

Follow four fundamental guidelines for successful meetings



Gig Harbor, Washington City Council. ©Jurassic Parliament 2018.

Robert's Rules of Order includes **four fundamental guidelines** that will create successful meetings. They are easy to say but take some effort to apply, since prevailing culture is often very different. Run your meetings according to these guidelines so your meetings—and your organization—will flourish.

I. The person running the meeting is the servant of the group, and the group is the final authority.

We are so used to our work situation, where the “boss” is in charge of the “employees,” that we often bring the same habits of mind to meetings of nonprofit boards, city councils, and other volunteer organizations. But in a board of directors or a council, all the members have equal standing. They are peers, and **the leader is one among equals.**

The chair has special duties to RUN the meeting, but does not determine the OUTCOME of the meeting. It is the group that must decide what it wishes to do. It is the chair's duty to assist the group in this task. And the group has the ability to overturn a decision or ruling made by the chair. Read about Point of Order and Appeal [on our website](#) to learn how this is done.

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II. All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations. To ensure this, no one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.

Every member of a board has an equal right to speak. In practice, however, boards often discuss their affairs in conversational mode. And in conversations, dominant people tend to dominate, and agreeable people tend to let them.

This often leads to a few people dominating the discussion, which is not fair and can lead to poor outcomes. Your quiet, introverted members have important insights that need to be heard.

If you adopt and apply the rule that **no one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once**, you will find that your meetings take on an entirely different nature—for the better!

III. Courtesy and respect are required at all times.

In these difficult times, people can be loud, rude and disorderly at meetings. Your chair and your members must insist on **courtesy and respect at all times**. These are not frills, but vital to the democratic process. No personal remarks, no insulting language, no attacks, no interrupting, no sidebar conversations, no disrespectful body language. If this happens, gently but firmly put a stop to it. Read about inappropriate remarks on our website ([local government here](#) and [nonprofit boards here](#)).

IV. One thing at a time

When a group is discussing a certain item, it must stick with that item, or make a conscious decision to set it aside to deal with something else. **You can't slip from one topic to another**, but must be deliberate in how and when you address each issue. Create a thoughtful agenda, time each item, and follow the agenda with flexible care.

Try these four guidelines, which we explain in greater detail in our [book](#), and see what a difference they make to your meetings.

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