

## **Meetings and Parliamentary Procedures -- Simplified**

### **By Irving Engelson**

Generally, a meeting is called to make one or more decisions; that is to take action. Action being a dynamic process implies movement, or "motion." Therefore, we need a Motion to take action. After all has been finished, we end the meeting.

In order for a committee or board meeting to be legal, it must have sufficient representation of its members. This is called a quorum. The charter of committees and boards normally specify how many members constitute a quorum. In the absence of a specification, a majority of the members is considered a quorum. So in a committee of 20, a quorum is 11. The same is true for a committee of 21; since 11 is more than half and therefore a majority.

In its simplest form, we can think of a meeting as having the following elements:

1. - Start the meeting (Call the meeting to order)
2. - Take the needed action (Pass one or more motions)
3. - End the meeting (Adjourn)

### **SOME SPECIFICS**

#### 1. Start the Meeting

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(a) If there is a Quorum, the Chairman (chair) says: "I call the meeting to order"

(b) The members agree on what to do, by approving the Agenda. The agenda is an action plan. It specifies what the committee agrees to do. The chairman says: "You have the proposed agenda. Are there any proposed changes?"

(c) After changes are made, which may include additions or deletions of items, the chairman says: "Hearing no changes (or no additional changes) would someone move the adoption of the agenda?"

(d) A member will say "I so move," or "I move the adoption of the agenda," or "I move the adoption of the agenda as modified" -- all of these are fine. The chairman then says: "Is there a second to the motion to approve the agenda?" Another member will indicate that s/he seconds the motion.

(e) The Chairman then says:

"All in favor of approving the agenda say 'aye', those opposed say 'no'."

(f) Assuming the majority said aye, the chairman says:

"The agenda is approved" --( or similar words)

## 2. - Take the Needed Action

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As stated, all actions are agreed to by passing motions. In an oversimplified way, we can classify motions in three categories:

(i) Main Motion -- This states the ultimate action to be taken.

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Example -- I move that we have cake and tea. The chairman asks for a second, that is to say an additional person who wants this item considered. The Chairman then asks if there is discussion. During the discussion, someone may move to amend, that is to change, the Main Motion.

(ii) Subsidiary Motions -- Used to change the main motion.

Example -- I move to amend the motion; that we substitute coffee for the tea. This too needs a second. And after discussion the chairman proceeds with a vote on the amendment. He asks for all those in favor to change coffee for tea to say aye, and those opposed to say no (or nay). Assuming that the amendment passed, the Chairman continues: "The main motion now reads that we will have cake with coffee. Is there further discussion?" When the discussion is over, the Chairman says, "We will now vote on the Main motion as amended."

Again, those in favor of the motion as amended say aye, those opposed say no. The chairman then announces the vote: Either the motion passes or the motion fails. Normally, it needs a simple majority vote i.e., the number of ayes is greater than the number of nos. An equal number is called a tie, and the motion does not pass. Abstentions i.e., people who do not vote are not counted. So in a committee of nine (9) five (5) is a quorum. If only five members are attending and a vote is taken and two abstain, two say aye and one says no, the motion passes.

For motions that change rules, for example bylaws, it needs 2/3 to pass. Normally motions of working committees are of the simple kind, and need only a simple majority.

(iii) Incidental Motions -- These concern procedures, and should normally not come up in working committees meetings.

## 3. - End The Meeting (Adjourn)

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When last item is over, the chair asks for a motion to "adjourn."

The Chairman says, "do we have a motion to adjourn? Is there a second?" After it has been seconded, and passed the chairman says "We stand adjourned."