



**MAKING
MEETINGS
RUN
SMOOTHLY**

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The Role of the Parliamentarian

Before the Meeting: As a parliamentarian, I review an organization's governing documents (constitution, bylaws, etc.), and I discuss with the chair all of the issues that are expected to come up in the meeting. Then I prep the chair on the finer points of proper procedure.

This is when the chair will learn the little tips and tricks to better achieve the desired result, along with achieving a smoother, shorter, and more productive meeting. A big part of parliamentary procedure is reducing the time spent in a meeting and adding clarity to the proceedings.

Presiding Script: To aid the chair, I commonly draft an exact presiding script. This way the presiding officer can stay on track without having to worry about losing his place or forgetting the proper wording in the heat of battle.

During the Meeting: Inside the meeting, I sit right next to the presiding officer and feed him information pertinent to the matter at hand, along with answering any questions that may arise. I generally answer 20 - 50 questions during a meeting, ranging from the very small to the very complex.

Ensuring Compliance: Another job of the parliamentarian is to remind the chair of the little critical points in procedure that can otherwise go overlooked and cause actions to unravel later. For example, I will commonly remind the chair to put the pending question to a vote and to repeat the exact wording of the motion right before taking the vote. Otherwise, disagreement is likely to emerge over what was actually decided.

Adding Clarity: Often, the chair will step aside during a critical moment in the

meeting and say, “The parliamentarian will explain how this works,” or “The parliamentarian will explain this rule.” This allows the presiding officer the comfort of addressing the members’ concerns, without having to admit to not knowing the answer or fumbling around in the rule books searching for help.

Making the Chair Look Good: An important part of my job is to make the presiding officer look good. And this is done by providing quick and clear answers, by anticipating problems before they arise, and by taking the pressure off the chair.

When a member raises a heated question from the floor, and when the crowd starts murmuring with discontent, the chair can feel very alone and very much under the gun. When I see chairs getting this feeling, I see them turn to me for help. And I’m glad to be able to provide them with the answer. Or, if the answer is complex, I offer to explain it directly to the assembly.

Creating Happy Members: While the presiding officer may often feel like the sole beneficiary, I am commonly approached by members after a meeting who appreciatively proclaim that they never understood certain aspects of procedure until I explained it in the meeting, and they have a new confidence in the process.