

## THE ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

The major role of the President is to 'lead' the team.  
Being the leader doesn't make you one!

Effective leaders are:

- Task specialists and;
- People specialists.
- They can fit people to the task.
- A good leader chooses not to use power, but instead uses strategies to build a team.

To 'lead' is not the same as 'telling', 'bossing' or squashing any opposition or different ideas/ways of thinking etc. It is to:

- Encourage – participation, growth of committee members, respect and thoughtfulness, fun and laughter.
- Monitor what is being done by the organization – have a good overview – review the many publications available – e.g. Community Resource Organizations.
- Evaluate any programmes/projects that are underway – refer to the many publications on this – as above.
- Delegate – some people in the organization have better skills than you in certain areas – give them the jobs (more about that later).
- Be a facilitator – not a dominator.
- Plan for change, development of members and the organization.
- Keep a clear view of the organization in mind – use flow charts, mind maps etc.
- Liaise with all the necessary people – e.g. Principal, teachers, Board of Trustees, other parents who are not on the PTA Committee – always have two of you at any meeting – this enables records to be kept and two people to listen to what is really being said.

### Team Building

An important aspect of a President's role is team building and there they need to be aware of both **task** and **process**. Every group has a reason for being together – this 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. This is the **process**. 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 role of the President is getting members to work on the process as well as the task and maintain a balance.

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

- When personal feeling affect the way the group works together, are we prepared to recognize 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 – everyone, not just our particular friends?

## **Delegation**

No President can be expected to do everything – this is why it is so important to develop good processes so that your committee can work as a team and everyone can help shoulder the burden of being a good strong, worthwhile, effective committee. To get the work done, an effective President will **delegate**. To delegate is not to ‘pass the buck’ nor to ‘wash your hands’ of that topic.

An effective President finds the:

- ‘Right’ people to do the job and;
- Makes sure the tasks are well defined.
- Gives the support to the people so delegated and follows up on progress.
- Lets them get on with the job as defined.
- The delegated people report to the committee as required.

## **MEETINGS**

If the role of the President in your organization is one who also chairs the meetings, the following are a few suggestions. However, it is a good idea to let others have a chance at leading the meetings too – especially the Vice President/s – but also if there is a special project to be put to the committee, it is often good to let the person presenting it to chair that part of the meeting.

### **Characteristics of an effective President/Chairman/Meeting Facilitator**

- Has the confidence of the group within which they are working and is aware of the different cultures within their community and protocols of those cultures.
- Understands the group’s strengths and weaknesses – works to utilize the former and reduce the effects of the latter. They build up the skills of the group.
- Presents a neutral position on the issues being discussed – does not dominate proceedings. There will be times however when the President does contribute to the content – it sometimes can move the group along. Will sometimes need to summarize the discussion so far.
- Deals with how things are done (the process), rather than with what is done (the content).
- Values as relevant, everything that happens and everyone at the meeting.
- Enables everyone to have the opportunity to express their views and be valued for that view.

- Keeps the purpose of the meeting and the agenda always in mind and prevents the meeting from being sidetracked.
- Is comfortable with conflict and conflict resolution.
- Is enthusiastic, can stimulate discussion and can laugh at themselves and with others.
- Supports, guides and informs members and involves them in decision making.
- Gets the job done on time and acts on decisions that have been made.

## **Communication Skills**

Presidents are super-communicators who use skills such as:

- Listening – and being aware of personal listening faults such as ‘self-listening’ (planning what they are going to say instead of listening to what is being said).
- The ability to speak openly – e.g. to be able to say “I don’t know”.
- Problem solving – defining the problem is the beginning of solution.
- Summarising – the discussion so far, points of view etc.
- Negotiating – finding the ‘common ground’.
- Using humour – especially when things are getting tense.
- Using silence – allowing for reflection and learning.
- Reviewing – offering a final overview of what has been said and decided.
- Giving and receiving constructive feedback in a non-threatening manner.
- Seeking agreement – don’t take silence as agreement – check it out.

## **Effective Meetings**

Regular, effective, face-to-face communications are essential for building and maintaining successful PTAs. Meetings may be held informally or they can be run according to a set of formal rules. Each has its merits. The influence of the person chairing the meeting makes a big difference – well run meetings produce results.

The Chairperson is the most important person at the meeting. They will set the pace of the meeting, making sure that people stick to topics, ensure that democratic decisions are made and that everyone is on-board with those decisions.

A good chairperson is an active chairperson. They should introduce the topic clearly and guide the discussion – especially when people start repeating points. When a discussion throws up opposing views, the chairperson should also try to summarize the different positions and where possible, propose a way forward.

This way forward can involve taking a vote on an issue, having a further discussion at another date (to allow for more information to be gathered) or making a compromise that most people can agree with. The chairperson should ask for agreement from the meeting on the way forward.

## **Procedures and Important Skills**

There are a number of structures you can put in place to maintain your organization so it is efficient and achieves what it sets out to do.

All these emphasise the need for:

- A sound knowledge of the skills and responsibilities of the roles of the members of your organization.
- A full understanding of the rules/constitution and be able to refer to these at any time during a meeting.
- Mutual respect.
- Clearly defined goals and objectives.
- Clearly defined boundaries.
- Open and effective communication channels.

## **Characteristics of a group that is working well**

- Belonging and valuing. The group operates in a positive environment where everybody's contribution is valued.
- Being clear about the task. Consistent attention is given to planning, policies and procedures and roles, and it is clear what needs to be done, when and how.
- Listening, consulting and participation. Participation is a key characteristic of a well functioning group.
- Having clear decision-making structure. Appropriate ways of decision making are used.
- Being committed to conflict resolution.
- The most articulate speaker does not always have the answers

## **Before the Meeting**

Effective meetings are planned in advance. Successful meeting organizers make sure that:

- The reason for members meeting face to face is clear and objectives have been communicated.
- Members are advised of the meeting well in advance (as a general rule).
- Any reports and/or background papers or finance statements about which decisions need to be made are circulated before the meeting so they can be read and digested.
- Members have been reminded of any jobs that need to be completed by the time of the meeting.
- There is an agenda.

## **At the Meeting**

The President/Chairperson will:

- Make sure the meeting starts on time – set a time frame for the meeting and work to keep to it.
- Welcome members and organize any introductions.
- Read and call for apologies.
- Keep to the agenda.
- Use a range of tools or interventions to assist the group to complete its task – e.g. summarizing, clarifying, reflecting, suggesting options, seeking agreement, encouraging participation and solving conflicts.
- Avoid introducing their own opinion unless it is necessary.
- As part of the closure, ensure that it is clear what is to be done by whom and when.
- Thank everyone for attending and return the room to its prior condition.

## **After the Meeting**

- Action plans and follow-ups are confirmed.
- Minutes are checked by the chair and minute taker.
- The time frame for circulation of minutes, new reports, background papers and the next agenda is arranged.
- Minutes are circulated by the Secretary.

## **Ground Rules of the Organization**

Ground rules should be developed by the group. These rules should cover:

- Respect for other people – not interrupting, no long monologues, no personal abuse, allow time for everyone to express their views.
- Confidentiality – agreement on whether meeting content may be discussed outside the meeting.
- Responsibility – everybody agrees to take responsibility for time keeping, keeping to the agenda and voicing their opinions in the meeting rather than afterwards.
- Decision-making – how are decisions to be made – by consensus or voting? If consensus can't be achieved, at what point will an alternative decision-making method be used, and who will decide.

## **Meeting Techniques**

### **1. Information Gathering**

Rounds are a simple, but effective technique used to give everyone in the group the opportunity of giving their point of view. A round is where the chair asks the viewpoint on an issue of each person in turn. Group members have the right to pass in the round if they do not want to contribute at a particular point.

Rounds can also be used as a means of everyone introducing themselves to the group. Rounds can be used at any stage of a meeting – as an icebreaker, in the middle of a meeting to ensure everyone's views on a matter are being considered or at the end to leave people comfortable with the total process.

## 2. Brainstorming

The objective of a brainstorming session is to collect ideas from all participants without criticism or judgement. Rule for conducting brainstorms:

- Before a brainstorm, define the subject clearly.
- Allow a minute to think about it.
- Encourage everyone to contribute – don't hold back ideas even if they seem silly.
- No discussion during brainstorming (that will come later).
- No-one is allowed to criticise other people's views – verbally or non-verbally.
- Build on ideas generated by others in the group.
- Write all ideas on a white board or newsprint so that the whole group can easily link ideas.
- The Chairperson/president/facilitator should ensure that everyone observes the rules.

After brainstorming it is a good idea to:

- Encourage everyone to prioritize 3 – 5 items.
- If several groups are brainstorming simultaneously, put the lists on the wall and give time for participants to read other groups' ideas or get group feed back.
- Have each person identify the items they think could most easily be achieved.

## 3. Timelines

A timeline is valuable if your group is organizing a specific function or project with a deadline. Draw a line showing today's date at one end and the deadline date at the other. Break up the space with appropriate divisions – months, weeks or days – and mark when things need to be done so that they are completed at an appropriate time rather than the last minute. From the timeline, you can develop a task list noting who has taken responsibility for particular tasks.

### **How to Take Decisions in Meetings**

Decisions are usually reached through two main ways:

- Consensus – this means reaching decisions by discussion and general agreement.
- Voting – people vote for or against a particular proposal. Usually one person will put forward a motion, someone else will second it and then people will vote. If the majority of people accept the proposal, it becomes binding on the organization.

Voting can be done either by a show of hands or secret ballot:

- Show of hands – when there is a difference of opinion among members the president/chairperson/facilitator asks the members to raise their hands to show their support for or against a proposal. These votes are then counted – majority would then ensure that the proposal stands or falls.

- Secret Ballot – each person would be given a slip of paper where they would write whether they support a particular proposal/person for a position or not. The votes would be counted and the majority would ensure that the proposal stands or falls.

It is usually better to reach consensus than to vote.

Reaching consensus often means that there are compromises from everyone but it ensures that most people feel part of the decision. It also usually takes more time.

## **Meeting Procedures**

All members should know meeting procedures. There are a number of points that people use in meetings to ensure that they run smoothly. Often members use these points to assist the chair.

The following are procedural points most used in meetings:

### a) Point of Order.

It should be used when a member feels that the meeting procedure is not being followed and they want the meeting to return to the correct procedure or order. For example, when an individual is speaking totally off the point, another member might ask for a point of order for the speaker to stay on track.

### b) Point of Information.

A member may raise their hand and ask to make a point of information (or request information) when it is not their turn to speak. This can enable a member to speak to request more information on the matter or give information on a point being discussed.

### c) Out of Order.

When an individual is not sticking to meeting procedure, being rude, interjecting or misbehaving in some way, the chairperson might rule them out of order. The person affected must desist or they will be asked to leave the meeting.

### d) Quorum.

This is the minimum number of people who must be present for the meeting to conduct business and take decisions.

This minimum number should be stated in your constitution.

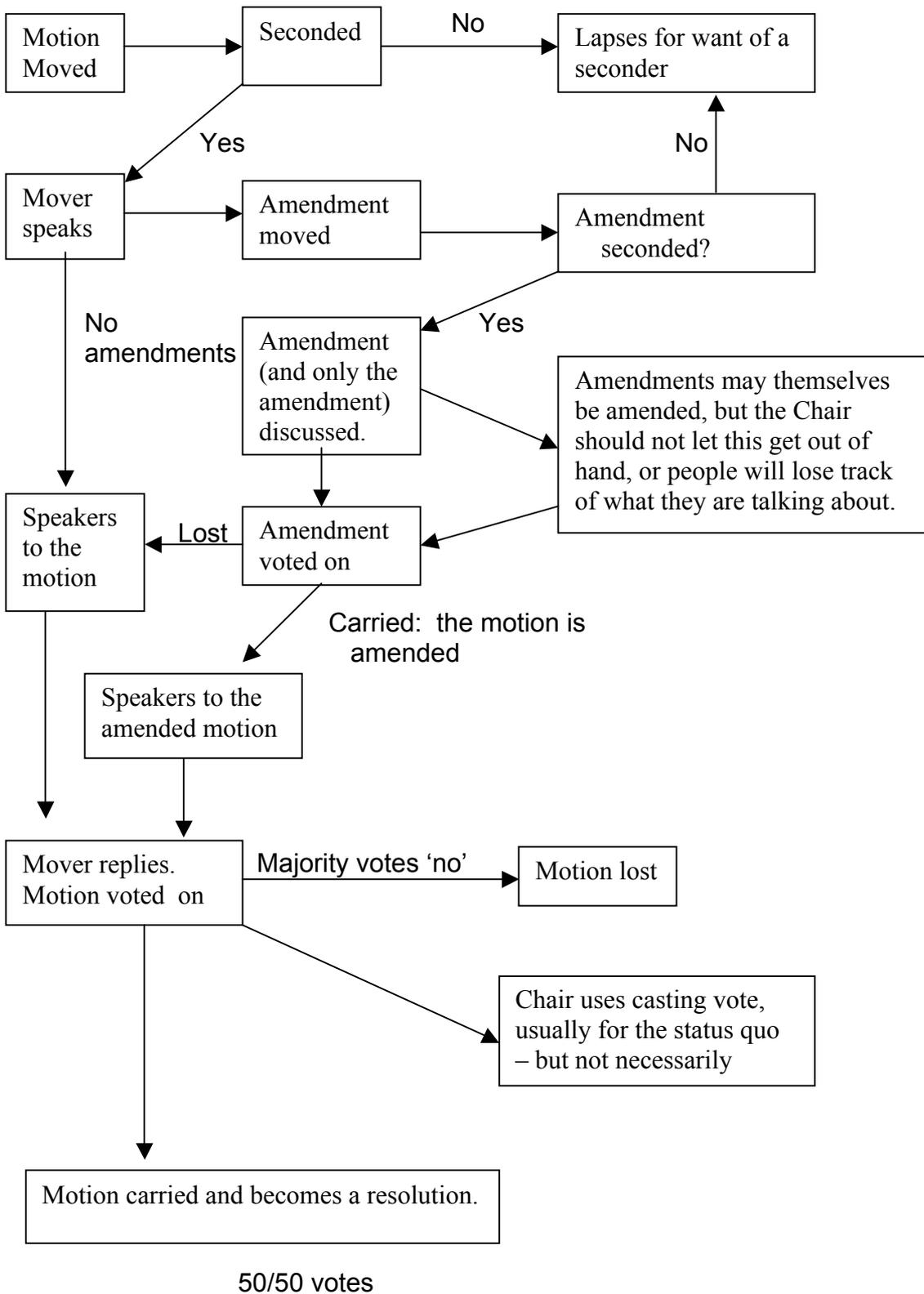
The meeting cannot start until there is a quorum. Always ensure that you have this minimum number of people at your meeting, especially when decisions must be taken. Decisions at meetings are only valid if a quorum is present. If someone leaves during the meeting and you lose your quorum, you should close the meeting.

### e) Motions.

A motion is a formal recommendation put by a member to a meeting for debate and consideration by saying “I move that ....” Each motion (except motions ‘from the Chair’) has to be supported (seconded) by another person before it is open for discussion. The chair then asks the proposer to speak to the motion. Other members can add to the discussion. Usually the chair will allow no more than 3 arguments for or against the motion before putting it to the vote.

A Motions and Amendments flow Chart follows.

Motions and Amendments Flowchart.



## **References and Further Reading**

### **'Role of a Chairperson', North Shore Community and Social Services Inc,**

P O Box 33-284,

Takapuna,

North Shore City.

Website: [www.nscss.org.nz](http://www.nscss.org.nz)

email: [info@nscss.org.nz](mailto:info@nscss.org.nz)

### **Community Development Resource Kit – [www.community.net.nz/how-toguides/crk/](http://www.community.net.nz/how-toguides/crk/)**

### **Managing Well – Resources for Community and Voluntary Organizations'**

Family and Community Services,

Ministry of Social Development

P O Box 12-136

Wellington

On-line – [www.community.net.nz/managingwell](http://www.community.net.nz/managingwell)

Email – [managingwell@community.net.nz](mailto:managingwell@community.net.nz)

**'Evaluating Your Organization and Notes for Individuals', North Shore Community and Social Services Inc – as above.**

**'Evaluating and Monitoring Projects that Already Exist', North Shore Community and Social Services Inc – as above.**