

BOARDS

Dysfunctional Pockets of Misused Power

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The Parliamentarian's Role

Back-up (75%): Proactively prevent and assertively mitigate consequences from countless failures in judgment of behavior.

Trainer (20%): Train the members and especially the delegates on their own documents of governance.

Rules Enforcer (5%): Reply to questions on parliamentary procedure during the meeting.

The Ineffectual Board Member

■ Member: 1. The Rebel

Description: Destructive ego, ego-centric. Demands accountability. Targets authority.

Parliam's Concern: Erodes board's unity, credibility, and trust. Violates confidence.

Parliam's Solution: Remove him.

■ Member: 2. The Accuser

Description: Finger pointer, stubborn. Uses erroneous facts and dramatic allegations.

Parliam's Concern: Members reluctant to be leaders. Popular vs correct decisions prevail. Domination thru fear.

Parliam's Solution: Remind that innocent mistakes are not malicious. Focus on fairness.

■ Member: 3. The Bully

Description: Intimidator, vociferous, belligerent.

Parliam's Concern: Boards members back down. Good decisions are reversed. Negative behavior is contagious.

Parliam's Solution: Demand civility. Behavior must not be tolerated.

■ Member: 4. The Intellectual

Description: Arrogant, condescending, conceited.

Parliam's Concern: Members' attention is distracted and time is wasted.

Parliam's Solution: Insist on humility and graciousness.

■ Member: 5. The Adversarial

Description: Focused on hunting for flaws. Always interrupts and focuses on rebuttals.

Parliam's Concern: Innovation is stifled. Participation is discouraged.

Parliam's Solution: No one should tolerate his interruptions. Insist on solutions rather than contradictions.

■ Member: 6. The Temperamental

Description: Loud, abusive, threatening.

Parliam's Concern: Members afraid to speak. Environment is unsafe and toxic.

Parliam's Solution: Take a recess. Do not capitulate or compromise. Insist on mutual respect.

■ Member: 7. The Rhetorical

Description: Self-appointed historian. Knowledgeable and correct but irrelevant.

Parliam's Concern: Participation diminishes. Passivity prevails. Time is wasted. Last agenda items have to be rushed.

Parliam's Solution: Limit speaking to first timers or have something new. Focus on pending motion. Try round robin.

■ Member: 8. The Wallflower

Description: Abstainer, uninvolved. Speaks too softly.

Parliam's Concern: Silent wisdom is lost. Dereliction of duty is common.

Parliam's Solution: Call on silent ones. Newness is no excuse. Encourage proactivity.

The Incompetent Chair

■ Chair: 9. The Partisan

Description: Aggressive, entrenched, and untrustworthy.

Parliam's Concern: Some members are ignored. Debate is one-sided. Informed decisions are hampered.

Parliam's Solution: Insist on equality. Chair is facilitator not ruler. Encourage members to challenge the biases.

■ Chair: 10. The Unilateral

Description: Arrogant, entrenched, tunnel-vision.

Parliam's Concern: Collective decisions are impossible.

Parliam's Solution: Clarify the role of the chair. Distribute documents of governance.

■ Chair: 11. The Spineless

Description: Capitulator, indecisive, compromiser. Placator. Too tolerant of misbehavior and rights violations.

Parliam's Concern: Tolerates abusive conduct and denial of rights. Long and unproductive meetings are common.

Parliam's Solution: Teach Rules of Order. Encourage members to lead. Develop the chair's confidence.

■ Chair: 12. The Clueless

Description: Untrained, inexperienced, and confused.

Parliam's Concern: No understanding of Parliamentary Procedure, debate protocol, or use of agenda/minutes.

Parliam's Solution: Train the entire board on Parliamentary Procedure. Insist on training at their convention.

The Dysfunctional Board

■ Board: 13. The Social Club

Description: Too informal and unfocused. Networking is the only plan. Goal is friendships and resumes.

Parliam's Concern: Debate or unpopular opinions are discouraged. All power is left to the officers.

Parliam's Solution: Encourage differences of opinion and unique comments. Clarify the members' role.

■ Board: 14. The Exclusive

Description: Entrenched, secretive, restrictive.

Parliam's Concern: Discourages community input. Alienates the constituents. Credibility is lost

Parliam's Solution: Discourage dismissal of ideas. Insist on openness and relevancy to community.

■ Board: 15. The Selfish

Description: Self-absorbed. Competitors. No team players.

Parliam's Concern: Focused on personal goals and trading votes toward these goals.

Parliam's Solution: Introduce a strategic plan. Focus on collective initiatives.

■ Board: 16. The Misguided

Description: Paralyzed by fear. React to competitors and risks. Decisions based on bottom line rather than need.

Parliam's Concern: Focus on problem avoidance. Not risk takers. Driven by outside pressures/wish for profits.

Parliam's Solution: Must remind them that objectives come with risks & costs, if constituents are to be pleased.

■ Board: 17. The Disparaging

Description: Always undermining the majority. Always leading a parking lot rebellion.

Parliam's Concern: Resentments develop. Board impact is weakened. Good decisions are often reversed.

Parliam's Solution: Board decisions based on solidarity. Right to disagree ends at vote. Rescind always option.

■ Board: 18. The Indecisive

Description: Postpones, refers, and lays on table.

Parliam's Concern: Revisits contentious issues. All decisions unstable and unreliable. Creates dissent.

Parliam's Solution: Show the productive balance between too much caution and not enough risk.

■ Board: 19. The Minutia Men

Description: Detail oriented. Intolerant of minor uncertainties. Spends 80% time on 20% value.

Parliam's Concern: Board direction is lost. Output is unachievable. Most members stop listening and leave.

Parliam's Solution: Encourage written motions. Focus on Why and What, not When and Where.

The Unproductive Meeting

■ Meeting: 20. The Purposeless

Description: Poor agenda, poorer minutes and poorest attendance.

Parliam's Concern: No agenda or it's too packed with items. Important members not present.

Parliam's Solution: Cancel the meeting. Have committees do the work. Establish a well-defined purpose.

■ Meeting: 21. The Chaotic

Description: Non-existent rules of debate. No group vision.

Parliam's Concern: Ideas never fully explored. Loud members dictate meeting direction. Many are silenced.

Parliam's Solution: Enforce established rules of debate. Focus on pending issue. Show how rules protect rights.

■ Meeting: 22. The Royalty

Description: Too formal, too rigid, and too pompous.

Parliam's Concern: Process more important than the content. New members are deterred from joining.

Parliam's Solution: Encourage informality and creativity. Humanize the board. Encourage output not mechanics.

■ Meeting: 23. The Lethargic

Description: No respect for agenda or members' time.

Parliam's Concern: Late starting. Long-winded debate. Slow, long, boring meeting full of digressions.

Parliam's Solution: Include time markers on agenda and adhere to them. Enforce debate protocol.

■ Meeting: 24. The E-Distracted

Description: Death by internet, email, or texting. Email wars during the meeting.

Parliam's Concern: Members are distracted. Decisions are not well informed. Problem snowballs and is contagious.

Parliam's Solution: Set rules on e-devices. Make meetings more interactive.

■ Meeting: 25. The Tele-fails

Description: No rules, no control, no better than chaos.

Parliam's Concern: Debate fails. Motions handled poorly. Members frustrated, & unwilling to participate on teleconference.

Parliam's Solution: Move it along. Set rules and adhere to them. Have only short meetings by teleconference.

Survival Tips

1. Offer to train the Board and the Delegates.
2. Establish and enforce Rules of Debate.
3. Meet with Chair before each meeting.
4. Submit a post-meeting constructive report.
5. Focus on their Documents of Governance.
6. Take preventive measures, proactively.
7. Most importantly, the Parliamentarian is the board's backup, whether requested or not.

References

- Mina, Eli. 2009. *101 Boardroom Problems and How to Solve Them*. American Management Association: New York.
- From the countless blunders and incongruities I have observed in boards, officers, and conventions.