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NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

Committees That Work!

October 23, 2017

This session:

- **Committee structures**
- **What makes a good committee**
- **Effective committee meetings**
- **The use of committee charters**
- **Best practices for great committees**

What is a committee?

A committee is a body of one or more persons appointed or elected by an assembly or society [*or Board*] to consider, or investigate, or take action in regard to certain matters or subjects, or to do all of these things.

- Robert's Rules of Order

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What is a committee?

A committee is a group that keeps minutes and loses hours.

- Milton Berle, Comedian and Actor

A committee is a cul-de-sac down which ideas are lured and then quietly strangled.

- Sir Barnett Cocks,
Clerk of the House of Commons

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Committees:
where good ideas go to sleep
...or worse

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We were chosen to be on the
committee!

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Why form a committee?

Committees make effective and efficient use of time and resources by having the right small group

- **investigate issues and identify pros and cons of various options**
- **develop proposals for action**
- **implement decisions as delegated**

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Board Responsibilities

- **Duty of Care**
- **Duty of Loyalty**
- **Duty of Obedience**

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Committee Structure

- **Standing Committees**
 - Deal with ongoing issues
 - Last indefinitely

- **Ad Hoc Committees**
 - Created to accomplish a specific objective
 - Within a specific timeframe
 - Disband when work is done

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Committee Structure

- **Unique to each organization**
- **Simple and flexible**
- **Bylaws (less is more)**
- **Limit number of committees to only those needed
(supplement with ad hoc committees/task forces)**

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Committee Structure

Types of Committees

- **Board Committees**
- **Organizational Committees**

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Committee Structure

Board Committees

- **Help do the work of the Board (governance)**
- **Take on policy and strategic work**
- **Help the Board fulfill its oversight and policymaking roles**
- **Report to the Board**

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Committee Structure

Organizational committees

- **Help do the work of the organization (operations)**
- **Work on issues that usually are part of the staff's responsibility**
- **Help in program implementation.**
- **Work with staff or (for small orgs) take on role of staff**
- **Report to the staff**

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What makes a good committee?

- **Purpose**
- **People**
- **Process**

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Purpose

- **Why is the committee being created?**
- **What is the relationship to the organization's mission, strategies and priorities?**
- **What is the benefit to the Board and organization?**
- **What are the committee's goal(s)?**

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Process

- **Clarity about role**
- **Specific objectives and deadlines**
- **Annual schedule of meetings**
- **Agreed-upon committee norms**
- **Job descriptions for members**
- **Orientation for new committee members**

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Process (*continued*)

- **Committee reference book**
- **Thorough, timely information to members -- and to Board**
- **Tie the work back to the organization's mission**
- **Regular review of committee performance and structure**

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People

- **Diversity of skills, knowledge, perspective**
- **Size – not too small, not too large**
- **Recruitment - Why me?**
- **Opportunities for learning, leadership**
- **Everyone participates but no one is overloaded**

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People (*continued*)

- Operate as a team
- No more than 2 committees per person
- Recognition – individuals and group
- Celebrate accomplishments
- Remove deadwood

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People: Committee members

Qualities of effective committee members:

- Commitment to mission
- Time to invest
- Understanding of committee's role
- Interested in work of committee
- Ability to compromise
- Responsible
- Strong work ethic
- Excellent interpersonal, communications and listening skills

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People: Committee Chair

Qualities of an effective committee chair:

- Leadership
- Diplomacy
- Enthusiasm
- Ability to involve all committee members
- Respect and solid relationships
- Deep understanding of committee's work and relationship to organization
- Organizational skills (or someone to delegate to)

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Committee Meetings



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Committee Meetings

- Clear objective(s)
- Future-focused
- Well-crafted agenda
- Start and end on time
- Brief and focused
- Use parking lot for off-topic discussions
- Conclude with a summary and next steps
- Maintain complete and accurate minutes (avoid unnecessary information)

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Meetings that don't suck

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Committee Meetings

Tips for productive committee meetings:

- **Name tags**
- **Materials in advance – no reports read at meetings**
- **Identify objectives for each agenda item**
- **Send reminders**
- **Talk to people in advance to gain consensus**

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Committee Meetings

Tips for productive committee meetings (cont.):

- **Heavy on discussion – time allocated based on the importance of each topic**
- **Most important items first**
- **Bring in experts – landscape**
- **Draw out people who haven't participated**

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Committee Meetings

Tips for productive committee meetings (cont.):

- Cater to multiple discussion styles – silent starts, small group discussions
- Don't tolerate windbags
- E.L.M.O.
- Be wary of decisions too easily reached
- Send summary documenting key decisions, responsibilities and deadlines

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Committee Charters

Agreement in advance regarding:

- Purpose
- Goals and objectives
- Deliverables
- Membership
- Authority
- Responsibility
- Accountability
- Time frame
- Budget (if applicable)

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QUESTIONS?

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