

An Alternative to Robert's Rules by Del Suggs

Mention *Robert's Rules of Order* to any assembled group, and you will get a collective groan.

Robert's Rules is a part of our lives as leaders-- it's even written into the bylaws of most organizations. When presenting my leadership development program "Recreating Your Organization," I'm often asked if there is an alternative to "Roberts Rules."

Yes, there is.

Many organizations across the country are adopting a meeting process called "Consensus." It's effective and efficient for most groups, and it doesn't require the learning curve of "Robert's Rules" for new members.

"Robert's Rules" was first published in 1870, and incorporated the so-called parliamentary procedure as used by Congress. It was presented as the best way to run a meeting. Perhaps it is the best way to run large meetings, conventions, Congress, and other rowdy assemblies. But for smaller groups, it's rather confusing with its formal motions, debates, precedence of some motions over others, and more.

Consensus is a simplified method of discussing an issue and reaching an agreement. It is important to understand that consensus doesn't mean that everyone be in agreement. It does mean that everyone has to be

willing to accept the agreement that is reached.

It works like this: an idea is brought to the floor. It doesn't have to be a motion, or even a formal proposal-- just an idea. The idea is discussed, and likely it will be improved from the input of others. When a general agreement appears, you test for consensus by stating the current version of the idea. If everyone agrees, you've reached consensus. If there is dissension, then you can continue the discussion until a more acceptable version is reached. When you've reached consensus, or when there is a willingness to accept the current proposal, then-- in those familiar parliamentary terms-- the "motion is approved."

In reality, this may likely be the way your organization already operates. And, after you've already reached consensus, you revert back to parliamentary rules, asking for someone to make a formal motion, a second, and then calling for a vote to make it "official." If you were using Consensus, it would already be done.

Mark Shepard has an excellent introduction to Consensus here: <http://www.markshep.com/nonviolence/Consensus.html>
Then, if you like the concept, there is another, more formalized guidelines available here: http://web.mit.edu/publicdisputes/practice/cbh_ch1.html

Check this out, and see this alternative to *Robert's Rules of Order* doesn't make more sense for your organization.

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