

Use of Robert's Rules of Order by Unit 503 of the ACBL

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This document contains relevant excerpts from Robert's Rules of order in relation to the Constitution and Bylaws of Unit 503 of the ACBL. These excerpts are taken verbatim from Robert's Rules. These excerpts are meant to emphasize the spirit of Robert's Rules of Order.

These excerpts describe the principles behind the rules. These principles are not always understood by new board members. Since these principles are fundamental to good decision making, relevant excerpts from Robert's Rules of Order are shown here:

The basic principles behind Robert's Rules or Order are:

- Someone has to facilitate or direct the discussion and keep order.
- All members of the group have the right to bring up ideas, discuss them, and come to a conclusion.
- Members should come to an agreement about what to do.

Members should understand that the majority rules, but the rights of the minority are always protected by assuring them the right to speak and to vote.

APPLYING DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES TO ORGANIZATIONS

For an organization to survive and grow, the democratic model has proved to be the best form of government because it makes use of the talents and abilities of all the members. Organizations are democratic to the extent that they conform in the following ways:

- The members rule through a decision making process that they've established by a vote. The organization's governing documents: its constitution, bylaws, rules of order, standing rules, policy statements, and parliamentary authority (such as Robert's Rules of Order) embody this process. This is government by the consent of the governed.
- Ideas come from the members and are presented to the assembly to decide upon. Everyone gets the right to present, speak to, and vote on ideas.
- Leaders come from the people through an election process. When a leader's term of office ends, he or she returns to the people. A hierarchy of power doesn't exist; it is shared equally. All members have the right to be considered for office.
- Checks and balances between the leadership and the members are established in the governing documents. As an example of checks and balances, officers and boards of directors have only the power that the governing documents assign to them. Those powers not specifically given to officers and boards in the bylaws enable members to reverse decisions made by boards and officers. For example, if the bylaws do not say that the board or officers can set dues, and the board votes to do this, then the members can rescind the action. Another check and balance that the bylaws give is the right of the membership to remove ineffective or tyrannical leaders from office.
- All members are equal. They have equal rights and responsibilities.

- The organization is run with impartiality and fairness. Laws and enactment rule the organization, not the whims of the leadership. The rules are applied equally, impartially, and fairly to all and not just a select few.
- There is equal justice under the law; members and officers have a right to a fair trial if accused. Written procedures exist for removing and replacing an officer when the officer doesn't fulfill his or her duties.
- The majority rules, but the rights of the minority and absent members are protected
- Everything is accomplished in the spirit of openness, not secrecy. Members have the right to know what is going on within the organization by attending meetings, inspecting the official records, and receiving notices and reports from committees, officers, and boards.
- Members have the right to resign from office or from the organization.

For a democracy to succeed, the members must work harmoniously together. To accomplish this, each member must know the purpose and goals of the organization, its rules, the rights of each individual member, and what each member is expected to do. One of the greatest threats to a democratic organization is for the members to become apathetic and let a small group of the membership do all the work. This creates divisions and promotes authoritarianism. Another threat is for a small group to work secretly behind the scenes to accomplish its own goals or its own agenda and then push it through without the rest of the membership having an input either through discussion or through the investigative process. Such actions cause mistrust and hostility.

E. 2. Robert's Rules of Order recommends against doing business by email as it is a closed forum. Consequently, Unit business shall not be conducted by email.

Here is an excerpt from the section on Electronic Meetings in Robert's Rules of Order:

Many organizations today have officers and members scattered across the globe and choose to conduct meetings via the telephone, email, or videoconferencing. Remember that the reason organizations have meetings is so members can hear about issues, respond to what others are saying, and give suggestions to evaluate them all at the same time. Telephone and video conferencing meetings allow members the means to accomplish these goals. If members want to hold telephone or video conferencing meetings, the bylaws must include a special provision. Members should adopt rules of order concerning basic parliamentary procedure about how to attain the floor, make motions, and handle the debate in telephone and video conferencing meetings.

However, meeting via email or electronic chat room does not allow members to fully participate in the democratic process. Many organizations today try this approach to meetings and find that it creates confusion rather than order. They have difficulty keeping order, having members understand where they are in the process, and getting business done.