

VENTURING MAGAZINE

LeaderThoughts #24 by Michael Brown

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Effective Meetings

How can you have effective meetings? By having and following an agenda and an "Order of Business". The "Order of Business" is the standard blueprint for your meetings. Most groups follow these standard sections (tho some may add a few additional ones). This is then put down on their meeting agenda, which everyone is given a copy of when the meeting begins. This allows everyone to understand what they will be dealing with at each stage of the meeting.



The standard Order of Business has the following sections, in this order:

- Call to Order
- Approval of Minutes
- Reports of Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees
- Reports of Special Committees
- Special Orders
- Unfinished Business & General Orders
- New Business
- Adjournment

What happens during each of these sections?

Call to Order

The presiding officer (who may be your president, or other officer if the president isn't there) should never call the meeting to order until a quorum is present. A quorum is the number of members entitled to vote who must be present in order for business to be legally transacted. Quorum is defined in your bylaws (more on bylaws in a future article) and should be based on the typical number of members who would be at a meeting. If it's not defined, the default quorum is half your membership. So if it's not possible to get half your membership at most meetings, best define your quorum accordingly. And it should be a number, not a percentage.

Once a quorum is present, the presiding officer calls the meeting to order by stating, "The meeting will come to order." If your presiding officer uses a gavel, a single rap would be appropriate. (the gavel is a standard sign of office for the presiding officer)

If your group has any special traditions with opening your meeting, that is fine. (Pledge of Allegiance, reciting the Scout Oath and Law, etc.)



Some groups will do a roll call; others will pass around a signup sheet so they know who's present.

Approval of Minutes

In meetings when minutes are to be approved (which really should be all of them), the minutes are typically distributed to all members in advance so that they do not have to be read aloud. This can be done via email. Corrections and approval are normally done by unanimous consent. That is, the presiding officer can ask, "Is there any objection to approving the minutes as read [or distributed]? If there is no objection, the minutes are approved." (the chair should state this). You need not ask for a formal motion to approve the minutes, nor take a formal vote. The only reason to object to approving the minutes is that there are mistakes. Correct them and then approve the corrected minutes. (we will speak more on minutes in a future article)

Once approved, the minutes go into the records of your crew/VOA, with the secretary signing and dating them.

Reports of Officers and Standing Committees

The first substantive item of business in meetings is typically hearing from the officers and established committees. The logic in this order of arrangement is to give priority to the items of business from the leadership. Typically, the presiding officer learns in advance who needs to report and only calls on those officers, boards, and committees that have reports. The order of the reports are the order of the officers and standing committees as given in the Bylaws.

The report of the Treasurer should be the organization's financial report on what has happened in the last month in terms of money coming in and going out, and for what. The report of the Secretary should only be of any correspondence that has come to the group.

All reports should be written, and a copy provided to the secretary and president. The copy to the secretary is to add this report to the organization's records and to give info for the minutes. In today's world of wide access to computers and printers, there is really no excuse that committee reports NOT be provided in writing at the meeting, or at least emailed.

Reports are generally for information only. In such instances, no motion is necessary following the reports unless there are recommendations to be implemented. A motion "to adopt" or "to accept" a report is seldom wise except when the report is to be issued or published in the name of the organization. On the other hand, it is common that the reporting member end by making a motion if there is a specific recommendation for action.

For example, the budget committee may have looked at the current dues structure. In the report, the committee chairman would explain in detail the committee's position and reasoning. At the end of the report, the committee chair would close by saying, "On behalf of the committee, I move that annual dues be increased to \$25.00."

If there are any special committees (also known as ad hoc committees) that may have been formed, their reports will come next. As you may not have any, this is an optional section that may or may not be needed.

Special Orders

Special orders are any items of business that are mandated for this meeting, typically from your bylaws. This could be items such as nominations, elections, and the like. They have the highest priority. Again, if none, this is skipped.

Unfinished Business & General Orders

NEVER "Old Business". "Old business" is a misnomer in that unfinished business is not simply items that have been discussed previously. By and large, unfinished business is matters that were on the previous meeting agenda, but not gotten to, and general orders are matters postponed to the present meeting, and which a decision has not been made.

The secretary should know if there are any items to be considered under this section, and ensure they are placed on the meeting's agenda (as it's the secretary's job to prepare the agenda). As a result, the presiding officer should not need to ask, "Is there any unfinished business?" Instead, the presiding officer should simply state the question on the first item of business. Again, if there is no unfinished business, the presiding officer should skip this section.

New Business

Much of the work in a meeting is accomplished during the heading of "new business". In this category of business, members can introduce any new item of for consideration. As a result, the presiding officer may be unaware of what items of business will arise under new business.

The presiding officer introduces the heading of new business by asking, "Is there any new business?" Any member can then introduce new items of business by making a motion and obtaining a second. Following the consideration of each item, the chair repeatedly asks, "Is there any further new business?" This process continues until there are no additional business items to come before the assembly.

Do not demand that anything a member wishes to bring up as new business must already be on the agenda. This is unnecessary. If a member wishes to put items on the agenda so they are not forgotten, that fine, but don't mandate this. You have no idea what may come up that needs to be discussed even at a meeting. It's wrong to prevent this from being discussed at this meeting due to it "not being on the agenda" and waiting until the next one.

Adjournment

In most assemblies the presiding officer can adjourn the meeting without waiting for a formal motion to adjourn. If all items of business have been considered, the presiding officer can ask, "Is there any further business?" If there is no response, the presiding officer simply states, "Since there is no further business, if there are no objections the meeting is adjourned." The time of adjournment is thus recorded. If a gavel is used, a simple rap on the gavel is sufficient.

Other sections of agendas

Some organizations many times have 2 additional items of business. One is "Open Forum" or "Good of the Order", which follows New Business. This allows the membership a chance to speak on matters that

