

# Skills Savvy | *Tips for Conducting a Stellar Board Meeting*

Nikki Chargois-Allen\*

A strong organization, strong council members, and an aggressive agenda. And they want me to run the meeting? Don't fret. The key to running a successful meeting is being organized, conveying the purpose of the meeting, and keeping it on track. Easy, right? Personalities, interruptions, side conversations, and members not feeling a part of the meeting could lead to a not-so-stellar meeting. Here are five tips on how to keep your meeting running smoothly and get your members engaged.

## 1. **Make Objectives Clear**

Making the objectives of the meeting clear is the best way to get off to a great start. An agenda should be prepared in advance of the meeting and shared, with enough time for the members to review it prior to the meeting. The agenda should be drafted in such a way that the amount of time needed to address each topic is taken into consideration. It is crucial in order to have a smooth meeting that the nuances of the topics that will be addressed and the types of discussions that members might engage in are anticipated in order for time constraints to be met. Time should be allowed for each topic to be thoroughly discussed while still allowing the meeting to end at the predetermined time. The agenda should be organized in such a way that the discussions logically flow. For instance, topics such as technology should be grouped close in time to topics regarding the website, social media, and methods for announcing meetings and events. If similar topics are not grouped on the agenda, discussions will inevitably be repeated when one committee has to address topics similar to topics addressed by other committees. There is no faster way to lose the attention of members than having the same discussion over and over and over again. Members should have a clear understanding of the time commitment that the meeting requires, and that time commitment should be adhered to.

## 2. **Assign Roles**

Pull in different members to have a role in the meeting. Making members feel as if they are needed is the easiest way to encourage members to be active participants and continue to work for the good of the organization. Members who have special roles in the meeting should be notified (*warned*) in advance of the meeting. Nothing like calling on someone during a meeting and receiving the "deer in the headlights" look in return. The members with special roles should understand what will be requested of them, be provided any relevant meeting materials, and have the opportunity, if needed, to brainstorm the objectives of the discussion with you. Having multiple members participate in the meeting also helps to eliminate the possibility of a monotone meeting, resulting in members taking naps. The different tones, rhythms of speech, inflections, and levels of enthusiasm with each new speaker will keep the attention of the members and ward off boredom.

## 3. **Fearlessly Facilitate**

As the leader of the meeting, you are the encourager of discussions, the referee, and the moderator. These roles should not be taken lightly. A speaker who drones on and on can throw a meeting off track in regard to the time constraints and the other members' attention spans. A heated discussion that is out of control can derail the entire meeting. And members not being respectful of the input of other members could result in a loss of respect for the entire group and/or process. A perfect example is the first United States Presidential Debate in 2020. The leader has to be able to gauge when discussions should be ended and/or tabled. Discussions that are lengthy can be sent to committees for review and discussion outside of the meeting time. And, in contradiction to the normal rule of not interrupting when someone is speaking, the

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leader has to be fearless and jump in when necessary in order to control the meeting. The title of “Fearless Leader” is not just casual nomenclature, but a title that needs to be embraced with gusto.

### 4. **The Magic of Robert’s Rules**

*Robert’s Rules of Order* (“Robert’s Rules”) is the best tool for assisting with controlling a meeting. If you are not familiar with or comfortable with Robert’s Rules, appoint someone to be the monitor of the formal progression of the meeting. This is a perfect role for the next president or chair-elect. Robert’s Rules help the members understand that there is an orderly procedure for how matters are presented to the group, debated, and voted on. Robert’s Rules are the most effective way to make sure that all ideas are respected and that there is understanding regarding the approval and disapproval of motions. Cling to Robert’s Rules as if it is your bible.

### 5. **R-E-S-P-E-C-T**

The final, secret ingredient for having a successful meeting is respect. There has to be respect for the members’ time. There has to be respect for the members’ input and discussions. And there has to be respect for the process (e.g., Robert’s Rules). With respect as the guiding force, members should come to know what to expect from the meeting and what is expected from them during the meeting. This knowledge usually carries over to the members being more involved due to understanding how their roles fit into the entire performance.

So, just like this article began, it IS easy, right? Embrace your role fearlessly and call your stellar meeting to order!

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## Skills Savvy | *So You Wanna Run for Office?*

### **Chief Justice-Elect Rebeca C. Martinez\***

When you think about it, the decision to run for office is not that much different than deciding to go to law school or hanging up your own shingle. You might be encouraged, discouraged, advised to wait or to be better prepared. When it comes down to it, the question really becomes how much do you really want it? Like many of you, I was a “first.” I left a firm to start my own law practice and lost my first run for office. I won my next 3 contested races. Each time, I had a strong desire. I made a decision and did what I had to do.

Why? As a judicial law clerk, I was indoctrinated with a reverence for the court. I worked with the very model of an appellate jurist, yet gained only a peripheral view of his political life. Later in private life, I volunteered on campaigns but, in retrospect, held no real desire to run for office. After 20 years of civil and criminal trial work, an opportunity arose. For the first time, I set eyes on a seat at a table where important decisions were made. At first glance, not one justice had a similarly diverse litigation background as I did, so I convinced myself that I could contribute in a positive way. The most important asset I had was knowledge of the job and what it demanded. What I lacked in political experience, like anything else, I made up for in confidence, hard work and perseverance.

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