

Canadian Square & Round Dance Society - Director's Manual

INFORMATION

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SO YOU'VE BEEN ELECTED TO A COMMITTEE!

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WHY HAVE COMMITTEES? *

Many dancers who are elected (or railroaded) to committees may not have served previously on committees and may wonder how they operate or how they themselves should act.

This series may make life easier by describing some of the workings of good and bad committees; and why people want to work on them or don't want to work on them. From the knowledge of how people and groups act, certain procedures and rules have been adopted in order to make things run more smoothly and not waste time at meetings. After all, time spent at meetings doesn't produce anything directly and we want to dance!! Let's keep the meetings as short as possible. In a later issue we'll talk about those rules.

Still later in the series, we will discuss some of the problems we run into in groups. Why people can't seem to get along, how others can also use group activities to satisfy an ego need (nothing wrong with that), and why disagreement in a group is healthy.

Why do we have committees? We all know of clubs that are run well by callers (bless them), and others also run well by committees, the executive run clubs.

Most committees operate on the basis that two heads are better than one. Others will have ideas we didn't think about. But we can also have individuals who may be smarter than anyone in the group, and can therefore make better decisions. What we're saying is that sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

In general groups do better than individuals due to discussion and sharing of ideas, but it takes much longer.

Another advantage of committees is the enthusiasm that is developed in the members when they have contributed to ideas. Large functions seem to be more successful when a group has decided on the details, rather than an individual. The reason is that having invested some time and effort in the project, the committee members feel that they are part of it, and therefore more committed to the program's success. They then make it work.

All of this, however, takes time. If we have to make a quick decision and haven't time to talk about it, then an individual decision may be our only choice. We also have to use individuals when the group does not have the expertise to make decisions. This is the reason why brand new clubs are typically caller/cuer run. The caller/cuer is usually the only one with any background knowledge of the square or round dance movement.

* CDN Apr. '84

AGENDAS*

In order not to waste time at meetings, some organization is necessary. An agenda, produced in advance, will keep the proceedings in smooth running order. It is normally prepared by the chairman.

An agenda can save start up time if the members know what to expect at the meeting. There is a danger, however, of having too much information in advance. The object of all meetings is to bring together the ideas of many people, and to accept the best. Members must be prepared to listen to others. If we provide complete information in advance, some members may spend considerable time developing their own ideas without listening to others, and convince themselves that they have the correct answers. With so much effort previously expended, that person will not give in easily to other suggested ideas, and will probably defend their ideas vigorously. Can't blame them! Chaos results when all members thoroughly study the subject and come to their own different conclusions. This is a case where doing your homework doesn't pay.

Agendas should just provide enough information to introduce a subject, but not enough to come to a conclusion in advance.

We should also be aware that this same technique of doing homework or being prepared can be used by some individuals in order to sell a pet project. By summarizing in advance all the reasons for and against a particular stand, the aggressive individual will be ready for all arguments and may win over the group. If the members recognize what's happening they need not accept an aggressive person's ideas. Of course, the aggressor may be right and just be enthusiastic about it. Careful, honest listening to all ideas is part of the game in good committees.

Another method of saving time in committees is to have an agenda which follows a standard set of general headings. Some of these are omitted in smaller committees, but in general they look something like this:

- Chairman's Remarks
- Reading of Minutes
- Business Arising from the Minutes
- Old Business
- Reports
- Correspondence
- New Business
- Adjournment

The chairman's remarks brings everyone up to date on important happenings since the last meeting. The reading of the minutes also brings everyone up to date and serves to review what happened previously.

Business arising from the minutes and old business are really the same thing as all old business should have been discussed and recorded in the minutes of the previous meeting. This is another reason to follow a set routine; minor items seem to get lost if a meeting is too informal.

There is some overlap between old and new business. Reports and correspondence may be a result of old business or may lead to new business. When all the new business has been taken care of, the meeting may adjourn.

* CDN July '84

THE CHAIRMAN*

The chairman, (or chairperson if you wish), is often regarded as the absolute leader in a group. When something goes wrong, we tend to blame the chairman for the actions of the group. Committees are formed in order to get the best ideas from all members. The chairman only makes routine decisions on his (or her) own.

The chairman is only a policeman who makes sure the committee follows the agenda, that the subject matter is on course or relevant, and suggests coming to a conclusion when all opinions are in. Contrary to what many chairmen do, they should not participate in discussions. In order to arbitrate minor differences between members, the chairman must try to stay neutral. Robert's Rules suggests that the chairman step down and allow someone else to take over the chair when he feels strongly enough about a subject to get involved.

After discussion, the chairman only attempts to clarify the problem at hand, making sure that all the facts have been considered on both sides, and then supervises the vote or agreement on consensus. A consensus does not mean that everyone agrees with the solution, but that all have been given a fair say and the dissenters can live with the solution.

In order to be fair, the chairman also must control the people in the group. Each member must be given the opportunity to voice his opinion, and be cut off politely if aggressive or repetitious. The self appointed expert, who is not contributing but merely showing off, must be cautioned by the chairman. Some members use committees to satisfy an ego need. Nothing wrong with satisfying an ego need; we all have some; but a meeting is not the time.

He must also control socializing or joke telling. A little of this may be necessary in order to release tensions in a strained situation, but too much can waste time.

At some point in time the chairman must sense when a group is ready to stop talking and take action. A vote taken too soon will lead to resentment because some members will feel that they have not been able to voice an opinion. A vote taken too late is a waste of time and will be boring to some. This is a careful balancing act that takes practice.

The chairman's task may be made easier if others in the group are also adept at summarizing, or smoothing over deep disagreements. When these individuals are recognized, asking them for opinions will give the chairman support in achieving his aim of a smooth meeting.

The chairman may have to remind members that disagreement is healthy. If we had no disagreements, we wouldn't need a meeting! Disagreements should be viewed as an effort to find the best possible solution by tapping the knowledge of all members present. Disagreements, therefore, should not be taken personally. Members who understand this, may be vigorous in their arguments, and afterwards chat over coffee, both with a feeling that they have hammered out the best solution for the group.

* CDN Oct. '84

ROBERT'S RULES*

Robert's Rules are used to save time at meetings by formalizing some of the procedures. They also ensure fair discussions by allowing everyone a chance to contribute.

For Round and Square Dance committees, only a little formality is needed. The chairman ensures that these simple rules are followed, but even he/she can be overruled by the group.

The main rules are:

(1) Motions may not be discussed until they have been seconded. If no seconder speaks up the motion dies. We've saved a lot of useless talk!

(2) Speakers to a motion cannot be interrupted, but once having spoken may not speak again until all others have had an opportunity to speak. An exception is when a previous speaker is required to answer a query, or if permitted by local custom in a small committee.

(3) Amendments to motions must have a direct bearing on the original motion, and not include a new subject areas. Sneaking in little pet ideas might work if everyone is in

favour of the main subject. The chairman has to be alert to deal with these techniques. After moving and seconding, the amendment is voted on before the main motion.

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(4) Only one amendment to an amendment may be made. This second stage amendment cannot be further amended. If it still requires to be changed, it's probably easier to withdraw the motion and start again with a brand new motion.

(5) We can also change our minds after a motion is passed, if we find some new information that alters the situation. Someone can move to reconsider the motion. In order to have some stability, some rules about reconsideration are necessary. Moving a motion to reconsider can only be proposed by a member that voted with the majority on the original motion. This is true whether the original motion was passed or defeated. Reconsideration of a motion can only be dealt with if the motion to reconsider is passed with a 2/3 majority. In addition, the chairman must rule a motion to reconsider out of order, if action has commenced to carry out the requirements of the original motion. Reconsideration does not cancel the motion but moves debate back to the point just before the vote.

(6) A motion to table a motion means putting it aside for the time being. Tabling of a motion is not debatable. The chairman asks immediately for a vote. Reactivation requires a motion to "take up from the table".

(7) A motion to refer a motion to a sub-committee has the same effect as tabling, except that it may be discussed as soon as the sub-committee is ready to report their findings.

(8) A new motion cannot be introduced until the present motion under discussion is either passed, tabled or defeated.

(9) A question of "privilege" can be brought up at any time. This may refer to a violation of Robert's Rules or procedures, or the discussion of irrelevant subjects not likely to affect the present motion being discussed. The chairman will rule on the objection. If someone objects to the chairman's ruling, it is put immediately to a vote. It is not debatable. A question of privilege can interrupt a speaker.

(10) After the chairman has assured himself that there is no further required discussion, (perhaps when members start to repeat their arguments), he should ask if the members are "ready for the question?". Then he asks "all in favour?", "all opposed?", "abstentions?". In the event of a tie, the chairman votes.

(11) A member may request a secret ballot and this is used when approved by the majority.

(12) Voting can be held by a secret ballot or a show of hands or each individual polled for "aye" or "nay". The chairman does not vote unless his vote may change the result.

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(13) Amending the constitution or the bylaws typically requires a 2/3 majority vote and a previous notice of intention to propose such an amendment. It follows then, that motions to temporarily suspend portions of the constitution or bylaws, would also require a 2/3 majority vote and previous notice. Usually these procedures are spelled out in the constitution.

(14) A motion to adjourn is not debatable.

* CDN Jan. '85

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS*

Why do people volunteer? They either want to help because they like to do things for others, or they like being at the centre of things; they may feel proud that they have some qualities that enable them to do some particular types of work well. We All have a little EGO need.

To get someone to volunteer, one has to pay attention to these needs. But people have hang-ups which make them not want to volunteer. "Fear of the unknown" is one of the biggest reasons people won't volunteer for committees. They fear they'll mess up publicly, so it's easier to just stay out of it. In addition they "haven't got the time", because of other interests.

People are more inclined to volunteer if they can see a limit to what they have to do. Tasks must be small enough so that they look like they won't take much time or effort. This will make them simple and easy to understand, thus removing the fear of the unknown. Later on, they may develop the job into something bigger, but for a start, the job must look as if it's easily achievable. Breaking up a lot of jobs into small tasks will take some effort on the part of the recruiter, but many hands make light work.

Volunteers are almost never successfully obtained by publicly announcing that "volunteers are required for such-and-such". When no-one comes forward, we should not be surprised. A person has to feel wanted, and if no-one has approached the volunteer personally, little response can be expected. Volunteers do not respond to public calls because they may feel a little guilty putting themselves in the spotlight. We find a parallel

situation in recruiting new dancers. Most of them need to be personally persuaded to join, not just asked through public advertisements.

In recruiting volunteers, salesmanship is needed, or even a little bit of the con artist. The potential volunteer must be told how valuable his/her services will be. One can also mention names of other people who think that this person is the best for the job. (Only, of course, if the others have actually said so.) Peer pressure works, but the worst case is the

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so-called rail-roading of volunteers. By publically nominating a person without their previous knowledge, a pressure is felt by the "encouragement" of the large group. Such a volunteer is hardly likely to do a good job, having been forced into the position. How much better it would be, if the "volunteer" has agreed in advance to let his/her name stand.

After we have broken the task into small jobs, and persuaded someone to volunteer, we tend to forget about that someone, or just make contact to complain. Volunteers need to be told frequently how well they are doing. Let's keep the criticism down to a minimum; only pick on those items that are really serious. The little problems will sort themselves out. Most volunteers want to do a good job, but because they are new at it, they'll make mistakes in the process of learning. (If you think you can do better, why didn't you volunteer for the job?)

Finally, when their term is up, or even along the way, show some recognition. To say "Thanks" doesn't take much effort, but a token piece of paper, small memento, or other form of recognition is much appreciated. The "thanks" should be given by a status person and be presented publicly. Public recognition may make it easier to get volunteers in the future.

* CDN April '85

BEHAVIOUR IN COMMITTEES*

People are all different. A lot of us try to get along with other people and maintain a nice friendly atmosphere. One of the reasons we get together in groups is to get other people's opinions and put the best of these together. One might expect then, that we will not always agree with other ideas. If we think that disagreement is bad, we may do things just to keep the peace, like agreeing when we don't really agree. When everybody in the group does this it's called "group think"; and it doesn't produce good results. It might be better if we decided to say so when we disagree, but then this might upset others.

Groups might operate better if they realize that the provision of opposition to ideas is essential to healthy decisions in groups. Our parliamentary systems have an "Official Opposition", for the express purpose of providing conflict. The reason, of course, is to force

those in power to justify their ideas and prove that they are sound. Experience has shown that opposition is healthy, when it's usefulness is recognized.

If all members of a committee agree in advance that full and open discussions are expected and welcomed, then no personal ill feelings will result.

Another advantage that results when all members feel free to express their opinions, is better control of aggressive members, who may be pushing ideas down the throats of

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others, capitalizing on the fact that most people don't provide opposition in order to keep the peace. When members readily discuss all aspects of an idea, this problem becomes much smaller.

Another problem in groups is noise. Noise consists of anything that interferes with the smooth running of the committee. It could be the private conversations while someone else is speaking. This problem is usually solved by the chairman directing members to "Address the chair" rather than another member, or "let's get back to the subject". Noise is also the telling of anecdotes or stories, which may use up a lot of time, and only serve to satisfy an ego need. Of course, the chairman may decide to let the story telling go on, in order to break up tension in heated arguments. Some members, and perhaps all, at some time, will not accept healthy conflict for it's worth in creating the best results.

The acceptance of constructive criticism is best measured when the members, while they may not agree with the decision, will be able to live with it, because they honestly believe that the subject has been thoroughly discussed and each person has had an opportunity to put forward his or her points. This is known as a consensus of opinion. Groups that reach conclusions in this type of friendly atmosphere, will be committed to supporting the decision

There are also disadvantages to some types of conflict. A member may create conflict by trying to solve all the problems that the committee is trying to address before he gets to the meeting. Although this will create some desired conflict, this member has devoted a great deal of time and effort and is not likely to give in easily. In fact, he will not likely even listen to other ideas. Eventually, after listening politely to what we might call the deviant, the group will attempt to talk him into agreeing for the sake of the group, and if this doesn't work they are likely to cut him off from the group. Ignoring the deviant solves their problem of getting the job done but creates bitter feelings within the group.

The deviant need not be an individual. Little sub-groups can form and create the same problems. These sub-groups also decide ahead of time to support each other and can sell their own ideas through mutual support. This can be counteracted by other alert members, but behind the scenes connivance does not produce the best ideas of the group, but only ill feelings. Manipulation of the committee can also be prevented by an astute chairman, who ensures that all members get a fair hearing.

Other causes of unwanted conflict are created by a natural resistance to change which we all have. Possibly this is due to a fear of the unknown, and the satisfaction of a security need. A "don't rock the boat" attitude stifles progress but is very comfortable. The resistance is not due to disagreement with the proposals but disagreement with change itself. People who are not risk takers (most of us) tend to be comfortable with the status quo.

* CDN July '85

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SIZE AND STRUCTURE OF COMMITTEES*

Size affects the way a committee works. If it is too small we may not have the expertise available to solve a problem and the majority becomes too powerful; if it is too large, too much time is taken up making sure all members have a chance to speak. In addition, a very large committee of necessity has to have a lot of formal rules, which also take a lot of time.

A small group of two or three is useful for small working committees, like decorating or food, where most of the decisions are routine. One person must be responsible for getting the job done and should be recognized as the leader. This is the most efficient system for routine tasks. Responsibility cannot be given only to a group, no matter what the size. Some individuals must be committed to the cause.

Groups of four, due to the even number of members, frequently become deadlocked and should be avoided.

Groups of five are probably the most efficient, provided we can find enough fair representation or expertise within those five. As we make the group larger, the procedures become more complex. Just look at how complex the procedures in parliament have become.

The structure-of groups develop in roughly four stages:

- (1) The orientation stage is the initial organizing when we decide on the size of the group, where we are going or what we are trying to accomplish, and who the initial members should be. Here we should look at resources and not necessarily friends or people who may be very agreeable to our pet ideas.
- (2) The formation stage occurs when members jockey for the various roles or positions in the group. Much conflict is experienced as people try to establish themselves as coordinators, summarizes-s, jokers, idea initiators or devil's advocates.
- (3) The coordination stage occurs when the roles have become acceptable to most, and an open exchange of ideas takes place. This is the stage which most committees reach

and remain in for a long time. In fact many committees never get beyond this stage. Many families, (another group) consider themselves a success if they have open discussions, but at the same time never completely trust each other (generation gaps).

(4) The performing or ideal stage is reached when complete trust is achieved and each member can be relied upon to support both the group and all other members. This stage is reached in some cults or groups with extremely strong family ties. It can also exist in some

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more formal groups, such as clubs or business syndicates. Unfortunately, one of the side effects is that strong support of one's own group is frequently at the expense of others outside the group. This is not a desirable feature for square and round dance clubs which should have a desire to welcome outsiders into their group.

Structure of a group will also include certain norms of behavior within the group. New members will have to learn what is acceptable in order to be accepted as a member. The further along the stages of group development, the stronger will be the group's norms.

One of the problems faced by group chairpersons, is the recognition of the stage of group development. The chairperson will then be on the alert for aggressive individuals who may force their own ideals as the permanent norms of the group. For committees in the later stages of development, the chairperson can assist to make the newcomer more welcome by tactfully suggesting the established norms of the group.

* CDN Oct. '85

SUMMARY*

Committees are used as a source of many ideas and not just to get the approval of the group. But meetings take time and should not be held just because one is scheduled. If no real pressing problems exist, cancel it!

Problems can arise in committees when too much information is given out ahead of time. Members tend to make up their minds ahead of time and then dig in their heels until a heated discussion results. The solution to this potential problem is to only give out enough information to stimulate thought, but not enough to enable people to make up their minds.

Chairmen do not normally take part in debates, except in very small committees. The chairman's job is to control the proceedings so that time is not wasted. The control of noise and determining just when to bring the group to a decision are the normal tasks of a chairman. This should be just before the members begin to repeat themselves, a nice trick if you're a good chairman. Following an agenda and being guided by Robert's Rules makes for better organization at a meeting. Over enthusiastic members sometimes have to be controlled by the chairman in order to make sure that pet ideas are not put through that the group does not really want. A really good idea, however, is easier to sell if it has at least one other supporter.

Volunteers can most easily be encouraged to come forward by personal contact. We must also make sure that the task is clear and small in scope. If it looks like a lot of effort, better that we split it up between more people, and make it more digestible. A little praise doesn't cost much, and can produce wonderful results.

Small committees can be fairly informal and are able to get things done quickly. Very large committees, while very democratic, take a lot of time and require much more formal rules. For committees spread across the country, committees should be very small, and even then a good number of decisions will have to be made without consulting others.

Committees can work efficiently, and are useful in order to get many ideas and commitment from people. We just need to learn from the experience of others. Committees have been operating since the beginning of time. There must be something useful in them!

* CDN Jan. '86

BIOGRAPHY

Ron and Dot have been active in square dancing since 1975 and have served continuously on one or more committee since the day of graduation.

Ron's Committee experience since 1942 outside of Square and Round Dancing includes membership on 17 committees and chairman of 10 others including chairman of the Department of Management, Saint Mary's University.

Ron and Dot have served on square and round dance committees as follows:

Director on Board Convention 82

Chairman Registration Committee Convention 82

Secretary Fun Time Rounds

Secretary, Vice Chairman and Chairman Metro Square And Round Dance Assoc.

N. S. Delegate and Chairman Convention Co-ordinating Committee, CSRDS

Vice President and President Starduster's Square Dance Club

Chairman Finance Committee - Square and Round Dance Federation of Nova Scotia

Acting Chairperson Convention 94.

Dot has served on Scouting Committees for 35 years and edits all Ron's Writings.

This material is on file in the Computer of:
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