



PLANNING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

Ray Burniston writes about the Committee meeting

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Great care should be taken in planning your Agenda and other items for your committee meeting. These days many clubs have reduced the number of meetings from the monthly to perhaps bi-monthly or in some cases quarterly. In many clubs the meeting will be held on a set day such as the first Monday, monthly, bi-monthly or otherwise.

Time of meeting is important, try to avoid meetings starting late in the evening such as 7.30 onwards. This will invariably lead to long drawn out meetings ending late at night which in turn lead to bad decisions being made. The best time to start a meeting is around 6.00 pm, and some clubs will follow this with an evening meal for the committee at 8.00 pm. Therefore great care must be exercised to see that vital reports and decisions are taken so that undue delay can be avoided. Although much of my article is directed at the private members club, the secretary at a proprietary club will in some cases need to carry out much of the preparation when presenting to the owners or board of directors. Starting at a new club it is good policy to read through the previous minutes for the past two years to get the feel of the club.

The Agenda

Avoid the simple matter of having a set agenda for each meeting. It may well be that you need to discuss and have reports for items such as finance and golf course, but far better to produce your own version with additions as they may be required. If for instance you have a sub-committee that has not met in the period between meetings then there is little point in having an item on the agenda which can often lead to time wasting. Occasionally there will be items occurring which need to be discussed and decisions made. Include these as necessary along with the relevant documentation. If possible have folders made with the club logo on and place everything in these for each committee member. Generally you should talk to the chairman prior to finalizing the agenda to determine any points that may need clarification.

Communication

Much of the preparation will be wasted if you do not make sure that members receive their agenda with reports and other documentation in good time prior to the meeting. Try to allow at least seven clear days' notice. Even with adequate notice you will get someone who will have not made any effort to prepare for the meeting, but if the majority have this should not affect the situation. There are several methods you can use these days to impart information effectively. If all your committee have e-mail then this is probably the quickest and best method to use. Unfortunately some persons have e-mail but rarely look to see if they have any correspondence.

You must make sure they are aware that you are using this method and check each meeting the degree of success.

If you send by mail always use first class and if you want to give them seven clear days allow at least three working days for delivery. Always avoid leaving the mail in the club house for collection by individual members as this rarely works and some will collect it prior to the meeting. There is also the danger that a member may open confidential letters in the bar either discuss the contents with non committee members or worst leave it behind.

If it is the first meeting of a new committee with several new faces then depending on club policy, copies of previous minutes for the past year are useful to familiarize the new members. If you have standing rules for the committee then make sure a copy is sent to each new member. These rules generally set out the way the meeting is conducted and any rules for committee procedure agreed at previous meetings.

Minutes

Minutes of the previous meeting should have been written and sent out as soon after the meeting as possible. Some chairman like to see them before they are circulated, if possible avoid this because they are draft minutes and are not official until approved. In some cases in which there has been a difficult meeting then it will be commonsense to at least discuss with the chairman any wording of these salient points.

Before you send the agenda for the next meeting it is good practice to carefully go through the draft minutes of the previous meeting and see that necessary action has been taken. In cases in which for various reasons nothing has happened these should be included either under Matters Arising or as a separate item on the agenda. It is important that both of you are agreed on any controversial matters and sing from the same song sheet. Remember you should have good notes of the meeting and will be the best person to advise the chairman. Some secretaries tape record their meetings which has the point if there is a dispute about what was said or passed you should have the details available. If you follow this method make sure the system is working throughout the meeting or you could be left with few notes to write the minutes. If your assistant takes the minutes then make sure they are fully briefed before the meeting and you should both agree the wording of the minutes before circulation.

Preparation before the Meeting - The Secretary

Good advance planning is essential to a well run meeting. Time taken before hand will always pay off and you should ensure that you have all the facts at your fingertips. If you put your documents in the order of the agenda for the meeting then this should ensure a smooth meeting.

Always have a copy of the club rules with you so that any points concerning a certain rule(s) can be dealt with. Always have copies of reports being given by sub-committee chairmen, cases have often occurred when they arrive at the meeting having left the relevant papers at home or in their office.

You need to brief the chairman thoroughly before each meeting. In many cases he will arrive about an hour before the meeting and go through the agenda with you. It is your job to see that he is made aware of any contentious items that may be brought up. You can never allow for every eventuality but a good secretary will have their ear to the ground and be aware of any areas of discontent within the club.

The Meeting

Generally the meeting will be held at the club in the appropriate room and it is essential to make sure sufficient tables and chairs are in place. Water and glasses should be available and it is best to ban alcohol until after the meeting because if quantities are consumed at the meeting members invariably become argumentative and this leads to a long drawn out meeting.

If it is the first meeting of a new committee following the AGM then some form of place name or badge can be useful especially for the chairman so that he can easily identify new members. Some clubs have set places for each member with a printed name plate and the office of each person.

Conclusion

Many of the items mentioned would seem superfluous but not spending sufficient time planning a meeting is a recipe for failure.

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