

## Guidelines for Meetings by Conference Call

John R. Berg, PRP

1. LAND LINES. To improve clarity of communication, avoid speaker phones, Internet phones, cordless phones, cell phones, etc., in that order, and try to use an old-fashioned standard land line if possible.
2. MUTE. In order to avoid background noise, anyone not speaking should mute their phone if possible. It only takes one person with background to ruin a conference call.
3. PAUSE. Due to electronic limitations, only one person can be heard at a time. If one person is speaking, no one else can address the chair, unless the chair provides for adequate pauses to allow someone to address the chair. Use lots of pauses.
4. EXCHANGE PAPERWORK. Any major motions or documents should be distributed to all members prior to the meeting, since it is impossible to hand out documents during the call.
5. TAKE TURNS. No one should speak twice to a motion until all others have had an opportunity to speak. Give everyone a chance to speak. The best way to accomplish this is to have the chairman call on each committee member in turn for their comments on every issue being debated. To encourage a free exchange of ideas, call on those less vocal, less dominant or of lesser rank first. Otherwise the big guns will dominate the discussion and lesser voices will be less likely to contribute. This process may appear to be time consuming, but there will be great rewards in the feeling of fairness that all will recognize after the meeting. All members will feel better about the decisions made if they know that they have had a fair opportunity to be heard.
6. NO VOICE VOTES. **Never take a voice vote** by "All in Favor, say Aye." Since only one person can be heard at a time, it is impossible to judge the number of "Aye" votes.
7. UNANIMOUS CONSENT. Rather than using voice votes for routine or non-controversial matters, simply put the question to a vote as follows: "The question is that Tom, Dick and Harry constitute the birthday committee. Is there any objection to the adoption of that motion by unanimous consent?" [pause] "Hearing no objection, the motion is adopted and Tom Dick and Harry will constitute the birthday committee." This is essentially taking the "No" vote first. If there are no negative votes, the motion is adopted and no "Yes" vote is taken. If there is at least one negative vote, take a poll the members vote. When asking if there is no objection, those with no objection should be silent because anyone saying that they have no objection could block out the voice of anyone voicing an objection.
8. POLLING MEMBER VOTES. Any vote taken (except by Unanimous Consent) must be by polling the members. "The question is that Tom, Dick and Harry constitute the birthday committee. Please vote when your name is called. Adam [pause], Barry [pause], Charles [pause], David [pause], ... Ziffer [pause]. Has everyone had an opportunity to vote? [pause] The vote is 15 Aye and 7 No. The Ayes have it and the motion is adopted." This is similar to a roll call vote except that the vote count and how each party voted is not noted in the minutes.
9. NO CALL FOR THE QUESTION. A "Call for the Question", also known as a motion for the Previous Question or a motion to end debate and vote is NOT permitted in committees. **Neither the chairman nor the committee can end debate** until all have had an opportunity to discuss the matter.