

call to order

The Rules of Decorum

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As was discussed in last month's column, *Robert's Rules of Order* does much more than provide guidance on the handling of motions. It provides guidance on how we conduct ourselves at meetings by providing rules of decorum.

Members may discuss the consequences of a proposal but must avoid personalities and never question a member's motives. Members must refrain from attacking another member's motives. The proposal, not the member, is the subject of the debate.

While serving on the town board, I supported a conditional use permit for a blacktop plant and a rezone for a mineral extraction site. Another member accused me of supporting the proposal because my brother owned a trucking company. That member was out of order. The question before the town board was whether this project was good for the town, not why I supported it. The member questioned my motives. If the member thought I had a conflict of interest, they should have raised that as a separate issue.

A member may disagree with a statement made by another member but should never use the words "is false," "liar," "fraud," or "lie."

Members of an assembly must address all remarks through the chair and cannot address one another directly. If a member has a question of another member, they must address the chair and the chair must ask the other member if they want to respond. It is improper to address the television cameras when televised; or, when sitting in the front row of

a large board, to turn around and address the body or to address the gallery when there is a large citizen attendance. A member should always address the chair.

Avoid the use of member's names during debate. Whenever possible, refer to other members as supervisor (last name), or *the supervisor from district one*, or *the previous speaker* or *the chair of the finance committee*. Using first names can personalize the debate when the discussion gets heated and can create a public appearance of a "good old boys club." Maintaining a sense of formality increases the stature of the body.

Always refer to the presiding officer as Mr. or Madame chair. The chair should refer to himself in the third person such as *the chair rules* or *the chair is of the opinion*, etc. The chair should never refer to a member by using *you*.

Members must refrain from speaking adversely on prior action not pending. Debate must be germane or related to the topic at hand.

Sometimes after debate, the maker of the motion changes his mind and now opposes. A member may vote against his own motion but may not speak against it.

A member has no right to read from any paper or book as part of their speech without permission from the assembly. Members are permitted to read short, pertinent, printed extracts in debate as long as they do not abuse the privilege. If there is a need, the member should ask the chair, "If there is no objection, I would like to read this short excerpt or paragraph."

If at any time the presiding officer addresses the body to make a ruling, give information or otherwise speak within his privilege, any member who is speaking should be seated or step back from the microphone until the presiding officer has finished. The member may resume his speech once the chair has finished.

No member is permitted to disturb the assembly by whispering, walking across the floor or in any other way. The key words are “disturbing the assembly.” If members have the need to talk to others during a meeting or need to use the facilities they should move for a short recess.

The presiding officer should relinquish the chair when participating in debate. The chair is presumed to be impartial while presiding over the meeting. If the chair wishes to participate in the debate, they

must relinquish the chair to the vice chair or second vice chair. They may not return until the matter is disposed of because they are no longer considered to be impartial. In small boards and committees the chair may speak as often as they want without relinquishing his position.

Normally debate is not permitted unless a formal motion is before the body. However, it is permissible for the chair to assist a member in framing the proper motion. It is also permissible to provide a brief explanation before making a motion. If a member wishes to make a motion such as *Lay on the Table*, it may be necessary to provide a brief explanation as to the purpose in order to get a second.

Most bodies do not follow Robert’s to the letter of the law, but the more you can the more effective and efficient your meetings will become.

Source: Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 11th Edition

Dear Sam,
The pressure you're putting me under is too much.
I QUIT!
Sincerely,
Your Heart

Don't let your heart quit on you. If you are living with high blood pressure, just knowing and doing the minimum isn't enough. Uncontrolled high blood pressure could lead to stroke, heart attack or death.

Get yours to a healthy range before it's too late. Find out how at heart.org/BloodPressure



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