

## **The Gentle Art of Presiding**

To become effective at presiding over a meeting, the presiding officer must establish goodwill, respect, and trust between the presiding officer and the assembly.

The atmosphere of a meeting is more important than strictly following parliamentary procedure. If there is tangible stress or tension or the assembly becomes distrustful of the presiding officer or the presiding officer's motives, it will become impossible to conduct an efficient meeting.

### **Timing**

- The presiding officer must start and end the meeting exactly on time.
- Make fair procedural decisions
- Take accurate vote counts
- If the presiding officer is in doubt about a voice vote, a rising vote should be taken by the presiding officer and then a rising counted vote if necessary to determine an accurate vote counts
- Deal with the members in a straightforward and honest manner

### **Focus**

- Focus on the members of the assembly as individuals, not as a member of a group
- Remain focused on what is occurring at all times during the meeting
- All members, no matter how discourteous their manner or irrelevant their positions must be dealt with seriously and with poise and grace

### **Impartiality**

- If the presiding officer and the assembly become adversaries then the presiding officer's decisions from recognition to procedural rulings can become highly suspect
- The chairman cannot enter into debate without comprising the impartiality of the office
- To enter into debate on an issue, the chairman should relinquish the chair until the issue has been completely dealt with (debate, voting, and the temporary chairman announcing the results of vote and effect of the motion)

### **Preventing confusion**

- If the meeting is conducted with basic fairness there must be no confusion or any sense among the members that they do not know what is occurring
- Confusion on the part of the members can lead to distrust of the chairman
- The easiest way to prevent confusion is to restate the motion in such a way the motion is clear to the assembly before a vote is taken
- If the chairman has the only copy of the motion, the entire motion needs to be read to the members, usually by the secretary
- If the chairman does not have a copy of a lengthy or confusing motion, the meeting must be stopped until a written copy is provided to the chairman and the secretary
- The chairman must restate the motion in such a way that all members understand what is being voted on and what the results of the vote will be

**Admitting mistakes**

- We are only human and mistakes can and do occur – what do we do then?
- Acknowledge mistakes and immediately make corrections
- Never try to bluff your way through the meeting

**Personal**

- Be well rested before the meeting
- Be well acquainted with the agenda, scripted agenda
- Be well acquainted with the organization's bylaws, standing rules, or other governing documents
- Develop and maintain a good sense of humor