

# Federation of American Aquarium Societies



## How to Effectively Plan and Run Society Meetings

### Document History

Dave Knelson, a former FAAS President, created the original version of this guide. Edits, updates and reformatting were made by Rick Borstein.

### Gender

For ease of authoring, the male gender has been used throughout this document. This is a grammatical treatment and in no way indicates a preference in gender.

### Introduction

The chairman—or President—of an aquarium society has to play the role of leader, cajoler, worker, therapist and many other roles.

This guide offers advice to help society board and committee members to:

- a) Plan a meeting
- b) Run society meetings
- c) Understand and administer committees
- d) Work with different kinds of people

The appendix includes sample agendas for [Business \(Board\) Meetings](#) and [General Meetings](#).

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## Part 1 - Aquarium Society Meetings

### *Introduction*

Meetings are the heart of any aquarium society. A society can operate without any of its other activities, but one which fails to hold meetings will not be around in the long term.

Your members look upon the meetings in a variety of different ways; each of which is dependent upon what each individual expects to obtain by attending them. Some enjoy the educational programs, others the bowl show while still others may attend simply because the meeting affords them the opportunity to meet others of similar interests, at a regular interval, in order to exchange ideas. No one attends because they have to! All those present are there of their own free will. Because of this, we who pursue the aquarium society administration hobby are indeed fortunate. We have a receptive audience. They may not be receptive to what they see or hear at the meeting but they are receptive to the society, and this is a major consideration.

The operation of a meeting requires a great deal of skill in order to be effective. Almost all of the meetings held by aquarium societies follow a very similar pattern of events and activities mainly because this standard format has proven to be an effective method.

### *Functions of a Meeting*

The gathering together of individuals with a common interest is as old as man. While technology allows people to interact remotely over the web, there really is no replacement for getting together as a group.

1. A meeting identifies the committee or group. Those present belong to it and those who are absent do not. It provides those in attendance with a sense of belonging.
2. A meeting provides a place where a group revises, updates, or adds to what they already know from a pool of shared knowledge, experience and judgment.
3. A meeting helps all present to understand the objectives of the group and the way in which the individual can contribute to the success of the group.
4. A meeting makes a commitment to all present to support the decisions made by the group.
5. The meeting provides an opportunity for the members of the group to meet with all administrators and the chairman at one time.
6. A meeting is a status arena. It provides a medium where those present can confirm the group's pecking order.

A meeting can perform each of the above functions but there is no guarantee that it will.

### *Meeting Influencing Factors*

To effectively administer the business of an aquarium society, there has to be more than single monthly meeting. Additional meetings usually are business meetings—board meetings. Some societies host social meetings; a gathering in a member's home, a collecting trip or even a banquet or dance. Each of these different meetings has a very distinct influence upon the successful operations of the society. Each type of meeting needs to be handled correctly.

Several factors which influence all types of meetings:

- (a) the meeting site
- (b) the meeting time and day

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- (c) the meeting frequency
- (d) the meeting composition
- (e) the meeting objectives

The influencing factors will be discussed below as they apply to the different types of meetings.

## **The General Meeting**

### *The Meeting Site*

The selection of a meeting site is most critical to the success of any aquarium society:

- It should be located centrally and be within easy access of the majority of the membership.
- It should be large enough to accommodate current requirements while at the same time taking into account a possible increase in membership in the future.
- The meeting site should not be so large that it might "dwarf" the group in attendance.

Many societies receive rent-free accommodations for their meetings by aligning themselves with such institutions as: libraries, museums, schools and even businesses. If these sites are not available for you, you may need to rent a room. Rental is often possible at: halls, large restaurants, bank buildings, hotels, etc.

It may be possible to combine arrangements with other non-profit groups in your area which could reduce costs and provide for the needs of all concerned in a satisfactory manner.

If possible, locate a meeting site which provides access to training aids such as: black boards, digital projectors, slide projectors, etc. These items are often available from schools or libraries.

### *The Meeting Time and Day*

Most members of an aquarium society are working people, housewives, and mothers or school students. This dictates that the meeting must fall on a day, and at a time, when the majority are able to attend.

Member free time generally is on weekends and evenings. Weekends are not generally considered to be as good as weeknights since many people have family obligations or sports activities.

When picking a weeknight, consider the following:

- Monday is often a bad day for many who have enjoyed a relaxing weekend. The conflict with Monday Night Football is often cited.
- Friday is too close to the weekend to even consider. Many people prefer to shop Friday evenings.
- Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings as possible alternatives.
- Sunday night works for some clubs.

Most societies hold weekday meetings which start at 7 or 7:30 PM.

### *The Meeting Frequency*

Most societies hold one meeting per month.

Some societies do not hold meetings during the months of July and August. . We generally feel that societies benefit through continuous operation. The attendance at the summer meetings may very well be low when compared to other months of peak hobby interest, but for those who did attend the service would be most welcomed.

### *The Meeting Composition*

We want to have as many members as possible in attendance.

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The more members we can recruit and keep the more advanced the organized hobby in our area will become.

Consideration should be given to attracting guests and visitors. In many cases these hobbyists will become members of the group after attending only a few of your meetings.

You may also wish to invite special individuals to your meetings such as members from a nearby aquarium society, members of a similar nonprofit group, individuals connected with the subject of your meeting or even members of the press or other media.

Attendance should be mandatory for members of the Board of Directors or Executive group

Non-executive committee chairpersons should also attend each general meeting. The general meeting is usually the only opportunity the members have to speak with these society administrators. If a key person cannot attend, that worker should delegate responsibility to another qualified member.

## *The Meeting Objectives*

The objectives of the general meeting should be, and should remain, the promotion of the hobby and they way the society relates to it.

- **Present Board Business**  
Many clubs struggle balancing how much of the board business should be shared at the regular meeting. FAAS generally feels that board business should be kept to a minimum in the general meeting. Members who want to have a lot of say in the operation of the club should go to a board meeting.
- **Present Committee Business**  
Committees should briefly report news and updates. For example, you will want to hear from your Breeders Award Program Chairman, Show Chairman, etc. You may also need to hear from special committees such as social, competition, etc
- **Offer an Informative Speaker or Program**  
The subject matter being presented should be geared to appeal to the majority of members in attendance. This is indeed a most complicated objective and demands a great deal of skill on the part of the Program Chairman. A good Program Chairman is an invaluable asset to any society. You will never fully satisfy the desires of all of your members at every meeting and this should not be the intent. Most members will realize that there is a need to vary your subject matter and that their individual interests may not be catered to at every meeting. They will appreciate the efforts made on their behalf and over a period of time will indeed find something of value to be learned at most meetings.
- **Provide Time for Social Activities**  
We suggest scheduling a refreshments break about midway through the meeting. This provides the members with the opportunity to talk with their fellow members about events and experiences they have encountered since the last meeting. It also provides the opportunity for administrators to speak to the members on a one-to-one basis.

Make a point of introducing yourself to all visitors and guests and acknowledge the presence of all members even if only by a simple "hello". This should be considered a part of the duties of all society administrators.

- **Offer Interest Generating Activities**  
These activities might include a bowl show, auction, raffle, door price drawing, or any number of similar activities. Remember that those who are attending for the first time will have no idea as to what is to happen. A few minutes explaining each at the start of the meeting are well spent.

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## **The Executive Committee or BOD Meeting**

### *The Meeting Site*

The administrative group within our societies averages about ten members. Most societies meet in the home of a board member. Some societies hold their administrative meetings in a small room of a centrally located lounge or restaurant.

The meeting site should be large enough to comfortably accommodate all present without having them squeeze into corners between aquariums. The President or Chairman should be located in a position where all present can see him and where he can also see all present. Large living rooms, rec rooms, or even around a kitchen table are some of the more obvious choices.

Some societies reimburse the host or hostess for the cost of refreshments and snacks

### *The Meeting Time and Day*

Some society boards meet the same day as the regular meeting. Other boards meet a different night, generally at 7:00 PM. Some boards meet the week after a regular meeting so that discussion topics are fresh in their minds. Other clubs meet the week prior so that the activities planned are fresh for the upcoming meeting!

Whatever option you choose, you will need to ensure that you:

1. Have enough time to conduct the business of the group
2. Have a convenient time for all attendees
3. Stick to the same day and time each month to maximize attendance.
4. Set a meeting end time and stick to it.  
FAAS recommends limiting board meetings to no more than two hours, excluding any after meeting social time.

### *The Meeting Frequency*

Most societies hold one business meeting per month. You may need to schedule additional meetings for:

- Public Shows
- Bylaw revisions
- Planning special activities

### *The Meeting Composition*

All members of the executive group and BOD if applicable plus all committee chairpersons should attend.

Invite any members assigned to short term projects of committees of non-standing status.

Board meetings should be open to any society member who may wish to attend. Frequent mention of this fact should be made in the society publication and at the general meeting.

Consider inviting individuals who can shed more light on a topic. For example:

- The manager of a Mall or hotel where your show held.
- The owner of a pet shop who has agreed to provide special benefits to your members.
- A government official who can explain why restrictions have been placed on the import of certain aquatic plants or fish species, etc.

### *The Meeting Objectives*

The main objective is to carry out the business for your society.

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Committee Chairpersons should expect to be asked to report on their committees. They may also wish to prepare an agenda.

New business will almost always be introduced, some of which may well require immediate action.

The agenda then simply states the minor objectives of that particular meeting and allows the meeting to progress according to plan. Under no circumstances should the objectives of the meeting be overlooked or forgotten. This would prove to be wasteful of time and unproductive. By sticking to the agenda and to the objectives you will probably find time to spare at the end of the meeting for hobby talk or visiting with those who wish to remain. This practice will also encourage attendance at these meetings.

## **The Committee Meeting**

### *The Meeting Frequency*

In many societies the standing committees are not required to meet on a regular basis. In fact quite often they may never meet at all.

In many cases, the standing committee may really be a committee-of-one, a person who works alone in order to accomplish the objectives of this specific committee.

Some examples of committees which should formally meet:

- Show Committee
- Membership Committee
- Elections Committee

Committee meetings should be held only as frequently as required. Remember that many committees will be made up of those who have been in attendance at the Executive Committee Meeting which may forego the need for a duplicate meeting.

Try to keep the committee meetings to a minimum while at the same time ensuring that the objectives of the committee are being met at all times.

### *The Meeting Composition*

All members of the committee should attend. If necessary, invite chairs of other committees whose work may be impacted

The society President may attend each committee meeting at his discretion. If the President does not attend, he should ask for an update from the Committee Chair.

### *The Meeting Objectives*

The main objective for all committee meetings must be to carry out the duties as assigned by the Executive Committee, according to the rules and regulations governing their operation.

For this reason, it is important that a member of the Executive Committee be present at the first meeting of the committee.

Note that the Executive Member should not lead the committee. The Executive Member should work to develop the leadership of other individuals and avoid undue influence.

The Executive Committee should outline what is required, stating in brief what is required and when it is to be accomplished. If possible, the committee objectives should be published.

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## **The Annual (Elections) Meeting**

This meeting is normally held at the same time and place as the general meeting and is most commonly the election meeting. Usually, annual meeting replaces one general meeting during the year.

The month that the Annual Meeting takes place will be mentioned in the society constitution.

### *The Meeting Composition*

Since the board will be elected at this meeting, as many members as possible should attend. Your society bylaws should specify the voting process and may even specify special functions to be performed at this meeting.

### *A note on the Changeover of Personnel*

We suggest a changeover of files, records at a combined executive meeting held one week after the annual meeting. Both outgoing and incoming administrators should be invited to attend. This way, the changeover can be accomplished with relative ease, something which may take weeks to carry out if left to personal convenience.

### *The Meeting Objectives*

The Annual Meeting runs very much like a regular meeting, but this important meeting deserves maximum attendance. Book a desirable speaker or other activity to drive attendance.

## **Emergency Meetings**

An Emergency Meeting is called for when there is a grave urgency which cannot be postponed until the next regular meeting. Generally, only board members need attend an Emergency Meeting.

The site will depend upon the number of members involved and also upon availability. Your club bylaws may dictate the circumstances where an Emergency Meeting can be called and who can call one.

Emergency Meetings should be called as seldom as possible.

One clear reason for calling such an Emergency Meeting is an incident which has an immediate direct bearing on society. For example, one club's annual show had to be postponed because the hotel which had been booked closed its doors.

Should the Emergency Meeting be required, the minimum of people should be involved.

Remember, the membership will know about the problem almost as soon as you do. They will expect appropriate and speedy action to be taken on their behalf. Your abilities as an aquarium society administrator will undoubtedly be put to the test during periods of this nature and the actions you take will not soon be forgotten, especially if they prove to be less than adequate.

The objectives of the Emergency Meeting are quite simply to find a solution to the existing problem

The conduct of a heated Emergency Meeting can be considered as being a test of administrative skills of any President or Committee Chairperson.

## **Social Meetings**

### *The Meeting Site*

There are a great many social activities which will require no expenditure at all and which can serve as effectively as would a more elaborate affair. Some examples of society social activities:

- Holiday Parties
- Picnics
- Bowling Parties

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- Fishroom Tours
- Shop Hops
- Field Trips

### *A Special Note about Drinking*

Societies should be concerned about the consumption of alcohol at their events:

- Societies may be liable if they over serve members or if an accident occurs.
- In no case should a member be allowed to operate a motor vehicle while intoxicated. Take their car keys!
- Many families do not want junior members involved when alcohol is consumed

### *Social Meeting Frequency*

Most societies schedule two or three social activities per year.

The planning of at least one large scale social activity each year, perhaps as part of the Annual Show or as a Banquet or Dance, is perhaps the one activity which all societies should consider holding.

### *The Meeting Composition*

Social meetings may vary greatly depending on the activity. A few considerations:

- Invite parents of your Junior Members should be invited to attend. This attendance by parents allows them to speak with the society administrators and to learn more about their child's interests and about those who are contributing a large part to the child's education and growing up.
- Members should always be allowed to bring their friends and relatives if for no other reason than the fact that the members will feel more comfortable socializing within their own social group. Many of our members never have the opportunity to mix socially with other society members outside of the society meetings.
- If the activity involves a trip or a visit, by all means enlist the help of a "guide" or even a member who has made this trip before.

### *The Meeting Objectives*

The Social Meeting objective is quite simply to have fun. Combine this with a minor objective of fund raising or even educational in nature and it can still be a success. Be careful, because once the minor objective surpasses the prime objective members may no longer wish to attend.

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## Part 2 - The Operation of a Meeting

### Introduction

The manner in which any meeting is operated will depend upon

- (a) the type of meeting
- (b) the objectives of the meeting
- (c) the size of the meeting
- (d) the composition of the meeting
- (e) the experience level of the Chairman
- (f) the urgency of the objectives.

A simple way to think about meetings is to categorize them as either “business” or “non-business” meetings.

Each type of meeting has a special set of methods which can be employed in their operation.

### The Business Meeting

#### *Defining the Objective(s)*

As the person running the meeting, the first thing you must do is to ask yourself is:

*What needs to be achieved at this meeting?”*

There may be a single objective, but most often there are several. No matter what your objective(s), they will fall into one or more of these broad headings:

- Informative
- Constructive or Organizational
- Planning
- Delegation

#### *Informative:*

We all want to learn more about our hobby and how the society can help us. A meeting may simply be a medium for the passage of information.

A purely informational meeting would require no decision making.

#### *Constructive or Organizational:*

Constructive or Organizational meetings as the question—“What shall we do?”

This type of meeting is held to set up new procedures or to implement new activities within the society.

#### *Planning*

The question asked this time is, “How shall we do it?” The goal of these meetings is the actual planning of the operation.

#### *Delegation*

The question here is “Who is going to be responsible and take care of this?”

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## Preparing for the Meeting

When a Chairman has not adequately prepared for a meeting, attendees can immediately tell. Be prepared! When you aren't, the message you send is that you don't care enough about your group.

### *People*

The number of persons attending the business meeting requires special attention. Most have twelve to fifteen people attend their regular business (e.g. board) meetings.

The Chairman should contact committee members prior to the meeting as necessary to ensure that the right information is brought before the board. Contact before the meeting can save valuable time.

FAAS discourages societies from holding closed meetings. If and how closed meetings are allowed may be specified in your club constitution.

### *The Agenda*

The Chairman should prepare an agenda which lists the topics to be covered. A copy of the agenda should be communicated to each anticipated attendee one week prior to the meeting. Most clubs do this via email.

The agenda should be considered as being the "lesson plan" of the meeting. [A sample business meeting agenda is included in Appendix B.](#)

### *Some Helpful Hints for the Operation of a Business Meeting*

1. The early part of the meeting is usually the liveliest. If you require ideas, the key items of your agenda should be conducted early in the meeting.
2. Items of general concern should be placed later in the agenda. This allows you to dispense with less interesting matters while the attention level is high.
3. Minor items should require minimal discussion. Ensure that unimportant business receives only minimal discussion time.
4. Slate an item which is unifying in nature just prior to one which will probably cause a division.
5. Try to keep the meeting length at about two hours. Any longer and the productivity of the group will be reduced. It should be remembered that most of those attending will already have spent a full day at work or at school and they may already be weary before the meeting.
6. Pick a starting time and stick with it.
7. If a meeting must be prolonged, it is wise to call for a break with coffee, or sandwiches or other goodies on hand. Decide the duration of the break and stick to it. About 20-30 minutes is about right.
8. If papers are to be introduced at the meeting, such as might be the case with designing new rules or reviewing bylaws, etc. it is wise to have all in attendance receive these papers with the agenda.
9. If papers are circulated prior to a meeting it is a good idea to make notes of questions to be asked, or other comments.
10. Papers issued prior to a meeting should be as brief as possible. Papers of this type are usually used to present a plan or to amplify a topic which will be discussed during the meeting.

## **A Good Chairman**

No matter how the situation is weighed, there is certainly some degree of prestige attached to the position of Chairman. Your leadership style has a huge impact on whether your society will meet objectives—or not.

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As a chairman, you are responsible not only for your work but how you do it. For want of a better term, you need to sell your vision and ideas so that members want to help the society achieve its goals.

The effective Chairman should not have to dominate the meeting, but instead should gently direct it. The one legitimate source of pleasure in Chairmanship should be the knowledge that the meeting has met its objectives and that it was a success. This feeling must also be shared with all others present.

It takes a strong individual to avoid assuming the role of dictator at meetings. An effective Chairman should be able to assist the group in making decisions, interpreting and clarifying any points of business, moving discussions along, and bringing forth resolutions from the group.

The Chairman's authority with the members should be his conviction that everything he is doing is for the good of the society.

Once that authority is established, it takes very little force of personality for the Chairman to maintain effective control at meetings. A distinct sense of urgency and an obvious desire to reach effective conclusions as quickly as possible can be far more effective in committee Chairmanship than a heavy gavel.

The Chairman who wishes a particular point to be advocated should ensure that it is introduced by another member rather than by himself. By so doing, he can hold back until much later in the discussion which may even allow him to alter his stand on the topic after listening to the arguments. If no change is required on his stand then it becomes much easier for the Chairman to simply show his support of members as they discuss the matter. It also allows the Chairman to summarize in favor of the view he prefers.

Effective Chairmanship is an art which is learned by experience and a skill which can only be perfected through practice.

## Conduct of the Meeting

Your society constitution likely dictates that meetings are run according to [Roberts Rules of Order](#):

From the official Roberts Rules website, we learn the following:

Henry Martyn Robert was an engineering officer in the regular Army. Without warning he was asked to preside over a church meeting and realized that he did not know how. He tried anyway and his embarrassment was supreme. This event, which may seem familiar to many readers, left him determined never to attend another meeting until he knew something of parliamentary law. Ultimately, he discovered and studied the few books then available on the subject. From time to time, due to his military duties, he was transferred to various parts of the United States where he found virtual parliamentary anarchy since each member from a different part of the country had differing ideas of correct procedure. To bring order out of chaos he decided to write *Robert's Rules of Order*.

However, few if any lay people have a good understanding of Roberts Rules. Strict adherence can even be a turn off to members.

However, the basics are fairly simple:

- A point is raised.
- Those present are allowed to present their thoughts and ideas
- A vote is called for
- The call to vote is seconded
- The vote is taken

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An experienced Chairman will deftly move the topic from point to vote.

The Committee Chairman must be aware of his obligations in respect to the operation of the meeting. He must deal not only with the subject(s) of the meeting but also with the members present.

## *Dealing with Discussion and Argument*

The Chairman should make a statement at the start of the discussion on any given topic which includes the final objective. For example, "The purpose of this discussion is to find out if the BAP rules should be changed."

As the discussion progresses, the Chairman should ensure that the members speaking do not get ahead of the agenda. Guard against repetition which is a waste of time. The main item to guard against is the injection of matters which are past history and which cannot be related to the matter at hand.

The Chairman should also ensure that all points raised are fully understood by him as well as by all those present. The Chairman should ask points to be clarified for the good of each attendee.

A good way to obtain elaboration in order to amplify a point is to have a member relate a personal experience which is related to the topic of discussion. This must be done with care in order to keep the conversation on the topic at hand but it can be effective.

A common failure is to wait too long to close the discussion. A good Chairman will know that the agreement has been accepted even before a vote has been taken.

The opposite also applies. A discussion should be allowed to follow its full progression until closure is called for. Failure to do so will not allow for effective decision-making on the part of the members.

The discussion should be closed when:

- i) more facts are required before further progress can be made
- ii) views of members not present are seen to be required
- iii) members seem to require more time to reach a decision
- iv) changing events prevent a final solution
- v) the subject cannot be resolved within meeting time frame
- vi) the problem can be resolved at a lower administrative level, or requires action by a higher administrative level

The fact that the decision is difficult, likely to be disrupted or that it will be unwelcome by a part of the membership is no valid reason to postpone it.

The Chairman should summarize after each topic as it is introduced and before it is taken to a vote or tabled. This helps the Secretary to take accurate minutes.

## *Dealing with People*

The seating arrangements at business meetings are an important consideration. Perhaps these tips may be of help in assisting you to arrive at a suitable arrangement for your business meetings:

- Having members sit face to face across a table may tend to cause opposition, conflict and disagreements;
- When seated side by side, disagreements and confrontations are not as likely to occur
- The Chairman should be alone, at the front of the group
- Try to avoid a ranking system with signing officers in front and the Committee Chairman in the rear
- Attempt to have all present seated at the same level

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- A semicircle is one of the most common arrangements

Some people take a long time to say very little. The Chairman's sense of urgency should indicate to those members the need of brevity. A trick which may prove useful is to stop the speaker with a phrase he has just used such as "\$200.00 for Show Ribbons, that sounds a bit high. John, you're the Treasurer, what do you think?"

Many meeting attendees don't actively voice opinions. The Chairman should try to engage everybody by asking questions and opinions of the silent members.

Newer members sometimes make statements or suggestions are frustrating to more experienced members. Inevitably, an experienced member making the newcomer feel that his ideas are not important. Take pains to commend the newer members on their input and its usefulness which will serve to take the initiative away from the attacking member. This will also help to reinforce the fact that all members have the right to contribute equally.

Personality clashes can be the downfall of not only committees, but of entire societies. Discourage them at all costs. Clashes of ideas should be encouraged however. A good meeting is not simply one where a dialogue exists between members, but rather where an interchange of ideas and debate exists with the Chairman occasionally guiding, mediating, probing, stimulating, and summarizing with the members thrashing out the ideas.

The meeting must be a conflict of ideas and opinions, not of people.

The wise Chairman will welcome any and all suggestions warmly and will quickly stifle the tendency to ridicule in those prone to this action. A method of doing this is to ask the offending member to supply a better suggestion on the spot. Very few ideas or suggestions put forth at meetings will ever be fully accepted in the form in which they are presented. They should each be taken in the spirit they are usually offered, simply suggestion. The good points of each can be used to build towards the final solution.

In aquarium society business meetings it is a good idea to work around the group after a topic has been presented for discussion. The Chairman can direct this rotation perhaps starting with the more novice members of the group and ending with the more experienced. This will avoid the more inexperienced members feeling they must compete with the suggestions offered by the experienced members and will help to encourage their participation.

All meetings should end on a positive note of achievement. In cases where the final topic remains unresolved the Chairman can select a previous topic for his closing remarks, thereby confirming the success of the meeting. The very last things to happen at these meetings should be the selection of a sit for the next meeting as well as a date and a time.

A gesture of good will is the thanking of all who attended and especially the member host if the meeting happens to be in a member's home.

Accurate meeting minutes taken by the Secretary and should be condensed for the society. The keeping of minutes acts as a guide for those who will follow as well as a permanent history of the society activities. In addition, meeting attendees respond positively to the notion that recorded minutes substantiate the purpose of the group.

## **The General Society Meeting**

### *Introduction*

The Aquarium Society General Meeting is the main place where members interact. It is here that visitors and guests, as well as the membership, are allowed to form their opinions about the society, its objectives and the degree of efficiency with which it is operated.

Because the society President is the spokesman at these meetings, he is the key representation of the image of the society. Your appearance, demeanor and manner of speech will be scrutinized.

The basic rules of good chairmanship apply but must be modified to suit the situation.

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The Chairman of the General Meeting then adopts a variety of chairmanship roles throughout the course of any given meeting. He may be required to be a basic Chairman during the portion dealing with business, a persuader during the portion dealing with the recruiting of workers for a project, a counselor during a question and answer period or possibly as an educator during the program part of the meeting. The good Chairman or President will be able to change his manner of approach accordingly and will readily recognize these variations in style as they are required.

### *Defining the Objective(s)*

The objectives of the General Meeting are as important as those of the business meeting and the President should have them clearly identified well in advance of the meeting. Generally speaking, these objectives are:

- Information,
- Education
- Decision Making

The President need not assume the sole responsibility of society spokesman at these meetings. It is a best practice to involve as many committee chairmen as possible in the meeting.

### *The Members*

The meeting is *for* the members. Keep in mind the following?

- a) Is the room comfortable?  
Temperature, lighting, seating arrangements can make a meeting successful—or the opposite. If possible, set the room classroom style so that each person has a table on which to take notes or place a drink.
- b) Noise  
A noisy air conditioner or other machinery can easily drown out the words of any speaker and you may be required to use an amplification system at your meetings.
- c) Microphone  
Provide a microphone and insist that speakers use it. Most people do not like to use microphones and if given a choice, will not. However, few people speak loudly enough to be heard by all present. Member' interest will not be long maintained if they cannot hear what is being said.
- d) Meeting Length  
Society meetings should run no more than 2 to 2.5 hours. Speakers should present for 45-50 minutes and allow an additional ten minutes for questions.
- e) Involve the Members  
Members need a forum to give something back to the meeting. Involve them through direct questioning, having the members carry out a written quiz, using some form of practical topic for the program such as constructing some form of equipment, etc. The average member will be most reluctant to speak at meetings to the point where he will hesitate to even ask questions of the speaker. This can be partly rectified by encouraging the members to ask questions, to voice opinions, or even to approach the speaker during the break. Remember that no everyone will interpret what they hear in exactly the same manner and clarification on the part of some members may be required. Speakers should be encouraged to make themselves available for individual conversations after the presentation whenever possible.
- f) Right Level of Information  
The understanding level of those present will obviously be quite varied. What is fully understandable to an experienced member may well be far in advance of what the newer members understand. The President should be aware of this fact and must attempt to accommodate all concerned

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A good suggestion however might be to plan each meeting as a part of an end objective with the subject matter of each meeting program carefully considered in relation to all those attending. A progressive system from novice to experienced during the course of any given year is a good idea

## *The Agenda*

Each General Meeting should have an agenda. The General Meeting agenda is roughed out at the Business (Board) Meeting. The actual finished product remains the responsibility of the President. A sample [General Meeting Agenda](#) is included in Appendix A.

The following suggestions may also prove useful to the President on arranging an agenda and the meeting format:

- a) Business should be kept at the business meeting whenever this is possible or practical.
- b) The membership should be fully informed of all matters which are pertinent to them and as directed in your bylaws. They may not be concerned that the webmaster is using new software, but would like to know that the website was going to change.
- c) Any items which directly effect the members must be included in the business portion of the general meeting. Rules and regulations or changes in established policy should be considered mandatory information. The members opinions may not be requested but they must be kept informed of any matters effecting their involvement with the society.
- d) Eliminate the unnecessary and unimportant, to most members, matters of business. This will promote the members good feelings about the society rather than detract from them. The business portion of the general meeting should last only a few minutes and should usually be informative in nature. Elections or voting matters would be the exceptions to this rule.
- e) The agenda for the General Meeting should be published in the following ways if possible:
  - A. Publication
  - B. Society Website
  - C. Mailer Card
  - D. Email

In all cases, the subject of the educational portion should be published along with brief details as to topic and speaker.

- f) Matters requiring membership approval by voting must be included in the agenda especially if required by the society bylaws.
- g) Use the society publication instead of meetings to publish detailed information which may not be of interest to all members.
- h) Plan ahead and recruit an effective Program Chairman in order to find the best speakers.

## **Helpful Hints for Presidents at General Meetings**

- a) Plan the meeting well in advance and stick to the schedule
- b) Arrange a program to suit the committee members and other persons who will be speaking during the meeting, especially during the business portion. All concerned must know when they will be called upon and they must be prepared.

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- c) Arrange alternate plans in the event that a planned speaker or committee chairman is late arriving or doesn't arrive at all. Necessary committee announcements should be made in any event even if the required member is not present. The efficient chairman will have appointed a delegate in his place, but the President should be prepared to fill in if so required. It remains his responsibility to see that all required announcements are made.
- d) Encourage committee chairmen to take an active part in the general meetings.
- e) Summarize after all announcements and business matters have been covered to reaffirm your position and to ensure that all present fully understand what has been said.
- f) Welcome everyone to the meeting. Make special mention of any guests or visitors. Briefly explain the format of the meeting and activities which are to be seen for the benefit of these persons.
- g) Keep the meeting moving to avoid boredom. If several points of business are to be discussed, interject some item of general interest between them. Take the required amount of time to ensure that business is covered effectively but don't dwell unnecessarily on any matters.
- h) Introduce all who will speak at the meeting to the membership. Your Speaker Chairman should provide a bio and introduction for the speaker.
- i) Before the break is called, review what those present can expect to see happening during the break, explain the various activities that all present may become involved with such as the purchase of raffle tickets, viewing of auction items, use of the library, etc.
- j) During the break, the President should interact with the membership and pay special attention to new members. Make sure to introduce new members to other members.
- k) Do not let the break run overtime. The schedule must be adhered to so that all items are covered.
- l) Allow as much time as is required for the involved committee chairmen to have their say. Encourage their participation which will also allow all members to see who is responsible for the various committees and projects operated by the society. If award presentations are involved allow your committee chairmen responsible for them make the presentations.
- m) Review pertinent business portion facts if required during the meeting summarization points.
- n) Recap announcements which apply to activities and events planned for the next meeting as well as any items the members should be made aware of for the next meeting. If the educational part has already been confirmed announce it again.
- o) Make yourself available after the meeting to speak with any members so wishing and especially your committee chairmen who may wish to discuss points of business or the business meeting with you.
- p) Pass out business meeting agendas and any related papers if this is required to all concerned.
- q) Many societies have developed a practice of having all interested parties meet for a coffee, or even a drink at a nearby bar after the meeting. This can be a very relaxing way of getting members to discuss their ideas and suggestions in an informal manner.

This form of gathering can often provide a good deal of input from less involved members should they attend.

Encourage conversations about the hobby, the individuals and their fishes at every opportunity. Get to know your members, learn what they are keeping and what their main interests re or any projects with which they may be involved. Let them see that you are really a hobbyist at heart and not simply a meeting chairman or

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society President. Take an obvious interest in them as individuals. This will be appreciated by the members and it will provide you with the necessary information you need to better operate the society as its President.

## **The Chairman's Job**

The chairman of the aquarium society general meeting is just that, the chairman. He should make certain that everything follows the plan and that the schedule is maintained. He is the spokesman for the society and as such should accept full charge of the announcements and other business but should also be willing to delegate portions of this material to his committee chairmen when at all possible.

### *Handling Unannounced Motions and Questions from the Floor*

The society which operates on the assumption that all business matters should be brought to the attention of the general membership is prone to this problem by simple virtue of their operating methods

A member, or group of members, may attempt to throw a "curve" at you during a meeting. This can be controlled by deciding upon a point during each meeting where you ask the membership if they have any questions or comments. The practice will soon become habit and the member(s) wishing to make a point will hold back until the question is asked of them. By your asking the question you have taken the initiative giving you the upper hand in the discussion which should never be allowed to develop past the point of having the point in question made.

The society President must be conversant with every aspect of his society's operation. He need not be involved to a degree where he can recite the bylaws by heart but he should be familiar enough with them, as well as all society regulations and rules, to answer any questions about them in an intelligent manner. As Chairman of the Executive Committee he must be fully familiar, in detail, with every current activity and project presently in progress or being planned. Only this knowledge will allow him to handle the unexpected in an effective and confident manner.

An outright motion from the floor can cause real problems and in some cases may even be embarrassing to the President or other society members. In most cases this situation will arise out of a dispute or from a disgruntled member. Ask the concerned member(s) to attend the business meeting to discuss their ideas.

You could address this issue in your bylaws by requiring all new business to be presented at the society's business meeting. The failure to include qualifications of this nature in the bylaws of a society can require the President to employ a great deal of tact and control in order to maintain order at the meeting.

Regular questions from the membership should be encouraged. Most members are reluctant to say anything at meetings. Encouraging membership opinions will provide the members with confidence in their President and the entire Executive Committee, especially if their questions are answered truthfully and without hesitation.

Do not hesitate to call upon any of your committee chairmen to answer questions of concern to their committees at any time you are asked. Even if you are fully able to answer the question yourself this delegation shows your confidence in your chairmen and will be appreciated by them as well as by the member(s) involved in the question.

### *Minor Meeting Problems*

Societies experience a number of common complaints about meetings:

- a) Can't hear the speaker  
This can be caused by any number of reasons but very often is due to the individual conversations being carried on amongst the members about the meeting room. Ask people to take their conversations outside the meeting room. Often a gentle reminder is all that is required to restore peace and order.
- b) The meeting doesn't start on time  
By consistently starting on time, you can avoid this issue. If committee members are not present, skip them and return to them when they arrive.

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c) Interruptions

You may also find members who delight in interrupting, especially during the educational portion of the meeting. If this happens you should simply request that all members save their questions until after the meeting program.

d) Smoking

Few venues allow smoking anymore. If your venue does, inform smokers to take their break outside.

### *Summary*

The General Meeting is perhaps the most important aspect of aquarium society operations. Successful meetings result in a successful society. The Chairman, or President, is the key figure in this success and as such must learn to effectively master good chairmanship techniques.

### **Social Gatherings**

Almost every society will engage in some form of social gathering at least a few times each year. Some of these are:

a) House parties

b) Game nights, Bingos, etc.

c) Open houses

d) Awards dinners and banquets

e) Dances

f) Collecting and field trips

g) Tours and visits

Organizing these activities is generally a committee function. Committee Chair should work within a budget defined by the Board. They should also plan for factors out of their control such as weather or last minute that might be cause to cancel the gathering or activity. Good planning and alternate plans will avoid cancellation. The alternatives may not be as desirable as the initial objectives but the activity, though in a modified form, will still take place as planned.

The Society President should avoid becoming involved in the operation of such gatherings but he should ensure that he is fully aware of all that is happening from start to finish. Good and frequent briefings by the Committee Chairman can help with this. The President should also attend the function and he should attempt to find time to speak to all participants, or as many as possible, at some point during the event.

Due to the fact that social gatherings involve the membership who will probably have little more than their hobby as a common interest, you can anticipate conversations about the hobby and the society to form a large part of the discussions. Keep conversations to hobby-related topics and avoid hot button issues such as politics and religion. They have no place in an aquarium society.

Guard against the temptation to involve business with the social gatherings except in a very casual manner. By all means do answer the questions members may have about the society and its operations but avoid becoming involved to the degree where a problem may arise. This may take a good deal of tact in some cases.

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## Part 3 - Obligations of a Committee Chairman

The major purpose of any committee is to relieve the workload of the Executive Committee. The executive remains ultimately responsible to see that the tasks are carried out effectively but is provided with the freedom to carry out the broader objectives of the society and their various administrative duties.

Those individuals, who head standing committees, or even committees of short term standing, should be aware that their obligations include more than simply accepting the position. It is not unusual to find that an individual may have accepted a position without really knowing what was required. A full description of the duties related to any position can be made available to any possible candidate verbally during the recruiting phase, by a section in society bylaws, in a member's handbook or in any number of similar ways.

Many societies place a lot of emphasis on having a name opposite every position on the society administrative list, but what is the use of a name if it doesn't belong to an active and productive member?

If an individual is not performing their duties in an effective manner the obligations will be seen to revert to the Executive group and in order to ensure that things continue to operate.

The Executive Committee should expect that the tasking of a committee chairman, along with specified guidelines, should produce a committee proposal, or even positive action from the committee within a specified time period. It is the responsibility of the committee chairman to ensure that this happens. The committee chairman may wish to consult with members of the Executive group as he goes about his fact gathering in order to make intelligent decisions, as might his committee members from time to time and this is as it should be.

Failure to use all resources such as the experience of the Executive Group is a sign of an inexperienced committee chairman.

Never forget that all society workers are volunteers. This may well be the case, but once a person has accepted a position of responsibility he should look upon it as an obligation and should feel responsible to ensure that all his duties are carried out to the best of his ability.

Members of the various committees should also be governed by these same responsibilities assigned to their Chairman. Society operations involve teamwork without which nothing can be accomplished. Some of us have more free time to help in society activities than others may, or we may be more willing to make this time available. As long as we are all able to do our duties to our best ability within our available free time, the objectives will be reached.

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## Appendix A- General Meeting Agenda

- 1) Introduction
  - a) Welcome all present.
  - b) Describe activities to be held for the new members, guests and visitors.
- 2) Business
  - a) A brief run down on activities and decisions of the Executive Committee.
  - b) Announcements.
  - c) Voting (if required)
- 3) Information
  - a) Plans in progress.
  - b) Plans being enacted.
  - c) Summary of current activities or those which demand details to be provided at the meeting, possibly for member participation.
- 4) Education
  - a) Introduction of the speaker (include his qualifications) or program.
  - b) The program - or part one of the program.
- 5) Break
  - a) Refer members to activities during the break.
  - b) Recap what has been presented if it is concluded.
  - c) Thank speaker if required and concluded.
  - d) Announce duration of the break
- 6) Speaker
  - a) a) Introduce speaker or topic if not continued.
  - b) The program - part two of the program
- 7) Miscellaneous
  - a) Auction.
  - b) Raffle Draw.
  - c) Presentation of Bowl Show Awards.
  - d) Other items unique to your operation.
- 8) Conclusion
  - a) Summary of item 1 and 2 above.
  - b) Announce the next meeting and the Exec. Committee meeting.
  - c) Final points.

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- d) Thank guests and visitors as well as members for attending.
- e) Adjourn.

It should be remembered that this is a suggested format only and that the variety possibilities are limited only to your own personal imagination. The use of a format simply ensures that all required points are covered. The arrangements of this format into a workable sequence and with details filled in will become your agenda.

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## Appendix B- Business Meeting Agenda

- 1) Introduction
  - a) Welcome all in attendance and introduce guests or new members.
  - b) State objectives of the meeting ... what is should be achieved by the end of the meeting.
- 2) Old Business
  - a) Reading of minutes and other required rituals.
  - b) Resolutions - Introduction; Discussion; Decision or Table.
- 3) New Business
  - a) Introduction
  - b) Discussion
  - c) Decision or
  - d) Table
  - e) Repeat as required until complete
- 4) Conclusion
  - a) Recap what has been tabled and what is expected at the next meeting from the group and from individuals.
  - b) Recap what has been accomplished and any decisions which have been made. Confirm what is expected and when from the group and from individuals.
  - c) Thanks all in attendance, especially the host.
  - d) Reminder of activities and dates to remember between then and the next meeting
  - e) Adjourn

### *Notes about Business Meeting Agenda*

The format you select will be far more complex as it will appear in agenda form with full details, points, headings and other required information such as key words and phrases to help keep things on the right track.

The format for handling each point of business need not be altered unless it is simply informative in nature.

By handling old business as a matter of course, the Chairman in control at all times this can be dispensed within minimum time. New business may take a bit longer or accomplish in some cases and should be approached on an individual basis. That is, with each member present being given the opportunity to present items of business, subsequent discussion, resolution or tabling, as required.

The "around the room approach" is one we recommend.

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## Appendix C- Roles People Play At Meetings

### *Group Blocking Roles*

- Aggressor
  - Criticizes, deflates others, disagrees aggressively.
- Blocker
  - Stubbornly disagrees, rejects others' points of view, cites unrelated personal experiences, returns to topics already resolved.
- Recognition
  - Boasts, excessive talking, very conscious of his status.
- Seeker
  - Topic Jumper. Continually changes the subject.
- Dominator
  - Tries to take over, manipulate the group.
- Special Interest Pleader
  - Uses the group's time to plead his own case.
- Playboy
  - Wastes group's time, story teller, nonchalant, cynical.
- Self Confessor
  - Talks irrelevantly about his own feelings and insights.
- Devil's Advocate
  - More devil than advocate.

### *The Group Building Roles*

- Initiator
  - Suggests new and different ideas for discussion and offers alternatives.
- Opinion Giver
  - States pertinent beliefs about the discussion and others suggestions.
- Elaborator
  - Builds on the suggestions of others.
- Clarifier
  - Gives relevant examples, offers rationales, probes for meaning and understanding, restates the problem
- Tester
  - Raises group questions to "test out" whether group is ready to arrive at a decision

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- Summarizer
  - Reviews discussions, pulls it together

## *Group Maintenance Roles*

1. Tension Reliever
  - Uses humor or calls for a break at appropriate times
2. Compromiser
  - Willing to yield when necessary to progress
3. Harmonizer
  - Mediates differences, reconciles points of view
4. Encourager
  - Praises and supports others, friendly, encouraging
5. Gate Keeper
  - Keeps communication open, encourages participation

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## Appendix D- Tips and Pitfall for Chairmen

### Tips

- A. Introduce yourself and the members, especially if group is meeting for the first time.
- B. Define the topic(s) and gain acceptance of them from the membership.
- C. Study each member as the meeting progresses. Become acquainted with the mental resources of the individuals, and of the group, and use them.
- D. After the subject(s) have been defined and accepted, employ the following steps for scientific problem-solving:
  6. study known factors and data concerning the topic
  7. nominate possible solutions, and
  8. select the best solution; and
- E. Avoid dual discussions and unrelated comments. Control overly aggressive members by:
  - restating problem or group objectives
  - asking direct questions
  - summarizing majority consensus and decisions
  - calling for an application of ideas to the problem at hand, or
  - calling upon other members, and
- F. Summarize conclusions both during and at the end of the discussion on each topic as well as at the end of the meeting.

### Pitfalls

#### *Busy! Busy!:*

- a) Never getting around to getting started.
- b) Feeling rushed at meetings when talking to members.
- c) Feeling you have more important things to do.

It is a common occurrence for a Chairman to feel other things are more important, about his work for the society and even his every day life. Ask yourself what is more important than getting the best performance from the committee.

The treatment is:

- e) Better planning of available time. Set up work schedules.
- f) Assign a member to look after problems while you look after the committee operation.

#### *You Won't Change*

- a) Telling members that they must change implies use of the old system.
- b) Little or no cooperation from members.

You can talk a good story about the accepted methods as it involves the committee, or the society, but you must also practice it.

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The treatment is:

- a) Don't tell, ask!
- b) Listen and allow members to respond, let the members initiate conversation.

*Perfectionist*

- a) Endless hours of discussion, rehashing and reworking.
- b) Hung up on small parts of the plan and expected results.

Going into infinite detail will strangle the project.

The treatment:

- a) Accept fairly broad generalities.
- b) Be expectant of a less than perfect system the first time around.
- c) Don't allow yourself to be dragged under by detail. Stay on top of the problems and the discussion.

*Once and For Always*

- Never giving in on any point.
- Once a plan is put into motion, never change it.
- Hold each member to the letter of the plan.

Plans must be flexible. Conditions change and so should the plan. No change can mean no improvement.

The treatment is:

- Agree to reasonable changes.
- Encourage members to suggest changes in plans.
- Consider conditions which might cause changes.

*Copy Cat*

- a) Always looking at other plans to copy so you won't have to think things through yourself.
- b) Trying to make as many plans fit a group pattern so they are all alike.

Plans will have many similar elements, especially when it comes to revamping already operational programs. It is the expected results which will be different.

The treatment is:

- Regard each plan as being separate and distinct.
- Avoid referring to other plans except as a guide.
- Let the committee members develop their own plan which will help to ensure originality.

*That's the System I've always used*

- Nothing new for you; you already know how it works.
- No one can tell you about the program.

Many chairmen feel they already know how the committee and its programs should work. In fact, they don't. Some elements of the Chairmanship are common, but most will be new.

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The treatment is:

- Listen - learn - and then decide.
- Search for parts and ideas which may be new to you.

*Definitions Hang Up*

- Members keep asking for definitions and meanings of words and terms used.
- Doubts about your true meaning creep into your thinking; you try your hand at redefining titles.

Getting the language straight and clear to those you are addressing is almost impossible. Attempting to define points to satisfy all members will cause distrust in you and the system.

The treatment is:

- Explain ideas. Don't attempt to explain expressions, use examples.
- Let the members define your words any way they wish as long as the end result is achieved.

*Too Hard to Understand*

- Members cannot get through their heads what you are trying to say or do.
- You get hung up on specific parts of a program.

Reluctance and resistance are often manifested by playing dumb. People who don't want to lean, or won't work, can find many reasons not to do so.

The treatment is:

- Recognize when members are resistant to changes.
- Speak to those members who are resisting, or perhaps not understanding. Determine the problem and act accordingly.

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## Developing an Open Atmosphere at Meetings

### 1. Building Openness

- Seek an attempt to understand viewpoints which differ from the majority, and from your own.
- Avoid dogmatic statements and value judgments.
- Avoid premature conclusions and fixed positions.

### 9. Developing Candor in Expressing Ideas

- Make feelings, attitudes and convictions clear.
- Be willing to pursue unpopular and uncomfortable areas of discussion.
- Respond frankly to the views of others.
- Be willing to disagree with the established precedent, majority opinion, or established authority.

### 10. Building Trust

- Show interest in the tolerance for differences in viewpoint, values and the temperament of others.
- Avoid win-lose strategies.
- Stand by convictions.
- Avoid recrimination.

### 11. Dealing Effectively with Disagreement or Conflict

- Seek out differences, or sources of differences, rather than smoothing over or avoiding such discussion.
- Develop experimental methods for dealing with issues at hand.
- Avoid issues of who's right; rather, seek out what's right.

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## Appendix E- Developing Good Chairmanship

1. Building Confidence
  - Keep your promises.
  - Think in terms of other member's interests.
  - Manage your duties so well that everyone can say, "You know your stuff."
  - Talk personally to all members, at every opportunity.
  - Know the wishes and desires of the membership.
  - Make prompt decisions and do not "pass the buck."
2. Developing Individual Initiative
  - Clearly define duties and responsibilities.
  - Give instructions with obvious points omitted; take an interest in the member's work contribution; give credit when due.
  - Watch for original suggestions and approve them, if they are good. (tactfully reject poor suggestions)
12. Preventing Grievances
  - Spot the trouble early, watch for any changes in member's behavior, attitude or performance as part of a committee. b) Talk with a possible upset member privately, listen sympathetically.
  - Make, or get a decision.
  - Sell the other member on the fairness of the decision, show him the other side of the coin and compare his point of view.
13. Correcting Mistakes
  - Cool off (but not too long).
  - Talk with the member privately.
  - As why; get all the facts; make sure a correction is required.
  - If it is, be sure to talk straight. Show the member the seriousness of the mistake.
  - Build confidence by showing the member how to avoid recurrence.
  - Encourage him to remain an effective part of the committee.
14. Adjusting Workers to New Situations (New Members)
  - Talk to the member privately; welcome him to the committee.
  - Ask questions to determine his level of experience and to determine ways which he can benefit the committee.
  - Explain objectives of the committee and its current projects.
  - Introduce him to all other committee members. (if not already known)
  - Be sure to answer any questions he may have.

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## 15. Developing New Workers

- Assign the new member specific responsibilities.
- Allow him to feel he is providing a needed function.
- Assist him in his attempt to "learn the ropes."
- Ensure that he becomes involved in committee activity to a point where he can effectively fill in as chairman if required.

## 16. Obtaining Cooperation

- Provide the complete details of necessity for assistance.
- Ask for assistance, don't demand it.
- Let the members make decisions.
- Talk in terms of what the committee, or the society, needs or expects, not what you want.
- Express hearty appreciation for the member's efforts, both past and present.