

Chairing your first meeting, by Kate Sanders

A very successful businesswoman was once heard to say "volunteer first, panic second". This phrase came back to me when I volunteered to be a Chair for the first time.

Here are a few points which I made after consulting some publications from the Industrial Society (references at the end):

- A successful meeting requires effort before, during and after the meeting
- Preparation - have a good Secretary and Treasurer - work as a team
- It can be a good or bad thing knowing most of those on the committee - don't be intimidated
- You can read all you like and learn from it but really the only way to learn is to do

Ask yourself: why are we having the meeting?

- Are the relevant people there to make decisions on behalf of their organisation?
- Is it necessary?
- Is there a clear objective?
- Is the group of manageable size? Too large a group may limit choice of venues
- Is the venue appropriate? (quiet, no disturbances)
- Do you know the committee members and where they are from? - all members should be involved. Make a point of getting to know individuals.

The Chair should:

- Listen to what everyone has to say but not let any one person talk for too long
- Understand the body language of committee members as well as what they are saying
- Ask questions either to encourage someone to talk or to clarify a point
- Summarise at the end of each section for the sake of the Minutes Secretary
- Be the co-ordinator of the meeting rather than its main speaker

Finally...if you are thinking of becoming a Chair, remember that:

- You will get recognition at other meetings (!)
- You will be promoting your own organisation and its library service

REFERENCES (thanks to the Industrial Society)

Industrial Society, The Write Stuff (oh dear –ed): Effective Minutes and Agendas, 1995

M. Pemberton, Effective meetings, Industrial Society, 1988

P. Hodgson & J Hodgson, Effective meetings, Century Business, 1992

Industrial Society, Management fact sheets: key facts and guidance for managers:
Meetings, Industrial Society, 1997

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