

# THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON

## WHO IS THE CHAIRPERSON?

The Chairman is a leader, who has a clear direction for the group, has vision, and can “take the committee along the pathway to success.” The primary role is to listen to the consumers of the service, maximise the skills of the committee, delegate the tasks according to their skills, and to ensure responsibility for the goals.

## DETERMINE “WHY ARE WE HERE?”

Meetings are to share information, make decisions allocate tasks, develop policies, strategies and plans. It is easy to assume you know what needs to be achieved, and fire ahead without the necessary consultation. Many chairman dominate rather than facilitate and the “I know best” philosophy alienates members.

- The Chairman must have a sound knowledge of the organisation, their goals and direction.
- The chairman must have an understanding of the rules/constitution, and be able to refer to these at any time during a meeting.
- The Chairman must have some understanding of the rules for running a meeting. Be aware of cultural needs of the committee and group.

Meetings are often a huge waste of time. Take a hard look at the number of meetings held, the meeting time, and the reason. A meeting must have a purpose and an outcome. Each meeting must be planned and the planning may take more time than the meeting, but will enhance the group image greatly.

- Have a clear picture of the desired outcome.
- Have a clear agenda that can be dealt with in the time allowed.
- Be prepared for other points of view, and lively debate.
- Be a good loser, you will not win each round, but that is democracy.
- Establish a good working relationship with your secretary, who will have all the papers, minutes, and other relevant items. You both need to be involved in the planning of the meeting, so every aspect is fully covered.

## **HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THE MEETING**

- Be prepared to start on time. When late comers realise that you will start promptly, they will either come punctually, or join a group that is less professional.
- Aim to finish on time, the committee have other things to do, too.
- Guide the committee through the discussions, listen carefully, allow everyone a chance to contribute, and avoid any one person overpowering.
- Sum up from time to time, clarify a point, and gauge when it is time to wrap up a debate, and get consensus. Liaise with the secretary to ensure that the wording of the minute is accurate and understandable.
- Where action is required, set the action points, “by whom, by when”. Make sure the action point is understood and agreed upon.
- At the end of the meeting most should feel that they were glad they attended, and will co-operate, and be at the next meeting prepared for more.

## **INFORMAL MEETINGS**

These may be held from time to time, as well as the regular meeting. Brainstorming or general discussion may be in an informal place, and be less serious. This is a good way to look into the future, decide where you are heading, and may involve the consumers of your service. As the regular chairperson, you may feel that to be more involved in the discussion, a facilitator should run the meeting, good planning for these meetings is equally important.

It is important to keep focused on the reason for the meeting, and make this known to those attending. This way you will be less likely to stray from the point. A lot of ideas are shared during and after the meeting, therefore it may be a good idea to have a follow up meeting soon after, when everyone has had time to formulate their thoughts.

## **A SIMPLE GUIDE TO CONDUCTING A MEETING**

- Declare the meeting open and welcome everyone
- Check there is quorum (refer to your rules)
- Make sure everyone has a copy of the agenda
- Ask for apologies and the secretary should note these and list attendees.
- Secretary reads minutes of last meeting, if these have been circulated prior to meeting
- With the Approval of the committee sign the minutes as true and correct record of that meeting

- Matters arising from the minutes. Discuss only those which do not appear on the agenda as specific topics
- Correspondence. Secretary reads relevant correspondence, and discussion and decisions can be made as you go. The file of mail should be available for the committee to peruse
- Financial reports. Call on the Treasurer to present the accounts, and to answer questions. Accounts to be “received”, and accounts for payments approved
- Other reports, to be read or tabled, discussed and approved
- Other business, these are items that are brought up for the first time, or a matter that has been previously discussed. If you consider that (a) there is insufficient time or (2) insufficient information, suggest that the item be placed on the agenda and that particular details become action points, for the next meeting.

As Chairperson, you have the control, and are expected to finish the meeting on time.

## **CLOSE MEETING**

Thank the committee for attending, advise them the date and time of the next meeting and declare the meeting closed.

## **TEAM BUILDING**

An important aspect of a Chairpersons role is team building and therefore he/she needs to be aware of both *task* and *process*. Every group has a reason for being together, sometimes it is as straight forward as its members enjoying themselves! Whatever it is, the group’s reason for being together is called the *task*.

A successful group needs not only to work towards its long-term aims, but also to take care of the feelings and relationships between individual members. In other words, both the task and the process need attention.

We think of the task as the head work, and the process as the heart work. Both will suffer if they are split from one another. Experience shows that groups often neglect their process, especially if their task is complicated and demanding. An important part of Chairmanship or facilitation, in any sort of group, is getting members to work on the process as well as the task and maintaining a balance.

Some useful questions to keep constantly in mind about the group process are:

- When personal feelings affect the way the group works together, are we prepared to recognise and deal openly with them?
- Are we prepared to express disagreements and conflict openly, so they can be used constructively?
- Do we have the skills we need to do these things and if, not, do we know where to find out about them?

- How much support and encouragement do we give to one another in the group?

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Being the leader doesn't make you one! Effective leaders are task specialists and people specialists. They can fit the people to the task. A good leader chooses not to use power, but instead uses strategies instead to build a team.
- Both process and content are equally important and must be managed carefully. The ideal meeting is one that balances process with content.
- Have fun!! Encourage enjoyment and laughter.
- Be a facilitator not a dominator.
- Don't interpret silence as agreement - check it out.
- The most articulate speaker does not always have all the answers.
- It is important not to make heavy weather of meeting framework.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

Chairing Meetings - John Milligan

How to run committees and Meetings - Michael Locke

Working in Groups - Community Resource (see below)

Guide for Committees - Community Resource (see below)

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**If you would like a list of our other community resources, or to be put on our mailing list, contact us at:**



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