

VENTURING MAGAZINE

LeaderThoughts #31 by Michael Brown

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Voting

With our recent National Elections, one thing that should be considered is how VOTING is conducted.

Voting is a big matter that all groups need to understand because it's how the organization expresses its will. So let's look at some basics. First off, we'll handle some basic definitions of voting.



Definitions

- Majority- more than half
- 2/3rd majority- 2/3rd of the vote
- General consent- when everyone approves/agrees
- Quorum- minimum number of members needs to hold an official meeting
- Abstention- not voting

So what do these really mean?

Majority is "more than half". That's its definition. It's NOT "50% plus one" or "half plus one" or 51% or the like. If you go with definitions like that, you will have problems.

2/3rd majority (some call this a "supermajority", but this is NOT a valid parliamentary term) is as it says, 2/3rds or 66% of the vote. It's needed in certain cases.

General consent (sometimes called unanimous consent) is used when it's clear that everyone (or nearly everyone) is in agreement. We cover this later.

Quorum is the number of people needed at a meeting to legally have a meeting. This should be stated in the bylaws. The default is half the membership. But some groups may not be able to get even half their membership at a meeting, so a quorum needs to be set. It should be set to the likely number of people who will be at the meeting. It should be a specific number, NOT a percentage. This is because if the membership number changes, you may not be able to meet this percentage. Having quorum too high is a problem for many groups.

Abstention is NOT voting. It's the third choice for people, the I don't care choice, as by NOT voting, the decision will rest with those who DO vote. The mistake people make is thinking that abstaining is the equivalent of either a YES or NO vote. It is neither, as it does not affect the outcome. Outcome is based on votes cast (YES or NO). Further, the chair should NEVER ask for abstentions. They are ignored, again, because they have no effect on the voting results.

Let's be clear on this point. The outcome of a vote is decided by those WHO VOTE. Which is either FOR something or AGAINST something. Even if only a small number of people present at a meeting VOTE, it's THEIR VOTES that decide the outcome. Even if only one person votes.

HOW then is voting done? There are actually several methods, and depending on the situation will determine which one is used.

Methods of Voting

- Voice
- Raising Vote
- Counting Vote
- Roll Call
- Ballot
- General /Unanimous Consent

What are these methods?

Voice vote. Most of your voting in your meetings will be by voice vote. If the vote needs a majority vote, you can use this. If it requires a 2/3rds vote, you'll have to do a raising vote (see next). How does it work? The chair asks "all those in favor, please signify by saying AYE". After they have done so, the chair asks "all those opposed, please signify by saying NAY(or NO)". The chair then gauges which side had more votes and announces the results ("The ayes have it, the motion carries" or "The nays have, the motion fails"). IF THERE IS DOUBT (ie, it's too close), the chair will need to go to a raising vote. If the chair doesn't and others feel it's too close, they can protest and force one themselves.

Raising vote. As noted, MUST be used for 2/3rds voting instead of voice votes, and CAN be used if the outcome of voice vote was too close to tell. In a raising vote people STAND (raise) to signify which side they vote. As an alternate, especially with a small group, raised hands is ok. How does it work? The chair asks "all those in favor, please (stand or raise your hand)." Chair should quickly count the votes. The chair should then say "Thank you. Please (sit down/lower your hand). All those in favor, please (stand or raise your hand)". Chair should quickly count those votes, compare the two, and announce results. DO NOT GIVE TOTALS. Just announce which side prevailed.

Counted vote. As the name implies, this is the raising vote, BUT the vote outcome IS given and recorded. This is usually ONLY used if someone demands it. This should be the ONLY time the outcome of a vote should be given in your meeting minutes. And again note that only votes (YES & NO) are given, never abstentions.

Roll call. I doubt most crews will use a roll call vote. This is usually only done in government bodies. Here the secretary reads thru the roll of the members, asking each on for their vote (Yes, no or 'present'). Present is the equivalent to abstention (see above for what this is). Usually the results of the vote (ie, who voted which way) is recorded.

Ballot. Most probably understand this. This is your secret ballot, in which you write down your vote on a piece of paper, so no one knows who voted which way. While this is usually only used in elections, it can ALSO be used for motions if membership wish to do so. The group will have to select tellers to collect the ballots, count them, and announce the results. You will also need to make a motion to instruct the tellers to destroy these ballots afterwards (usually a good idea, as if you don't, the ballots are



kept as part of the records of the meetings, and available for members to review.). It's always a good idea for the secretary to keep a small pad of paper or very small notebook for use as impromptu ballots.

Unanimous consent/general consent. This can be used by a chair to move the meeting along when they feel that everyone is in agreement with the motion. Sadly, too many don't understand this and mess it up. How does it work? Well, the chair says that the crew will use unanimous consent to decide, unless someone objects. If someone objects, it doesn't mean the motion failed, only they you'll have to use voice vote or the like. The chair would say "if there are no objections, we'll decide the matter by unanimous consent". Chair should pause to give people a chance to object. If not, they would say "As there are no objections, the motion passes".

As always, I like to include some resources. I haven't found too many resources devoted to just voting, other than the National Association of Parliamentarians (www.parliamentarians.org) work called "Various Optional Techniques Explored: A Guide to Voting" which is part of their Pathways to Proficiency series.