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What a Professional Parliamentarian Can do for You

A parliamentarian assists the organization before, during, and after meetings. A parliamentarian also may be of assistance to the organization throughout the entire year, not just at convention time.

A parliamentarian can assist the organization in any of the following ways:

- Convention Parliamentarian
- Bylaws Consultant
- Bylaws Amendment or Revision Author
- Advisor to the Officers and Board of Directors
- Opinion Writing
- Expert Witness
- Professional Presiding Officer
- Trainer in Parliamentary Procedure
- Presiding Officer Trainer
- Election Supervision
- Planning Meeting Strategy
- Script Writing

Most of the capacities that the parliamentarian can serve are centered around giving advice on parliamentary procedure to the president, officers, committees, and members. The parliamentarian should be an integral part of the presiding team.

Script. When there is a convention involved or when there are potential volatile or confusing situations, it is considered advisable to prepare a script for the presiding officer and other members who will be expected to present information at the meeting.

A script in the parliamentary sense is in writing what the presiding officer and other people involved in the meeting will be saying during the meeting. You can find many scripts for specific motions in my book: *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Robert's Rules*.

Scripts are particularly helpful for conventions. The convention sometimes goes on for many days and to expect the presiding officer to be on top of everything for that period of time without the assistance of a script is not very realistic. If you have ever presided at a meeting you realize that when you are up there you are lucky to remember your mother's name much less what you should say next.

If you have a script, I find it incredibly helpful to have what I refer to as a Script Review Meeting. That meeting would include the president, parliamentarian, chief staff officer, secretary, and other members of the presiding team. The group would sit around a table, read the script out loud and then proceed to discuss what might happen at different times in the script and how to handle those situations. This has proven to be a life saver more than once.

Delegate Briefing. When you have a parliamentarian serving at a convention don't overlook using the parliamentarian to assist at meetings other than the official business

meetings. For example, many conventions have delegate briefing sessions or delegate forums or seminars, whatever the particular organization calls them. They are usually informational sessions where delegates can get information about the issues that they will be voting on, as well as have the opportunity to hear discussion on the issues. They work beautifully because delegates get information in advance of the meeting and then they get a chance to process it and discuss it with other delegates before they have to vote on it.

The parliamentarian is usually up front and available to answer questions during the delegate briefing. The parliamentarian serves as a resource to the officers involved and the delegates in attendance.

Preparation. The parliamentarian should not be expected to go into the meeting or the situation “cold”. Therefore, upon first being hired by an organization, the parliamentarian should receive many documents from the organization. A few of the documents needed by a parliamentarian are:

- Charter or articles of incorporation
- Bylaws – and constitution, if there is one
- Governing documents of any parent organization
- All information that is given to the meeting attendees, such as program, agenda, proposed resolutions and/or amendments
- Names of officers and staff members that might be in contact with the parliamentarian
- Minutes of past meetings of the members and of the board
- Policies and procedures of the organization and any other applicable rules

A thorough review of this material can be very helpful to the parliamentarian. It helps the parliamentarian begin understanding the culture of the organization and what to expect at the upcoming meeting.

Trainer. Additionally a parliamentarian may serve as a trainer for your members and officers. Most professional parliamentarians are trained and prepared to present workshops on parliamentary procedure. These workshops can be very helpful to the future manner in which business is conducted within the organization. The more people who are familiar with parliamentary procedure, the more likely your meetings will run smoothly.

The parliamentarian can also train the presiding officer. It is not at all unusual for the parliamentarian to train the president before he or she presides and throughout the year as president. Sometimes that training involves having the presiding officer practice using the scripts. Videotaping can be of assistance here.

The parliamentarian should be the organizations chief bylaws consultant. Actually the parliamentarian can and should help in the preparation of any amendments to the bylaws, or to any of the governing documents. One of the things that the parliamentarian brings

to the table is experience with many different organizations and the knowledge that that experience gives.

Many times parliamentarians are called in to help with or to supervise the elections. The parliamentarian has knowledge in the nomination and election process. That knowledge, along with impartiality, can be of great assistance in close or difficult elections.

The ways in which a professional parliamentarian can be of assistance to an organization are truly only limited by the imagination of all involved.