

## Robert's Rules of Order

### **Background**

Our meetings are conducted by Robert's Rules of Order however the Constitution of Grand Chapter and the chapter by-laws take precedence. Some aspects of properly run Masonic bodies are in conflict with regular parliamentary procedure: The ruling of the presiding officer can be overturned by a vote of the members, in a Chapter any action that infringes on the authority or rights of the Z. is out of order. There is no appeal from any decision of the Z. makes, this is unlike many non-Masonic organizations, a decision made by the Z. is only reversible by the Grand Chapter or the Grand First Principal.

### **When a motion is made**

The fact that a motion has been made and seconded does NOT put it before the chapter, as the Z. alone can do that. He must either rule it out of order or state the question. Until a motion is stated or ruled out of order, companions may suggest modifications and mover has right to make such modifications or even to withdraw the motion. After question is stated by Z. he can do neither without consent of the chapter. A little informal consultation before the question is stated often saves time.

### **Obtaining the Floor**

A member must rise before the floor can be yielded, salute and respectfully address the Z. The Z. will recognize him, or 'assign him the floor' by announcing his name. It is out of order to be standing when another has the floor. A Companion who has brought a question before the chapter (submitted a report or made a motion) is entitled to be recognized as having the floor even though another has risen first. Z. should alternate the floor between companions who are for or against a motion giving preference to one opposed to the last speaker.

### **Motions and Resolutions**

Z. has the right to require any motion, amendment, or instructions from a committee to be in writing. Motions requiring notice as per the Constitution must be in writing and received by the Chapter during a stated meeting and held over, without debate, in order for due notice to be given to the membership.

### **Seconding Motions**

As a general rule every motion should be seconded. This is to prevent time being consumed in considering a question that only one person favours. If no one steps forward to second, Z. may ask "Is the motion seconded?" A motion is seconded by a companion saying "I second the motion", which he does without obtaining the floor. Examples of motions NOT requiring a second are; Objection to the Consideration of a Question; Call for Division of the Chapter (in voting); Nominations; Leave to Withdraw a Motion; or Inquiries of any kind.

### **Stating the Question**

When a motion has been moved and seconded, it is the duty of the Z., unless he rules it out of order, immediately to state the question. If the question is debatable or amendable, the Z. should immediately ask for comments or discussion on the motion.

## **Debate**

All resolutions, reports of committees, communications of the chapter, and all amendments proposed to them and all other motions except the un-debatable Motions, may be debated. Examples of an un-debatable motion are: Objection to the Consideration of a Question, Suspension of the Rules or To Lay on the Table.

Debate must be limited to the merits of the immediately pending question – that is, the last question stated by the Z. Speakers must address their remarks to the Z., be courteous, and avoid all personalities, never alluding to the officers or companions by name, nor to the motives of the companion making the motion.

In a debate each companion has the right to speak twice on the same question, but cannot make a second speech on the same question as long as any companion who has not spoken on that question desires the floor.

No one should speak longer than ten minutes at a time without permission of the Z.

The companion upon whose motion the subject was brought before the chapter is entitled to close the debate with a speech, if he has not previously exhausted his twenty minutes.

## **Secondary Motions**

To assist in the proper disposal of a question, secondary motions are used such as to amend or to commit, etc. The subsidiary motion replaces the resolution or motion and becomes the immediately pending question.

## **Putting the Question and Announcing the Vote**

When the debate appears to have closed, the Z. asks again, "Are you ready for the question?" If no one rises he proceeds to "put the question" – that is, to take a vote on the question.

In putting the question the Z. should make perfectly clear what the question is that the chapter is to decide.

Example of putting the question on an amendment: "The question is on amending the motion by inserting the word 'oak' before the word 'desk'. Those in favor of the amendment signify in the usual Masonic manner; those opposed. If those in favor have it and the amendment is adopted.

The question is now on the motion as amended which is as follows... Then, "Are you ready for the question?"

## **Reception and Acceptance of Reports**

When called upon, the reporting member rises and addresses the Z., and when recognized, reads the report and hands it to the Z. or Scribe E., and when necessary, moves its adoption or acceptance.

A very common error is, after a report has been read, to move that it be received, whereas the fact that it has been read shows that it has already been received by the chapter.

If the report contains only a statement of fact or opinion for the information of the chapter, the reporting companion makes no motion for its disposal, as there is no necessity for action on the report. But if any action is taken, the proper motion, which should be made by someone else, is to "accept the report", which has the effect of endorsing the statement and making the chapter assume responsibility for it.

If it is a financial report, as in the case of the Treasurer, it should be referred to an auditing or finance committee, as the vote to accept the report does not endorse the accuracy of the figures, for the chapter can only be sure of that by having the report audited. Whenever such a financial report is made, the Z., without any motion, should say it is referred to the finance committee or auditors.

If the report is from the investigation committee of a candidate, the Z. at once states the question on the reception of the candidate recommended by the committee.

### **Hints to the First Principal**

It is vitally important to control the debate and maintain harmony within a chapter. If a particular question is contentious or polarizing, the motion should be immediately tabled and be discussed at a later date or by a committee before being presented to the chapter. The chairman of a committee usually has the most to say in reference to questions before the committee; but the Z. of a chapter, especially a large one, should of all the companions, have the least to say upon the merits of pending questions.

All voting in a Chapter will be by a show of hands except in cases where the Constitution requires a ballot or where the Chapter, by show of hands, decides that the vote will be by ballot.

Remember that parliamentary law was made for chapters, and not the chapters for parliamentary law. This is well expressed by a distinguished English writer on parliamentary law, "*The great purpose of all rules and forms is to subserve the will of the body rather than to restrain it; to facilitate, and not to obstruct, the expression of their deliberate sense.*"

### **Something to think about**

Carl Claudy in *The Master's Book* notes the following: "*No motion to 'lay on the table', 'to postpone', 'to adjourn', 'to close', for 'unanimous consent for a companion to speak', for 'the previous question' should ever be entertained, much less put. It is only for the Master [Z.] to say whether this subject is to be discussed now or later.*"

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Grand Third Principal  
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#### Sources:

Ex.Comp. Robert Kliaman, Oakwood Chapter No. 233, for his assistance and guidance  
Robert's Rules of Order, Masonic Edition, Michael R. Poll  
The Master's Book, Carl H. Claudy