



Guidelines for better work meetings

A colleague asked for our best tips on leading meetings at work using Robert's Rules.

In general, Robert's Rules don't apply at work

Work is not a venue where Robert's Rules and parliamentary procedure apply. That system is designed for assemblies, where all members have equal rights, privileges and obligations. In the work setting, the boss is the final authority, not the workers. [Read more about this in our article, *The chair is not in charge of your meeting.*](#)

Some guidelines do apply

At the same time, some of the guidelines we promote do apply at work. They will help your work committee meetings be more effective. Here are some suggestions.

Develop a charter

The first step is to develop a committee charter. Make sure that everyone is clear on the goals of the committee, attendance expectation, member roles and so on. A manager may be participating in a group on the same footing as the other members, in which case it is important that they not try to dominate the meeting as a "boss."

Plan a smart agenda

Invest thought in preparing a powerful agenda. Consider the time of day, the length of the meeting, and what energy level people will bring to the meeting. We recommend indicating times for each agenda item. Read more in our article, [Agenda in Robert's Rules.](#)

Use reflection time during the meeting

One of the best ways to encourage deep thinking is to use reflection time during the meeting. Ask everyone to jot down their thoughts privately. Then capture each person's suggestion on a whiteboard or flipchart BEFORE talking about any of them. This excellent post from MRSC develops this thought: [Want Better Teamwork? Take More Breaks.](#)



The chair should “recognize” people before they speak

Although it can seem challenging to do, insisting that people seek recognition (raise their hand) before speaking will make the meeting flow better and gives everyone an equal chance.

No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once

Making sure that everyone has an equal chance promotes fair and democratic discussion.

Use the “round robin”

Using the “round robin” method gives everyone an equal chance to speak. You go around the table, calling on each person in turn. People may pass and speak at the end, if they wish. Read our article [Using the Round Robin Method for efficient board meetings](#) to learn more. If that idea appeals, please check out our article, [Make better decisions using the Exploratory Round Robin](#), for an even more structured approach that is very efficient.

One thing at a time

Running off topic is a hazard for any human gathering. As chair, you have a special responsibility to help people keep focused on the agenda and the specific topic under discussion.

Speak to issues, not to personalities

This formula from Robert’s Rules is obvious. Don’t allow personal comments, innuendo or insinuations at your meetings. Insist that everyone focus on the topics at hand.

Exercise “generous authority”

In running a meeting, the chair needs to be willing to assert their authority. We love Priya Parker’s phrase in her outstanding book, *The Art of Gathering*: You must exercise a “generous authority” in running the meeting, because if you don’t control the meeting, someone else will.

Keep an emotional connection

As a leader, you need to be tuned in to your own feelings and those of others, being able to recognize when people are fatigued, bored, or frightened by the topic at hand, and adjust your tactics accordingly.

A committee chair can take notes

For assemblies, you must have two people to run a meeting, the chair and the clerk or secretary. For committees, the chair can take the notes. It may be wise, however, to recruit someone else to do this if you are writing thoughts or conclusions on a whiteboard or flipchart.

Be sure to follow up

As chair, help the group to follow up on the action items so committee time isn’t wasted. We offer a sample Action Items List in our article, [Action Items List will improve board followup](#).

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P.O. Box 77553, Seattle, WA 98177

TEL 206.542.8422 | EMAIL info@jurassicparliament.com

www.jurassicparliament.com