

## VI.A Serving Effectively as a Board Member

### UNDERSTANDING GROUP DYNAMICS

#### DEFINITIONS:

**Group:** A collection of one or more people who meet somewhat regularly to pursue one or more common goals.

**An Effective Group:** A group that achieves and maintains high levels of task performance and member satisfaction.

**Group Dynamics:** Forces within groups that affect the group's task performance and member satisfaction. The study of behavior in groups.

**Group Think:** A tendency for groups which are highly cohesive to lose their ability to critically evaluate the members' ideas/suggestions.

**Team:** A group with a common mission/purpose, goals and objectives.

#### KEY ELEMENTS OF GROUP DYNAMICS:

- Group Development Phases/Stages:
- "Getting to Know You" Phase
- Working/Middle Phase
- Termination/Final Phase

**Group Norm:** Behavior which is expected of group members and is largely determined by the collective will of the group (e.g., norms regarding: the amount of work to be accomplished each day, arrival time at work, preparedness for meetings)

**Group Cohesiveness:** The degree to which members are attracted to and motivated to remain a part of the group. The more cohesive a group is, the more likely it is to conform to group norms.

### TECHNIQUES FOR A POSITIVE COMMISSION/STAFF Team Relationship

#### Get to Know Each Other

- In order for groups to work together effectively, time must be spent on the "getting to know you" phase of group processes.
- Commissions members should talk with staff to show interest and gain understanding of their responsibilities.
- Getting together "over food" is an easy way to get acquainted. Refreshments prior to commission meetings create an informal atmosphere which allows people to get to know each other.
- Compile a commission/staff manual which includes background about each commission and staff member. Include in it Polaroid pictures to help people call each other by name.
- Provide name tags (written largely) for commission meetings and events.
- An orientation program (including a packet of information regarding the ordinance establishing the commission, policies, procedures, organization chart, strategic plan, roster of commission and staff members, responsibilities of commission and staff, committee descriptions, etc.) should be provided for new commission members and staff.

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### Communicate Clearly

- Communicate openly and honestly. No hidden agendas.
- Clearly define a problem before searching for solutions. If the group doesn't have a common understanding of a problem, it will not be able to agree on the solution(s).
- When trying to find solutions to a problem, brainstorm ideas (writing the suggestions on a flipchart paper so everyone can see them) first and then evaluate them. People will speak much more freely and creatively if they don't have to worry about being criticized as soon as they make their suggestion.
- Clarify expectations and needs which commission and staff have of each other in order to work together effectively.
- Staff and commission should have job descriptions which clearly define their responsibilities.
- Listen without judging.
- Commission and staff should state what they like (or is positive) before stating what they don't like.
- Ask for verbal feedback and be aware of non-verbal communication.
- Realize that what someone intends to say may have a different impact than was expected on the receiver.
- Give positive feedback. Commission and staff should set-up each other for success
- Praise in public. Criticize in private.
- Strategic Planning
- The commission and staff should develop a mission/purpose statement (one sentence) together.
- A vision statement and organizational values also should be part of a strategic plan.
- Identify three-year action-oriented goals (what needs to be done).
- Develop one-year objectives (by when, who will do what) for each of the three-year goals.
- Identify and use a process to monitor the goals and objectives (it should include a brief review of the progress at each commission meeting).
- Review the commission's committees to see if they help achieve the plan. It may be necessary to add some committees and delete others.

### Desired Commission/Staff Relationship

The commission/staff relationship is that of a team/partnership which includes...

- Mutual respect
- Common commitment to the mission/purpose of the commission
- Shared goals and objectives
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Common information
- Clear communication processes

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- Willingness to be open and honest
- Willingness to disagree agreeably
- Process for conflict resolution
- Shared responsibility

### Parliamentary Procedure

- Parliamentary procedure should be used, not abused. Know the rules.
- A motion is a proposed solution to a problem that the group may not have agreed exists. Consequently, don't over-use the introduction of motions.
- Don't be afraid to come to consensus (everyone can support/live with the decision, even if it isn't their favorite idea) and then vote. Consensus brings a group together. The making of motions and taking a vote often polarizes a group—those who are for and those who are against.
- If making a motion, state “I move that...” not “I make a motion that...”
- There has to be a second to motion if an individual makes it, but not if the motion comes from a committee.

\*Whenever the term “commission” is used, it also applies to a governmental board.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMISSION/BOARD MEMBERS

The following are many of the key roles and responsibilities of being a commission/board member:

- Be knowledgeable
- Demonstrate commitment (e.g., regularly attending meetings on time and staying until the end, being prepared, accepting assignments and following through on responsibilities)
- Help identify goals and objectives for the commission/board
- Participate in the ongoing as well as annual evaluation of the commission/board
- Be financially aware and responsible (e.g., understand the budget process)
- Adopt or advise regarding commission/board policies
- Be an advocate for the commission/board and its work
- Communicate openly and honestly
- Use a conflict resolution process that has been agreed upon by the commission/board
- Understand and adhere to the Brown Act
- Be supportive of staff (praise in public and criticize in private)

## AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

When people work together (whether a board, committee, task force, etc.), they are either a:

- **Collection of individuals**—all with their own goals who go their own direction
- **Group**—characterized by a leader with goals which everyone follows

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- **Team**—has clearly expressed/understood expectations of each other and a common mission/purpose, goals and objectives.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

An effective team's members:

- Are committed to the mission/purpose
- Trust each other
- Communicate openly
- Respect each other and individual differences
- Share ideas and feelings
- Deal with conflict as soon as it occurs
- Readily use consensus (may reach consensus and then take a vote rather than making motions and voting initially)
- Talk positively about the organization, team, and each other
- Frequently use, "we," "us" and "our" rather than "I," "me" and "mine"
- Praise each other with specific, descriptive examples
- Follow-through and if they can't then say so in the beginning
- Respect each other's time

### AN EFFECTIVE MEETING LEADER'S CHECKLIST CLEARLY

STATE WHEN OPENING THE MEETING:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Purpose of the meeting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Length of the meeting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your role
- \_\_\_\_\_ What is expected of the participants
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ground rules
- \_\_\_\_\_ Decision making process (e.g., consensus, vote by majority rule, or consensus followed by a vote)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Where meeting fits into related events
- \_\_\_\_\_ Review of the agenda (if a new item is introduced into an already full agenda, ask the group if they want to extend the meeting time, delete another item or defer the issue to another time/meeting)

DURING THE MEETING:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Be aware of your body language:
  - Use open hand/body gestures
  - Lean forward
  - Scan the group repeatedly to be aware of the body-language/non-verbal cues of others
  - Maintain eye contact
  - Avoid frowning/grimacing while others are talking

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\_\_\_\_\_ Remember to:

- Listen carefully (listening is the physical act of hearing with an attempt at understanding what you hear)
- Question for clarity, development and understanding of ideas
- Summarize periodically and check for accuracy
- Acknowledge your feeling after others have had a chance to state theirs
- Accept other's ideas without immediately indicating agreement/disagreement
- Use "I" statements when you are expressing what you feel
- Bring one agenda item to closure before proceeding to the next item
- Deflect questions to others in the group rather than giving all the answers yourself
- Avoid overuse/abuse of parliamentary procedure (it's ok to discuss an item or even reach consensus before putting it in the form of a motion)
- Acknowledge/praise contributions to a successful meeting (e.g., presenters giving a good report within their allotted time)
- Avoid talking too much and being defensive
- Bring a discussion back on focus (even if there is interest in the discussion, question its relevance to the purpose of the meeting within two or three minutes)
- Get the group to agree on one of the following solutions when it is apparent that the meeting is going to continue past the agreed-upon ending:
  - Shorten another agenda item
  - Skip another agenda item
  - Extend the closure to a specific time

AT THE END OF THE MEETING:

\_\_\_\_\_ Summarize actions taken

\_\_\_\_\_ Establish "next steps" and assign accountability (by when, who will do what)

\_\_\_\_\_ Acknowledge/praise the investment of time and energy by the group

\_\_\_\_\_ Set or announce (if a regularly scheduled meeting) the purpose, time, and location of the next meeting

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#### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING

Do we agree that there is a problem?

Do we all agree what the problem is? Would someone state the problem for the group?

What I am hearing is... Is that an accurate reading of the group?

Have we determined the problem or a symptom of the problem?

What do we agree are the causes of the problem?

Given our definition of the problem and its causes, what are some solutions to consider?

How are we going to evaluate the alternatives?

What are the consequences, probability of success, value, and risk of each alternative?

What is the priority ranking of the alternatives?

Are we ready to make a decision?

How and when are we going to evaluate the results of our action?

#### EVALUATION PHASE QUESTIONS

Why did the solution work or not work?

What were the most positive outcomes from the action that was taken?

What didn't work well regarding the action we took?

Were there major problems that resulted from the action? Why did they occur?

What constructive action can we take to remedy the problems now?

#### TWO MAJOR PROBLEM SOLVING PRINCIPLES

***A group will not agree on a solution if they are unable to agree on the definition of the problem.***

***Be certain the group is in agreement on one problem solving phase before moving to the next phase***

#### DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE IN A MEETING

The following suggestions may help you deal with difficult people in a meeting. The approaches will not always work and may not fit your style of dealing with people. If you are not comfortable saying something that is suggested, don't say it.

**LATECOMER** Do not confront this person when he/she comes in late. Neither should you take time to review material you have covered as it penalizes those who have arrived on time. Instead, have an agenda posted at the front of the room with items checked off as you complete them so the latecomer(s) can see readily what is being discussed.

Focus on the meeting away from the door so the latecomer(s) are not disruptive when they enter. Ask yourself if you are the cause of late arrivals. Do you always start the meetings on time? Are your meetings necessary, interesting, and efficient, or a waste of time?

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<b>EARLY LEAVER</b>	<p>At the beginning of the meeting when you review the agenda, check to be certain that everyone can stay until the end. If not, find out when he/she needs to leave.</p> <p>If many people need to leave early, adjust the ending time of the meeting. Otherwise as each person leaves, it is like water draining out of a bathtub. The energy of/for the meeting disappears!</p> <p>If you are the meeting leader, ask yourself if you are the cause of the early leavers. Are the meetings too long, uninteresting, or too unstructured?</p>
<b>DOMINATOR</b>	<p>During the discussion, I will not be calling on anyone a second time until everyone who wishes to speak has had a chance to speak once.”</p> <p>“In order to give everyone an opportunity to participate, I may not call on people in order if others have not had a chance to speak and wish to do so.”</p> <p>“Thank you George.What suggestions do you have Joan?”</p> <p>“How many of you would like to continue discussing this topic? Since others wish to move on, perhaps you and I can talk about this at the break.”</p>
<b>SILENT MEMBER</b>	<p>“Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet.”</p> <p>“What do some of the rest of you think who have not spoken?”</p> <p>Small group discussions prior to large group interaction can help the silent members speak- up and try out his/her ideas.</p>
<b>RAMBLER</b>	<p>“As you share your comments, please be as specific as you can about how your ideas relate to the topic.” (Stated to the entire group before a discussion begins.)</p> <p>“Thank you for your comments, Jennifer. I need to move on to the next item on the agenda in order to keep us on time.”</p>
<b>OFF-SUBJECT</b>	<p>“What do you see as the relationship between what you are saying and the issue we are discussing?” (be particularly careful about your tone of voice)</p> <p>“Thank you for your input, Bob.” (Quickly move on to avoid embarrassing the person.)</p>
<b>DOUBTING</b>	<p>“Who else agrees with Tom’s misgivings about the process that is being used?”</p>
<b>THOMAS</b>	<p>“You’ve clearly expressed your concerns, Sue. Wait until all the other ideas are expressed and then everyone will have a chance to evaluate them.”</p>

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#### CHRONIC DISAGREER

Recognize that “devil’s advocates” can be very helpful as long as they are not always the same person (then they tend to get ignored). In order to avoid “group think,” a variety of people in a group should question periodically what the group is doing. Particularly when a team works together for a long time, it is too easy to “go along with the crowd to get along with the crowd.”

“What other viewpoints are there regarding the solution we are discussion?”

#### HOSTILE

Often the hostile/aggressive person is not personally angry with you. You just happen to be a handy target for their anger. Act calmly and non-defensively. Since feelings are contagious, your calmness may help reduce the other person’s anger. Avoid arguing with someone who is angry.

I know you are upset. Please describe the problem as specifically as you can and perhaps the group will be able to solve it.”

#### GIVING FEEDBACK

In the communication process, it is critical to give and ask for feedback. If you do not give feedback to the sender of a message, he/she does not know whether you understood what he/she intended to say. On the other hand, if you do not request feedback, you may not get it and so not know how your message was interpreted.

Gale Giebler, Ph. D., gives the following criteria for useful feedback:

- ***It is descriptive rather than evaluative***
- ***It is specific rather than general***
- ***It takes into account the needs of both the receiver and the giver of the feedback***
- ***It is directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about***
- ***It is solicited rather than imposed***
- ***It is well-timed***

Feedback is most useful when given at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior has happened. On the other hand, if it is constructive criticism, it needs to take into account whether or not anyone else is around (criticize in private) and the person’s ability to take in the information.

- ***It is checked to be sure the sender has communicated clearly with the receiver of the message***

#### STEPS TO A MOTION

From: Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised:

1. Member # 1 addresses the chair, “Madam/Mister Chairman.”
2. Chair recognizes Member #1



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3. Member #1 introduces the motion, "I move that..."
4. Member #2 seconds the motion, "I second the motion." No second is needed if the motion is a result of a committee's recommendation. At this point, the motion is still the property of the "maker and the "seconder" of the motion.
5. Options of the chair:
  - i. The chair may make a statement such as the following, "I hear your concern about the problem and in view of our full agenda (the complexity of the problem or whatever deferred) and if there are no objections, I would like to refer this to a committee."
  - ii. Chair states the motion as soon as it is seconded. The motion now becomes the property of the 'assembly.'
6. The chair calls for discussion.
  - i. The chair may call for discussion as soon as the motion has been seconded. In this case, the rules of debate apply (pro and con speakers must alternate and no one may speak a second time until everyone has had a chance to speak once who wishes to do so).
7. Call for the vote.
  - i. The chair may ask, "Are you ready for the question?"
  - ii. A member of the assembly may state, "I call for the question." This really means, "I move the previous question and wish to close debate."
  - iii. The chair then says, "If there are no objections, we will vote on the motion." iv. If there are objections to closing debate, there must be:
    1. A second to "call for the question."
    2. A 2/3rds vote of the members to close debate
8. Chair restates Member #1's motion
9. Members vote and then chair announces vote.

### CRITERIA FOR AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

- Physical Set-Up Conducive to Interaction
- Clear, Agreed-Upon Agenda (distributed in advance of the meeting)
- Clear Ground Rules, Roles, and Responsibilities
- Clear Beginning and End (on time)
- Timed Agenda (time indicated about every 15 minutes)
  - Common Focus on Content
  - Common Focus on Process
  - Opportunity for All to Participate
  - Someone (usually the chair or an outside facilitator) Responsible for Protecting Individuals from Personal, Verbal attack
  - Someone (usually the chair) Responsible for Maintaining an Open, Even Flow/Pace
  - Everyone Well Prepared

### VI.B Effective Commissioners

#### EFFECTIVE COMMISSIONERS

##### DO

1. Talk with staff about major issues and questions prior to public meetings
2. Support staff even though you may not agree with their viewpoint or information
3. Have an open mind to other commissioner's thoughts even if you rarely agree with them
4. Take a broad based view of community interests
5. Spend time on policy issues
6. Clarify the decision to be made, if necessary
7. Reflect on previous actions in order to maintain consistency
8. Have an awareness of staff's strengths, and weaknesses and biases
9. Separate fact from opinion
10. Define the role of the Chairperson
11. Put your issues on the table
12. Read agenda staff reports before the meeting

##### DON'T

1. Surprise staff with questions or issues which require preparation
2. Question staff's expertise or issues which require preparation
3. Block out statements by a commissioner with views contrary to yours
4. Represent a constituency
5. Tackle the technical and administrative issues
6. Not know or ask what has to be decided
7. Act on matters without considering precedents
8. Take staff's view as gospel
9. Confuse fact with opinion
10. Refuse to discuss or let discussion evolve haphazardly
11. Work from a hidden agenda
12. "Wing it" at the meeting