

# SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

A conversation guide for church leaders

## Minutes – What to Record and What to Leave Out

I sometimes feel like the champion of the mundane. Really, I do. And I probably am.

Yet I have found that the mundane things associated with leadership often have more significant impacts upon the results we get than we think.

This month's topic is so dull, and its August 1 publication date is so "not cool," that I'll use a special word to describe it – prosaic. Yes, I want you and your leaders to talk about the minutes of your meetings. Aaaargh! Perhaps just a brief chat? Are your meeting minutes serving you well?

One of the basics of leadership meetings is the keeping of the minutes. Anecdotally, it seems that oftentimes the most junior member of the team is drafted to write and keep the minutes. It's a task that many boards find no one really wants to do. Yet these records are extremely important to the organization's long-term health and can be invaluable when historical research is needed related a significant matter in the church. And, they are legally required documents. Yes, keeping good minutes is something to talk about.

Note that there are few actual "rules" about writing minutes. Various published "experts" disagree among themselves and provide different advice. I have my own thoughts and have incorporated some from other reliable resources.

Here are some topics that you should consider talking about.

- Do our minutes include the members' remarks, content of discussions, summaries of remarks, or the content of deliberations on a matter? Remember these are *minutes* and not transcripts of the meeting. Minutes are a clear and complete summary of the actions taken during a meeting. Period. Details of the discussion or debate of a matter, who said what, should NOT be included in the minutes. This takes way too much time to record and review and thoughtful, candid conversations, so important to the health of a church and its leaders, are likely to be dampened when one knows their comments and inquiries will be recorded for all to see until Jesus returns. As noted in that hallowed

compendium of parliamentary formality, *Robert's Rules of Order, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition*, "In an ordinary society, the minutes should contain mainly a record of what was *done* at the meeting, not what was *said* by the members" (italics in original).<sup>1</sup> Churches are ordinary societies.

- Do the opening sections of our minutes identify who was at the meeting, the details about the meeting (date, time, location), those present and absent (for board meetings), the number of members present (for membership meetings), enough facts to determine the required quorum was present, and information to support that required notice of the meeting was properly completed? In the digital age, this is easy – we can generally cut and paste and update this information from the previous meeting's minutes. In my early days using a typewriter, this was indeed tedious.
- Are the motions recorded clearly and concisely? The best way I know to have clear motions is to write them out prior to the meeting and include them on the agenda if possible. By doing so, everyone at the meeting will know what motions are going to be considered and time is not wasted trying to verbally craft a clear motion through on-the-spot crowd sourcing. If you expect a motion will be forthcoming before the meeting, write at least a draft version before the meeting. The board chair can be a great help in leading this effort.
- Are the approved minutes signed and properly stored? Generally, minutes may be stored on paper or electronically. I frequently find that minutes are stored and allegedly approved, but do not bear the signature of the secretary. Without the signature, their validity can be called into question.
- If documents are to be signed, does the motion identify who is authorized to sign them? For example, if a church's chief financial officer or business administrator is authorized to sign a work agreement with a contractor, this must be noted in the minutes. Without specifying another person to sign, it is generally the chair's responsibility to sign everything. Include who is authorized to sign on behalf of the church in the motion.
- Can you quickly find that motion that was approved six years ago to authorize a policy or some other matter? Without an effective index system, it can be a difficult and frustrating task to locate a motion that authorized an action that occurred or reoccurred sometime thereafter. Consider giving each motion an identifying number (I recommend eight digits – year, month, day of meeting and item number for that meeting – 21-08-01-04) and creating an index or spread sheet that allows for simple searches. Trust me on this – future board members will love you for this.
- How will you train future secretaries to properly prepare meeting minutes? I suggest creating a written protocol and process as policy. You can also get information from other organizations and sources that you save for the next secretary and the next after that.<sup>2</sup> Ensuring that the proper preparation and processing of minutes is a skill transferred consistently from term to term will yield significant benefits over the long haul.

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<sup>1</sup> *Robert's Rules of Order, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition*, page 468.

<sup>2</sup> *Robert's Rules of Order, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition*, has several pages of good information. The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability has good stuff on their Website. A general Web search can provide good information, too.

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August 1, 2021

Good minutes are far more than a bureaucratic exercise to be done near the start of each meeting. They are essential to the long-term smooth function of leadership teams and important legal documents. While such formality is not required of records of team or staff meetings, you will find that maintaining a written record of actions taken and assignments given will boost the leadership team's likelihood of accomplishing their duties and goals over the long haul.

Good, clear, concise, and useful meeting minutes and records – it sounds boring, but it is something to talk about.

*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.  
Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at [bob.osborne@efca.org](mailto:bob.osborne@efca.org).*

*This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.*

*Prior articles can be found at <https://efca-west.districts.efca.org/something-to-talk-about-archives/>.*