

## **Board Rules of the Road**

**By Kenn Hurto & Abhi Janamanchi**

Every gathering of congregational leaders soon discovers that we're not all on the same page regarding how to conduct our shared business or to meet our responsibilities. Many Boards intuitively come to understandings that work well to keep things efficient and cordial. Others, however, learn there is value in negotiating and describing intentionally how they will work together.

Call it "*Rules of the Road*," or "*Our Working Covenant*," these might include some very basic elements that, once said, seem rather obvious. That they seem obvious does not mean, however, we always know what they are nor how to follow and enforce them.

Here is a short list of recommendations that might help the Board or Committees work more happily and more effectively. What would you add? What would you take away?

1. Have a job description: what are you supposed to do?
  - a. Provide clarity around various roles by delineating powers and authorities that go with a particular office.
2. Have an agenda!
  - a. Establish who sets the agenda, how, and by when.
  - b. Make it clear how someone gets an item on the agenda.
  - c. Publish your agenda! The congregation has a right to know what you're doing.
3. Decide who runs your meeting. Typically, it is the Chair.
  - a. Who leads in the Chair's absence?
  - b. Does the Chair have a right to speak to issues or should s/he step out of that role when s/he desires to advocate a point of view?
4. Be clear about your decision-making procedures.
  - a. If consensus is not found, when and how will you vote?
  - b. Is a simple majority adequate in all cases?
5. Limit your meetings to two hours.
  - a. Begin and end your meetings on time!
  - b. If more time is needed, add no more than 15 minutes.
  - c. If need be table an item or schedule another meeting.
6. Appoint a timekeeper.
  - a. While all members must share the burden of keeping the meeting on track, a timekeeper is given the legitimacy to "call time" when the need arises.
  - b. Add time-lines to your agenda and abide by them.

7. Appoint a process-observer.
  - a. Ideally, this is someone not serving on the Board. Any fair-minded person can do this. It need not be the same persons each time.
  - b. If a Board member takes this role, the phrase "participant process-observer [PPO]" indicates that this person participates fully in the meeting but also notes how well the meeting proceeds.
  - c. Some things a PPO might track:
    - i. The tone and energy of the meeting.
    - ii. How well conversation is on track.
    - iii. How well members listen and engage each other.
    - iv. Who under- or over-participates in using "air" time.
    - v. Whether the "rules" are being followed.
8. Agree to come prepared .
  - a. No reading of reports or minutes at the Board table.
  - b. Don't turn the Board into a committee meeting; you're there to decide, not process.
  - c. Don't second-guess those who have done work for the Board.
9. Speak respectfully , one person at a time.
  - a. Speak for yourself, use "I" statements.
    - i. Guard against "you" assertions.
    - ii. Take care not to represent others as agreeing with you.
    - iii. Speak specifically, avoid "there are many who think," type remarks.
  - b. No cross talk or side bar conversations.
  - c. No attribution of motives to what anyone says, assume good will not a hidden agenda.
  - e. Argue issues, not personalities or motivations.
10. Speak to the "good of the order." Boards need to represent the congregation per se, not any person or constituency.
11. Speak as a Board with "one voice. " Once a board has made a decision, every Board member is obligated to speak affirmatively about that decision outside of the Board meeting.
12. **Find ways to keep it fun!**
  - a. Take a snack break mid-way.
  - b. Celebrate birthdays, anniversaries.
  - c. Keep a list of "what we do well."
13. Inform the congregation, clearly and promptly of your work.
  - a. Include a "Who Needs to Know Directly of Our Decisions?" item on your agenda.
  - b. Host a "Q&A" session the Sunday after your Board meeting to discuss what the Board is up to with any interested.
  - c. Publish a written summary of Board actions in your newsletter, etc.
  - d. Post your meeting minutes in an accessible, public space.

Whatever your rules, post them at every meeting. Review them with each new Board term.