics being discussed
- A personal knowledge of the Committee's members
- Strength of personality and character allowing you to stand your ground and to effectively manage the meeting. Be able to utilise your authority e.g. prevent discussions wandering, prevent those with out anything new to add repeating the same point, being able to move on when a point is discussed as far as possible etc
- Being able to sum up the points made in discussions so before a vote the members know what they being asked to decide on. Requires you having an understanding of the issues and topics being discussed and keenly listening to the discussions.
- Knowing how things should be done i.e. knowing the standing orders and not have to look them up
- The ability to deal with people outside meetings

It is important to get feedback from others about your ability to chair. Ask others what they think your weaknesses are, possibly asking them how the meeting progressed and what weaknesses there were.

General Running of Meeting

a) Before meeting starts

- Send out the agenda and papers so everyone can read them at least seven days in advance
- Book a room and make sure it is easily found (in liaison with the clerk).
- Arrange seating to encourage maximum interaction and contribution. This may involve everyone sitting around a table for reasonable sized groups

b) As people arrive

- Ensure everyone has copy of the agenda and any papers for the meeting

c) Starting the meeting

- Make sure you start on time
- Introduce yourself and welcome all especially new members

d) Fun stuff - a meeting doesn't just have to be about presenting/reading/discussing papers, other things can be done too

- Presentations about important developments. If a presentation is included may be an idea to have paper copies so these can be taken away and members aren't too distracted by taking down too many notes.
- Include slides, overheads, videos etc One again, copies where possible, summaries of the information on the video could be useful/essential
- Invite outside speakers to talk about issues relevant to the committee
- Training events- e.g. games
- Review what has previously been done, congratulating members when things have been accomplished
- Bring refreshments

e) Finishing

- Always finish on time
- Talk to other members about what has been discussed/or other issues if they wish
- Make sure the minutes are written up and circulated to the members within two weeks of the meeting (speak to the clerk)

At the first meeting

Don't

- talk too much as the chair
- cover too much
- have it lasting too long
- assume everyone has the same knowledge or knows what you are talking about

Do

- get organised in advance
- have a written agenda
- introduce yourself maybe new members or others observing don't know who you are
- make everyone feel comfortable
- have a method to get member's ideas brainstorming, open debate
- have expectations about how members should give input

- enjoy yourself
- finish on time

Chairing ongoing meetings

- Discussion - let member know when discussion has drifted from the topic. Usually it will quickly return to it. Remind members of the topic and the goals of the meeting
- Summarise- what less active members have said and link associated points together. Accept parts of ideas and ask for them to be developed.
- Spot likely problems - summarise feelings as well as content to anticipate problems
- State the problem - never blame anyone, state in a constructive manner. Clear up what decisions the group has to make, do not waste time on other things
- Avoid -
 - taking sides
 - becoming a participant of the discussion
 - manipulating the group towards your own agenda
 - criticising the values and ideas of others
 - forcing your own ideas on the group if necessary have someone else chair the meeting so you can take part
 - making decisions for the members without asking them for agreement
 - saying too much
- Start - as close to the start time as possible, people's time is invaluable
- Finish - on time, if not before, ditto

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How to Chair Meetings Effectively

Ten Commandments for the Chair

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■ [Feb 6, 2009](#)

A chair should learn how to chair meetings effectively and decisively. Chairmanship is a unique skill worth practicing and nurturing.



Chairmanship is a learned skill. It has to be practiced and perfected. A chair is considered successful when he provides opportunity for everyone to be heard, gives appropriate rulings and protects the minority while abiding by the majority decisions.

Ten Commandments for the Chair

1. *Be Prepared.* The number one rule for effective chairmanship is to be prepared well in advance for the meeting. He should, with the help of the secretary of the organization, draft an agenda for the meeting which reflects the purpose of the meeting. He should see to it that all committees and subcommittees are given equal chances to be heard without hindrance. He should contact the chairs of various committees and check what they are going to deliver. Prioritize the items according to importance. If some topics are current, motivate the concerned committees to present their reports. Spread the agenda evenly to provide for everyone to be heard. Being prepared will enable the chair to guide the meeting in the proper direction rather than allow it to drift aimlessly. Adhering to proper formal meeting procedures by the chair will uphold democratic principles and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the procedures.
2. *Be Prompt.* Prompt responses to the members' opinions and suggestions are very important in keeping the meetings under control. Use common sense. Never let the discussion linger on. Never let things get out of your command.
3. *Be Punctual.* A chair should be the first to arrive at the meeting place. He should realize that time is very precious. A chair must insist that meetings start on time and end on time. Frivolous discussion should be discouraged.
4. *Be Strict.* A chair should be strict without being rude. Always see to it that the rule and decorum of the organization are observed by the members. Never allow personal attacks and ego boosting performances by the members.
5. *Be Impartial.* Many a times, the discussions may reach a point where the chair will have to make a ruling depending on the preceding discussions. The general trend of the discussion may have gone against the chair's own conviction. But the majority should always be given weightage. Chair may mention his reservations while proclaiming his rulings, though.
6. *Be Honest.* Being honest and open is the best virtue for a chair. Even though the chair has to stick with the majority decision, the chair will be respected if he reveals his own caliber and credibility.
7. *Be Rational.* Common sense and reasoning can be of great virtues for a chair. A rational chair will be efficient in judging the members' moods and guiding the discussion in the appropriate direction.
8. *Be Humorous.* A humorous chair can convert the most monotonous meeting into a colorful and enjoyable experience. The humor should be spontaneous and well timed.
9. *Be Current.* Keep updated on the current affairs of the organization, the society, the nation and the world. This will come handy during the discussions.
10. *Be Knowledgeable.* Above all, the chair should have a sound knowledge of the parliamentary procedures and rules governing the conduct of a meeting. He should have the [Robert's Rules of Order](#) on his fingertips to guide the meeting in the desired direction. A basic knowledge about different types of motions will be a useful tool while chairing a meeting.

Further Reading

- [An Introduction to Formal Meeting Motions](#)

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Chairing a Meeting

Why do meetings fail? Well, there may be reasons such as lack of time, a badly designed agenda or an unsatisfactory venue. However, if the chairman is doing his (or her) job, it should be possible to overcome these difficulties.

Chairing a meeting means ensuring that a meeting achieves its aims. The meeting should have been called for a specific purpose and all discussion at the meeting must be steered to this end. This may sound simple in theory but in practice it is a very demanding task. The skills required include:

Impartiality

A chairman is like a judge in a court. He should ensure that all participants have an opportunity to express their point of view. It can be difficult to leave your own opinions at home, but if you can't remain impartial, you shouldn't have taken the job.

Assertiveness

Ensuring that everyone gets a hearing will almost certainly involve stopping someone from dominating the proceedings. The more contentious the issue the more likely you are to require firmness. You don't need to be rude or dogmatic. Phrases such as "I think we should hear from Ms. Smith on this" or "can we have some comments from the engineering department on this" should be sufficient in most cases. Once you provide this opening, however, you need to ensure that there are no interruptions while the next speaker has their say.

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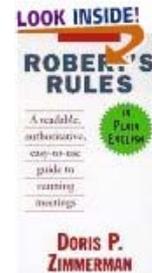
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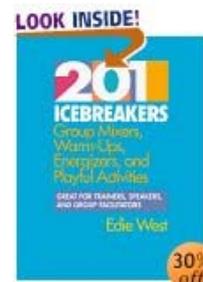


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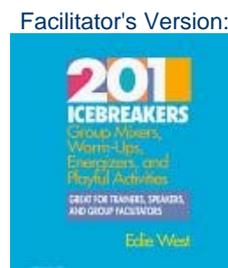
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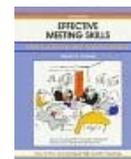
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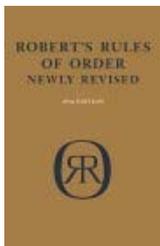
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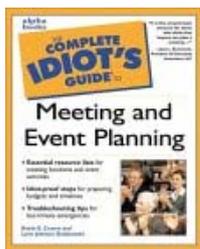
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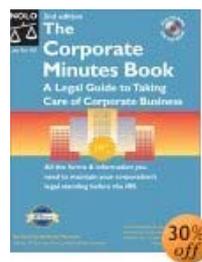


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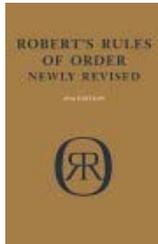
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Chairing Meetings (cont'd)

Staying on course

How often have you seen an agenda left totally aside? The meeting starts off well but becomes embroiled in a particular topic (perhaps the first item on the agenda) and ends when time runs out. A Chairman must assess the importance of each item on the agenda, and allot time to each topic as required. If one issue begins to dominate the chairman must take control. You might suggest a further meeting to discuss the issue at a later date, or that the main parties concerned could continue the discussion at the end of the meeting. Sometimes it will be necessary to call for a decision and then move on to the next topic. You need to stay alert and make sure that the issue has been given an adequate and impartial hearing within the allotted time.

Summarizing

Summarizing can be used to end a topic, to end a discussion, to limit the need for discussion and at the end of a meeting to ensure that everyone has a clear overview of what took place or what action is now required. It is an invaluable skill for a chairman. Summarizing requires active listening. You have to state concisely what was said in an impartial way and end with a clear statement about what is expected to happen next. It takes practice to summarize well, but it is a skill well worth developing.

Many people feel that being a chairman means opening the meeting and stopping rows. There is much more to it than that. Prior to the meeting, a chairman should consult with the secretary regarding the agenda, ensure that all interested parties have been notified, assess the level of interest and the potential for divisiveness for each item, and allot time to each item, based on decisions required and number of people attending.

During the meeting, the chairman must focus on the decisions required of the meeting, ensure that all participants are accorded adequate time, decide when to end debate on each topic, use appropriate questions to

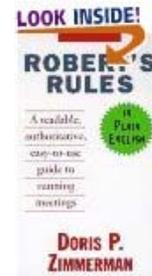
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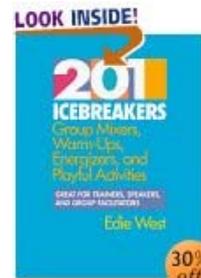


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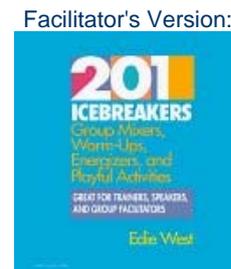
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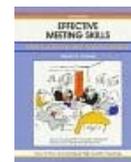
How to Hold Successful Meetings : 30...



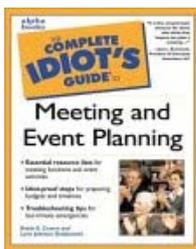
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First Aid for Meetings : Quick Fixes and...



Effective Meeting Skills (50-Minute...



elucidate information or re-direct discussion, listen carefully to all contributions, and clearly summarize proceedings with an emphasis on decisions taken and future plans.

The above are all key ingredients for a fruitful meeting. A tactful but assertive chairman will facilitate an effective meeting, and that's what everyone wants.

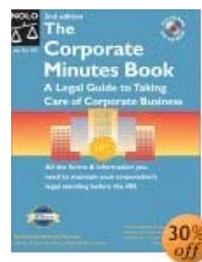
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Managing Meetings That Get Results



201 IceBreakers Ring bound edition



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