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LeaderThoughts #32 by Michael Brown

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All About Motions

In previous works in this series, we have eluded to the concept of "motions" in meetings to get things done. But what are they all about, and how do you deal with them?

In most cases, all the decisions an organization will make will be due to **motions** being made by the members, discussed, and then decided upon (in cases where you have MEMBERS making decisions vs. just your officers). How this is done is really very easy, but can be confusing to those not familiar with them.

Motions are handled in this seven step process:

1. Obtain the floor
2. Make the motion
3. Have it seconded
4. Chair repeats it
5. Motion is discussed/debated
6. Vote is taken
7. Result is given



How is each step handled?

1. **OBTAIN THE FLOOR.** Before you can state your motion, you must 'obtain the floor'. And you can't do this unless there is nothing else pending. In other words, if the group is currently working on another matter, your motion will have to wait. Hopefully, your chair will say "Is there any other new business?" once other matters are finished, indicating it's ok to put forth something new. This is your chance to make your motion. Obtain the chairs attention, by either raising your hand or standing (depending on the size of the group and its customs). Hopefully, the chair will recognize you and you can make your motion (the chair may say "the Chair recognizes...").
2. **MAKE THE MOTION.** Now that you have the floor, make your motion. Start it off by saying "I move that", and clearly state your motion. Do NOT say "I'd like to make a motion...", or "I make a motion that..." or "I so move..." or the like. Do NOT spend time explaining or justifying the motion (you'll get your chance later). Make it short and sweet, and sit down. IF the motion is a little complex, have it written down and give copies to the chair and secretary.
3. **THE MOTION IS SECONDED.** Now that you have stated the motion, it needs to be seconded. Seconding ONLY means that at least one person feels the group should consider the motion. The seconder is NOT obligated to vote for the motion or be in favor of it. (they may in fact be against it, and may be seconded it so that it can be considered and defeated!). All that is needed is someone to say "Second!" If no one does, the chair can prompt for a second ("Is there a second"). IF THERE IS NO SECOND, the motion is lost and that's it (Chair "Motion is lost due to lack of a second. Is there any new business?"). If there is a second, we move to the next step.

NOTE: in small committees (12 or less), you may dispense with the need for a second.

4. CHAIR REPEATS IT. The chair then says "It has been moved and seconded that..." This make sure everyone is clear on what we will be discussing.
5. MOTION IS DISCUSSED/DEBATED. At this point, members can now discuss the motion. As noted in previous points, we are discussing ONLY the motion. The old style is for the chair to say "Are you ready for the question?", but it is simpler to say "Is there any discussion?" THE MAKER OF THE MOTION gets to speak first, by the way. This is now their chance to expound on the motion, and convince people to vote for it. Afterwards, everyone else gets to speak. It is a good idea for people to make it clear where they stand by saying "I speak for the motion/I speak in favor of the motion" or "I speak against the motion/I speak in opposition to the motion" and then explain why. Should there be a lull in those obtaining the floor to speak about the motion; the chair may prompt for further debate by saying "Is there any further discussion?"

There ARE limits to how long you can speak and how often. The standard rule is twice on the same motion for 10 minutes each. The organization is free to change this for the organization all the time (thru a "Standing Rule" of the organization) or for that meeting or for just that motion.

6. VOTE IS TAKEN. Once it is clear everyone has had their say, OR someone has forced the matter by 'calling the question' and ending debate, the chair will put the motion to a vote. Before doing so, the chair should again repeat the motion so that everyone is clear as to what they are voting on (helpful if the motion was changed thru amendments). The chair should say "The question is on the adoption of the motion to...". And then put the matter to a vote (see the article on Voting).
7. RESULT IS GIVEN. After the vote is taken, the chair needs to announce the results: "The ayes have it and the motion is adopted" or "The noes have it, and the motion is lost", or the like. As noted on Voting, you do not give a count of the vote, just who prevailed.

FREQUENT QUESTIONS

SECOND - as noted, and which bears repeating: Seconding just means that at least one person feels the group should consider the motion. The seconder is NOT obligated to vote for the motion or be in favor of it. (They may in fact be against it, and may be seconded it so that it can be considered and defeated!). Seconding is not needed in small committees or groups less than 12. Also, once seconded, you can't withdraw your second. And, if debate begins before a second is formally given (which it shouldn't), then the second is assumed.



MINUTES - what goes into the minutes? The motion as it was voted on, who made it (don't need who seconded it), and the outcome (adopted or lost). "It was moved by John Smith and seconded that we increase our dues to \$100 a year. The motion passed."

AMENDMENTS - during discussions on the motions, the members CAN make changes to the motion (add, remove, reword, change). These are call amendments. This will be covered below.

More on Motions

When speaking of motions, there are some other things to be aware of. There are, in fact, 23 different motions. Do you need to memorize them all? No. In fact for most people and most situations, you need to be familiar with only a handful or so. We will cover the most useful of these below.

First off, every motion has certain characteristics. It's important to be familiar with these characteristics. It can be difficult to memorize the characteristics of every motion, but thankfully there are various charts and cheat sheets you can get and use during your meetings.

The characteristics are:

1. Precedence
2. Application
3. If in order when another has the floor
4. Seconded
5. Debatable
6. Amendable
7. Vote needed
8. Reconsidered

What do these mean?

1. Precedence. For some motions (a dozen of them), there is an order of precedence. Thus, if a motion is being considered, you can put forth a motion of a higher precedence, without waiting for that motion to be finished. Main motions (those motions that bring forth new business to be considered, which was the main focus of the first part of this article) have the lowest precedence. Some motions have no precedence, btw.
2. Application. What is the purpose of this motion? This is important, because some motions have somewhat confusing names and some motions seem to have identical purposes. You need to be sure you are using the right motion for the right reasons.
3. As noted, when someone has the floor, you have to wait your turn to make a motion. HOWEVER, there are some motions that you can use even if another member has the floor.
4. Does the motion require a second? Some don't.
5. Can the motion be debated (discussed)? Some don't allow it.
6. Can the motion be amended (changed)? Some can't.
7. What kind of vote is needed to pass the motion? Most motions need only a majority vote. Certain motions require a 2/3 vote (these are motions that affects member's "parliamentary rights" of debate). Some motions don't need a vote.
8. Can you reconsider the vote on a motion? Some allow it, some don't.

In addition, motions are put into one of several groups: Main Motions, Subsidiary motions, Privileged Motions, Incidental Motions, "Bring Back" Motions.



What are these groups?

Main motions bring new business before the group as motions or resolutions.

Subsidiary motions are motions that apply to the main motion, by changing them, setting them aside, and the like.

Privileged motions are important because they have precedence over other motions and are not debatable. All deal with the business of running the meeting.

Incidental motions are related to the main motion, but in such a way that they need to be dealt with NOW.

"Bring Back" motions are a motions that bring back issues for consideration to the group. These can be motions that were set aside and the like.

As noted, one need not memorize motions, but you need to be familiar with them, and using various charts during your meeting can help. Here are some resources for these charts.

You can download several free charts at Jim Slaughter's website (www.jimslaughter.com/articles.htm). He has a great chart of the parliamentary motions, and two others that are useful are "Preside Like a Pro" and "Presiding Phrases", which can help the person chairing a meeting to move things along.

The National Association of Parliamentarians (www.parliamentarians.org) has several items for sale in their store that are useful. They have several plastic cards with basic information on them, such as handling a motion, chair's guide, vote calculator, ranking motions, and subsidiary motions. Their basic information leaflet is one I get by the 100 and pass out at seminars I do. This one has it all in one place.

10 Basic Motions

So here we give 10 basic motions that most people will need to know.

1. **BRING UP BUSINESS.** If you want to propose that your group take an action (ie, make a purchase, plan a service event or social event or a camping trip) you must make a **MAIN MOTION**. You can only do this when no other business is pending. This is what we spoke about at the beginning of this article. "I move we raise our annual dues to \$25 collected in October".
2. **KILL A MAIN MOTION.** Move to **POSTPONE INDEFINITELY**. This avoids a direct vote on the main motion and thereby "kills" it.
3. **MAKE A MAIN MOTION BETTER.** Move to **AMEND** the main motion. You may add or delete or change, even substitute one motion for another. Don't withhold a second because the motion isn't quite what you want, instead **AMEND** it. "I move to strike out October and replace it with November." Note that if you amend a motion, what is amended is now

"locked in place" and cannot be further changed, tho the rest can be. And you can only have an amendment to an amendment, but nothing deeper.

4. GET MORE INFORMATION. Move to REFER the motion to a committee. You may even specify which committee or you may define the committee. (That is, assign it to an already existing Standing Committee or establish a short-lived Special Committee or Ad Hoc Committee with specific members just to look at this matter.) Very useful if you think the idea has merit, but needs more work by a small group of people. "I move to refer the motion on dues to a committee of 3 to report back at the next meeting".
5. PUT OFF THE VOTE ON A MAIN MOTION. Move to POSTPONE the main motion to a later time or another meeting. The time must be DEFINITELY specified. If postponing it to another meeting, ideally it should be the next one.
6. PUT ASIDE TEMPORARILY. Move to LAY the pending motion ON THE TABLE. Can only be used if an urgent reason to do so. Consideration of the motion continues after adoption of the motion to TAKE FROM THE TABLE.
7. CLOSE DEBATE/STOP AMENDMENTS. Move the PREVIOUS QUESTION. (some groups allow for this to be called "STOP DEBATE"). This requires a 2/3 vote and if adopted the vote is taken immediately on the pending motion. DON'T confuse the vote on the previous question with a vote on the motion itself!! They are separate! If you voted to stop the debate, you STILL have to vote on the motion itself.
8. TAKE A BREAK. Move to RECESS. A recess is short intermission (say, 15 minutes or so); the interrupted business is resumed after the recess.
9. CLOSE THE MEETING. Move to ADJOURN. Adjourn is in order even when business is pending and if adopted closes the meeting immediately. (Any pending business is lost, by the way.)
10. NEED TO KNOW SOMETHING more about the pending motion? Use the device POINT OF INFORMATION. For example, "Mr. President, Point of Information. How much did we give last year?"

As noted, there are MORE Motions, but you will probably rarely, if ever, deal with them in your crew meetings. Refer to the materials available on motions to familiarize yourselves with them just in case.