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The Chair is not in charge of your meeting!

It is a little-known fact that ultimately, it is the board and the membership that is in charge of your meeting, not the chair. According to the principles of parliamentary procedure and Robert's Rules of Order, the chair runs the meeting while subject to the will of the body as a whole.

This is very different from the workplace, the military, or many other institutions in our society. Those institutions are structured by ACCOUNTABILITY HIERARCHY. In which everyone reports, through the appropriate channels, to the BOSS at the top of the pyramid. The boss makes the ultimate decisions and is responsible for the organization's performance.

On the other hand, in local government and nonprofit work the governing body is structured as a VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION. The members of the group are peers. The chair has equal standing with the members, plus a special responsibility to maintain proper procedure. She is not the BOSS, but the LEADER of the group. The governing body makes its own decisions, and the governing body is responsible for its own performance.

If two members of the governing body disagree with a ruling, decision or order of the chair, they may APPEAL the decision, and the group will decide the matter (unless it is a matter on which there cannot be two opinions, such as a clear statement in the bylaws). One member makes the appeal (motion, powerful) and another member seconds it.

This model can be harder for people more experienced in the workplace hierarchy to accept, but it is critical for the success of our school boards, councils, and nonprofit boards.

A chair who understands these principles, who controls meeting procedures in accord with the group's adopted rules, and who helps the group to make its own decisions without undue pressure or personal agenda, will serve the group well. The job of President/chair will also prove much more manageable, and more rewarding, than trying to make everyone do what you want.