

Four Unfortunate Misconceptions Promoted by Members

Misconception #1:

If a motion to perform Task A is defeated, the association has adopted a motion to not perform Task A.

If an assembly defeats a motion to support the Clay Pigeon's habitat, it does not mean that the assembly has adopted a motion against the Clay Pigeon's habitat. The defeat of this motion merely states that the society has expressed an opinion on this topic. The opinion is that the society is not in favor of supporting the Clay Pigeon's habitat at this session. It is not an opinion against ever supporting the habitat.

In conventional conversational English, when people do not decide in favor of accepting an option, they have decided against accepting that option. In parliamentary talk, the defeat of a motion does not follow the same logic. In parliamentary talk, a defeat merely means that an approval failed. The defeated motion would still be in order at a later session.

Actually, the defeated motion could still be in order even at the current session. A motion that has been previously considered, and not adopted, may be reintroduced on the same session if it becomes substantially a different question because of a difference in time or circumstances in which it is proposed. RONR (10th ed.), p.325, l. 12-17.

The difference between adopting a motion and defeating a motion can best be illustrated with what RONR allows subsequent to each of these voting results.

Let us say that a motion "to purchase 3 gavels" was defeated.

Let us test the possibility that a defeat of this motion means an adoption of a prohibition related to the purchase of 3 gavels. If at a later session, we choose to renew the defeated motion to purchase 3 gavels, we would be confronted with RONR's limitations on the introduction of a motion when another motion is still in effect. RONR (10th ed.), p.106, l. 30-32.

If the defeated motion meant an adoption of a motion to prohibit the purchase, we would not be able to introduce the motion to purchase again since the adoption of the motion to prohibit is still in effect. But, RONR does allow the introduction of a defeated motion at a later session. So, RONR does not expect the members to perceive a defeated motion as an adoption of a prohibition of any kind.

And yet, we hear members insist that once a motion to perform a particular task is defeated, the society may neither perform that task, nor move a different motion associated with the performance of that task.

Misconception #2:

The definition of a “Small” board is 12 members or less.

If a board of less than 12 members attempts to conduct business with the formality that is necessary for large assemblies, business would be hindered. RONR recommends, as long as it is practical, a less strict adherence to the rules. RONR (10th ed.), p.469, l. 22-24.

However, if one reads carefully (RONR (10th ed.), p.470, l. 17- p. 471, l. 11), the deciding factor is not the number 12, but rather the hindrance of conducting business.

Proof of this is in the choice of some of the words,

1. Members are **not required** to obtain the floor...
2. Motions **need not** be second...
3. Motions to limit debate **generally should not** be entertained...
4. A **vote can be taken without a motion**...
5. The chair **may speak in debate**...usually **can make motions ...usually votes** on all questions.

Clearly the words “not required”, “need not”, “generally should not”, and “may” do not imply that a group of 12 or less is obligated to relax the association’s rules. Actually, the group cannot insist on a right to relax the rules. Though a relaxed procedure in small boards is permitted, the option to strictly adhere to the rules is always in order.

So instead of looking at the magic number 12, we should remember that what most hinders business is the nature of the business and the members’ attitudes. A more pertinent question before deciding to relax the rules in a board is whether or not the meeting is contentious, controversial, or combative.

Regrettably, the smaller the group, the louder it will defend its option to forgo parliamentary procedure claiming that parliamentary procedure is an obstacle to results. And yet, repeatedly we witness small groups be stifled by a lack of structure. Small groups are the best examples of the antithesis of efficiency. Most small groups debate aimlessly and endlessly. Tempers flair, trust erodes, and unyielding alliances are cemented. Debate is monopolized by bullies, great ideas are trampled, and creativity is squashed.

The solution is to understand that the word “small” in reference to boards refers to “small” level of contention, controversy, and combativeness. The board members should consider that relaxed rules are a reward for cooperation, and not the power inherent in being a board member.

**Misconception #3:
A quarterly time interval is 90 days.**

In conventional conversational English, a quarterly time interval is 90 days. In parliamentary talk, a quarterly time interval may exceed 120 days.

Except through the use of certain motions, most business cannot be handled beyond the parliamentary quarterly time interval. Some of the exceptions that can handle business beyond the parliamentary quarterly time interval are the following motions: to refer, to rescind, to amend something previously adopted, to discharge a committee, or to deal with some points of order related to a breach of a continuing nature.

Societies that meet every three months incorrectly believe that they exceed the quarterly time interval. But the parliamentary definition of a quarterly time interval is not based on a number of days. It is based on the second session occurring on any day of the month that is three months after the first session. RONR (10th ed.), p.88, l. 2-13.

For example: The first meeting occurs on June 1st. Three months later is September 1st. But the definition states that the second session may fall anywhere in the second month, and still be within the quarterly time interval.

So, if the second session falls on September 30th, the second session qualifies as occurring within the quarterly time interval. There are 122 days between June 1st and September 30th.

**Misconception #4:
Robert's Rules are rules and not guidelines.**

In several cases, RONR itself assures us of the contrary. A presiding officer will do well to bear in mind that no rules can take the place of tact and common sense. RONR (10th ed.), p.433, l. 20-22. Common sense should guide the presiding officer in interpreting the rules, both to give freedom for improvement of the main motion and to protect the assembly. RONR (10th ed.), p.133, l. 26-30.

Here is a common situation. A society cannot attract enough members to its annual meeting to reach a quorum. The annual meeting is the only time when the bylaws can be amended to reduce the quorum. The bylaws do not allow for voting by mailing or by proxy. Without a quorum no business may be conducted. The choice here is either the society dissolves or some rules will have to be broken. In this case, even General Robert chose common sense over some of his own rules where he advises, "While voting by mail is not allowed, ...yet this rule must be broken in order to comply with the spirit of an unwise bylaw."
(Robert 1923, 452)

Every entry in RONR is based on common sense. If we look at the hierarchy of motions, there is no ranking that is more logical than the current one. If we look at the characteristics of motions we see that a great deal of thought went into deciding which motions need the right to be amended and which do not. Any motion that RONR characterizes as not debatable defeats its purpose if debate were to be allowed.

By their function alone, it would be nonsensical to mix the privileged and the incidental motions. Voting levels of majority vs. 2/3 vs chair-decides could not be more reasonable. With few exceptions any motion important enough with which to interrupt a speaker generally does not need a second.

Clearly, RONR is sound judgment itemized as a set of rules which any society can customize to its members' benefit.

Invariably, we witness members expound on the superficial nature of the written rule by promoting these four unfortunate misconceptions. These members then conclude that parliamentary procedure is an obstacle. The misinformed member deprives his society of the true purpose of parliamentary procedure – a reliable means to an equitable and productive meeting solution.

Bibliography

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