

## Why Parliamentary Procedure? What is it good for?

by Rick Joseph, DTM

Member of Sears-Halifax Toastmasters #1555 & Toast of the Coast

Mention the term Parliamentary Procedure to someone and watch their eyes glaze over, their palms begin to sweat and suddenly they are late for a very important appointment. We often hear that the greatest fear that the majority of people have is the fear of public speaking, which out ranks the fear of death. I would argue that the second greatest fear is to be asked to be Parliamentarian at a Toastmasters meeting.

Toastmasters gives us an opportunity to learn about parliamentary procedure and how to use it effectively to carry on the business of our clubs and in other situations where people are gathered to conduct business and achieve objectives.

### Why do we need Parliamentary Procedure?

Doris P. Zimmerman\*\* in her book Robert's Rules In Plain English, (an excellent overview of Robert's Rules of Order), states that:

***“Parliamentary law is the basis of all constitutional governments. By protecting and practicing correct parliamentary procedure, we also protect our democratic institutions.”***

The rules of parliamentary law are based on a regard for the rights:

- Of the majority,
- Of the minority, especially a strong minority – greater than one third,
- Of individual members,
- Of absentees, and
- Of all these together.

All parliamentary procedure is built on the premise that there must be a balance between the rights of the organization as a whole, the rights of any sub-groups within the organization and the rights of the individual.

Having a basic understanding of parliamentary procedure can give an individual a greater appreciation of how business should be conducted. It is like watching a hockey game without understanding the rules and watching it with an understanding of the rules.

***“The more extensive a man's knowledge of what has been done, the greater his power of knowing what to do.” – Benjamin Disraeli***

**The 10 basic principles of Parliamentary Law include:**

1. The organization is paramount.
2. All members have equal rights.
3. An established minimum number of voting members must be present in order to conduct business.
4. Only one main proposition may be before the assembly at a time.
5. There must be full debate before any action can be taken on a main proposition.
6. A proposition is the item under discussion.
7. A question once settled may not be presented in the same form in the same session.
8. A majority decides a question except in cases where basic rights of members or a change in previous action are involved.
9. A two-thirds vote is necessary for any motion that deprives a member of his rights in any way.
10. Silence is consent.

Parliamentary procedure should be viewed as a tool to help and not to hinder decision-making.

\*\* Doris P. Zimmerman is a Professional Registered Parliamentarian, a member of the National Association of Parliamentarians and the American Institute of Parliamentarians, and founder and president of Parliamentary Consultants Inc.