

VOICE OVER - "DAVID JULIAN PRICE SPECIALISES IN PERSON AND BUSINESS EFFECTIVENESS, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO MEETINGS. HE IS A FULL-TIME PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS SPEAKER, WHO HAS PRESENTED TO AUDIENCES THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA AND ALSO THE U.S.A, SINGAPORE, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND NEW ZEALAND.

DAVID HOLDS THE HIGHEST INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION AVAILABLE TO SPEAKERS, CSP - CERTIFIED SPEAKING PROFESSIONAL AND IS A PAST WORLD PRESIDENT, OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF PROFESSIONAL SPEAKERS. HE ALSO HOLDS THE NATIONAL NEVEN AWARD, THE HIGHEST AWARD GIVEN TO PROFESSIONAL SPEAKERS IN AUSTRALIA.

DAVID IS THE AUTHOR OF SEVERAL BOOKS AND PROGRAMS ON EVERY ASPECT OF MEETINGS. INCLUDING CHAIRING, FORMAL RULES OF PROCEDURE AND MINUTE TAKING. THIS HAS LED HIM BEING KNOWN AS, 'MR MEETINGS'.

IN THIS PROGRAM, DAVID IS INTERVIEWED BY GLOBAL NETWORKING SPECIALIST, ROBYN HENDERSON, ABOUT STRATEGIES, TIPS AND TOOLS TO CHAIR AN EFFECTIVE MEETING."

Robyn - Welcome, my name is Robyn Henderson, and I have the pleasure today of interviewing 'Mr. Meetings', David Price. David is going to give us a practical guide for the first-timer or the professional on how to chair a meeting. Welcome David.

David - Hi Robyn.

Robyn - David, they call you 'Mr. Meetings', why is that?

David - Well it's not a name I gave myself Robyn. I've been working in this area of meetings for just on 22 years now, and probably about 15 years ago, I was doing a lot of work with local government. And the person who was organising that work called me one day on the telephone and he said, "Hello, is that 'Mr. Meetings'?", and I laughed and I said, "Ah, yes". And the name just stuck from there, so he referred to me as 'Mr. Meetings' from then on, and I started using it in my marketing material, and that's how it came to be.

Robyn - And because it's your specialty area, it's well deserved. Okay, so before we start, let's clarify some terminology. What is the correct term for someone who chairs a meeting?

David - Well the funny part is, there's no correct term. There are three common terms, and they are chair, chairman and chairperson. Now it's interesting that if we were sitting here, say 30 years ago, the answer to your question would be chairman, without doubt. However, if we were sitting here, say, 15 years ago, the answer to question without doubt would have been chairperson. Because in the 80's the most commonly used word, certainly in Australia and New Zealand was 'chairperson'. However, now the most common word is chairman.

The 'man' part of chairman has nothing to do with man or woman, it comes from the Latin word, *manus*, which means 'to guide'. And that in itself, was a very interesting debate in academia back in the 80's as to whether that was or wasn't the case. But the general view was the 'man' part of chairman is the Latin 'to guide'.

Robyn - I don't think that's common knowledge, because a lot of people still do get annoyed about that... or you know some women get annoyed about the 'chairman'.

David - Quite right. So the rule of thumb, is this, you use the word that the group you're in uses. So if they have a custom where they tend to use 'chair' or they use 'chairman' or they use 'chairperson', use the word that that group uses. But if you are the person, and there is no custom that is agreed to, then basically it's up to you to decide how you wish to be referred to. So for instance, if you're the minute taker, you may say to a person in the chair, let's pretend it's you for a moment, Robyn, I may come to you and say, "Hi Robyn, look I'm the minute taker. How would you like me to refer

to you in the minutes...as 'chair', 'chairman' or 'chairperson'?" . And whatever word you say, is the word I would use.

Robyn - Now David, I've seen someone address a female chair, as 'madam chair'. Okay so what then is...is it 'Mr. Chair'?

David - Well, that's an interesting one. The term 'Chair' confuses everyone because no one quite knows how to fit it into sentences... yes.

Robyn - Yes

David - ...so 'madam chair' is a very common terminology that's used, but it's highly offensive to some women.

Robyn - Oh, is it?

David - So, most of the time when people are using the term 'chair' they don't put anything in front of it, there's no salutation, it's just 'chair'. Which sounds very odd to people who aren't used to it..

Robyn - Yes, and a bit blunt

David - ...but again, if you're in an organisation where they're used to that, it sounds perfectly normal.

Robyn - Right

David - So, there's a bit of a contradiction in terms when there's a salutation put in front of any of the terms, 'Mr. Chair', 'Madam Chair', 'Mr. Chairperson', 'Madam Chairperson'... whatever.

Robyn - Right

David - So it really is I guess saying the word is non-sexist, but we'll add a little sexist word in front of it...

Robyn - Yes

David - So it becomes a little confusing. Best way out of it is, follow what every one else does.

Robyn - Does... yes. Okay, and if you're first up, make sure you check ahead of time.

David - Exactly, now for the purpose of this program Robyn, I'm going to use the three terms, 'chair', 'chairman' and 'chairperson' interchangeably, just to show how they can be used.

Robyn - Okay, so if we start David, with what are the major issues about chairing a meeting

David - Well it's interesting, if you ask the average person in the corporate world, "What do they think of the people who chair the meetings they go to?", the answers will invariably be relatively negative. There are not many positive comments that are made about people who chair meetings, which is sad in some ways. These are the major things people say about the people who chair their meetings, and indeed about the meetings themselves.

The first thing they say is, "they go too long, much to long". They'll also say that the person in the chair speaks too much, just never stops talking some of them. That they have difficulty controlling the meeting that they allow the meeting to wander off the agenda, assuming there is an agenda.

Robyn - Wouldn't that be standard practice though, that they have an agenda?

David - One would think so, one would hope so....

Robyn - But not always... yes

David - ...But reality is... I couldn't put a percentage...but in the client's that I work with, I would say when I first go into work with them, I would say probably 40% perhaps 50% of the meetings that the people go to have no agenda. They're just called to a meeting, they don't know why, although

they can sometimes guess. They don't know the specific decisions that they're going to be asked to be made, although sometimes they can guess. But, it is a fairly good indication that the meeting's not well organised, if there's no agenda.

Robyn - So there could be a real connection between no agenda and meetings to long

David - Oh, well and truly, absolutely.

Robyn - Any more?

David - Yes, some of the others are that the chair gives their opinion all the time, the chair doesn't draw out the wisdom, the knowledge and the experience of the quieter members, often there's no clear decision at the end of an item, because the chairman doesn't draw the discussion to a close and say, "well, what have we decided?". And frequently beyond that, they don't say, "well okay, we've decided x, now what action is going to happen?".

Robyn - Mmmmm, and who's responsible

David - And then they often don't allocate the responsibility, and then they often don't allocate a timeframe.

Robyn - Right

David - So they need to go through all of those, they need to make sure the decision is agreed and understood by everyone, that everyone knows who's going to do what as a result of the decision, that they know exactly what it is that is required and by when.

Robyn - Yes it obvious isn't it, when you think about it

David - They often jump all over the agenda, the people who don't chair meetings well. They...here's a really interesting one Robyn... many people, many complaints that I receive about people that

chair meetings, is that they control the information flow and they often do it by vetting the minutes before anyone else sees them.

Robyn - But that's not really legal to do that is it?

David - Well it's not so much...it's not so much illegal, it's unethical..

Robyn - Mmmmm

David - ...And there are some situations, in some jurisdictions where courts have determined that the chair has no right to do that. But essentially what happens in many, many meetings is that the minutes will be taken for instance by a minute taker, and then the minute taker will pass those minutes on to his or her boss. And that boss is nearly always the chairman of the meeting, who then reads the minutes and changes them. Now usually, in most situations, the person who chairs the meeting doesn't change the context or the content of the minutes, but might just clarify some terminology, perhaps, and that's fine. Or they may clarify some decisions, but I would have to say if that's necessary, it means that they haven't chaired the meeting that well in the first place, because the clarity should have been..

Robyn - During the meeting

David - Exactly, during the meetings. But sometimes, I have people, probably about once every two or three weeks, I have someone who says to me, "look, my boss who is the chair of the meeting actually changes decisions in the minutes", and when they're challenged they'll say, "Oh well, if the people had of known what I knew, they wouldn't have decided that.". But that's still wrong. The meeting...the meeting doesn't except that and the interesting thing, and I think that sad and unreasonable thing, is that the minute taker gets the blame. The minute taker didn't make the change, the chairperson did but the minute taker is the one who is seen to be in control of the minutes, and therefore gets the blame.

Robyn - Mmmmm, interesting

David - And frequently, quite a vindictive blame so to speak, which is very unreasonable. So it's interesting...we'll talk about this a little later, in terms of some particular styles that people that chair meetings have, but the person who will vet the minutes, is always the sort of person who wants to control the people in the meeting and control the information flow.

Robyn - Interesting, Okay.

David - Another major one is that they often see themselves as the boss of the meeting. And here people fall into two very clear categories, the one who sees themselves as the boss of the meeting, and the one who sees themselves as the facilitator of the meeting. Now, when I say 'boss', I don't necessarily mean that the person is technically the boss of the group of people. But when people get into the role of chairing a meeting, they often feel they are now the 'boss' of these people. It's a little like for instance, a person being elected to the president of a sports club in the community. Some people think that when they're elected to the role of resident, that it is now their club. And they run it their way. And nothing could be further from the truth; they are now custodian of the customs and the procedures that that club has adopted over the years. And sure that person could put their style and their mark and their vision, but it doesn't mean it's their club.

Robyn - No

David - They're carrying it out for the greatest good of the greatest number.

Robyn - Okay, so why are these people chairing the meeting, why are their skills so poor?

David - Well Robyn, let me answer that question by using you as the example. You're in the corporate world, you're a successful business person in your own right, and you go meetings and the chair some meetings. Now without meaning to put you on the spot, how much training have you had in chairing meetings?

Robyn - None

David - Exactly, and you're a pretty typical person in the corporate world.

Robyn - So I avoid situations where I have to chair something?

David - Well you may avoid them, lots of people won't necessarily have your wisdom to avoid them, but what they will do nevertheless is have relatively few skills because they haven't been trained. The interesting thing is, that it's this good old unconscious incompetence, and I'm not for a minute suggesting that you're incompetent, I'm sure...

Robyn - Well in meetings I am, absolutely....

David - Then perhaps, the issue of unconscious incompetence is people don't know what they don't know. And the reason for that is, is the way they've learned to chair meetings, is by going to meetings and observing the people who have chaired those meetings.

Robyn - Yes

David - The problem is those people learned by doing the same thing.

Robyn - Sure

David - And so, they may in fact have learned, if we can say 'bad habits', but they don't know that they're bad habits..

Robyn - Because that's what..

David - ...That's what they've seen.

Robyn - Yes

David - ...exactly, and with the majority of people chairing meetings, being relatively poor, then the bad habits tend to be replicated time and time and time again.

Robyn - Okay so, let's get down to the 'how'. What are the major components of any meeting?

David - Okay, well it's interesting you say the 'how' because you've led into this perfectly. The meeting is divided into two broad components, one is content and the other is process. Now the content is the 'what' the meeting talks about...

Robyn - Right

David - ...and the process is the word you've just used, the process is the 'how' we talk about it.

Robyn - Okay

David - So the content is whatever it is on the agenda. "Are we going to let the contract for such and such to this company or that company?", "Are we going to increase membership fees?", "Are we going to do this, are we going to do that?", that's the content.

The process is how the meeting goes about making the decision to do X or Y or Z or whatever. And so the process needs to be very clearly understood by everyone, but particularly the person in the chair, and the chair's role is to facilitate the journey of the process so to speak. So the content travels through the meeting, but the way it travels through the meeting, is by virtue of the process that the person in the chair runs.

Robyn - Okay

David - For instance, if it's in a formal meeting, then the process is going to be formal meeting procedure, where motions are going to be moved, they'll be a second to call, they'll be discussion for and against, they'll eventually be a vote taken, the decision made, then the action will be delegated. If it's in an informal meeting, which is most meetings, then they'll just be general discussion, and then eventually someone will put forward a suggestion, and the meeting will either agree to that

or perhaps modify it, but eventually come to a decision. And then the same thing happens, the action is delegated. Now if the chair hasn't thought through the process before the meeting then they'll be, if you like, in the proverbial 'hot water'. They're not necessarily sure where they're going to go. And this really becomes a problem when there is a difficulty.

Robyn - Yes

David - When there's no difficulty, there's no problem.

Robyn - Straight forward, sure.

David - When there's a difficulty Robyn, it's never the content that provides the solution for that difficulty, it's always the process. So the process is the thing that the chair needs to be well and truly aware of and understand fully, and obviously be able to put in place to avoid and resolve any difficulties that may arise.

Robyn - The conflict that comes up..

David - Exactly

Robyn - Okay then, so what are the key skills a person chairing a meeting needs?

David - Ah well, I have a line that I often use, and that's this, that there's three 'F' words for effective chairmanship, and they are that the chair needs to be fair, firm and focused. And without any one of those three words, then there's a problem.

Robyn - Okay, so 'fair' is fair to all parties?

David - Yes exactly, and it's interesting you started with that one because, if the chair is not fair then the meeting is a disaster..

Robyn - ...fall apart

David - ...absolute disaster. So I'll give you an example of how a person chairing a meeting may not be fair. They may for instance, favour certain people; they may for instance favour a certain opinion. Let's say there's an issue, an there's a 'for' and 'against' argument and the chair infact has the view that they're for the argument, then what they may do is actually allow the people who are 'for' to speak for longer or they may allow more people who are in favour to speak and less to speak against. That's how a person who's unfair can actually influence a meeting. The interesting thing is that that usually back fires on that sort of chairman, because it becomes very obvious if the chair is unfair. Diabolical situation.

Robyn - Yeah, sure...

David - The next one is firm. Now the interesting thing about firmness is, this is where the chairperson can really become, what I call, the 'charismatic chairperson'. The person, who is firm, is assumable, completely fair. Very rare for there to be a firm chairman who's not fair. You can have a bully, but that's not what I mean. A 'firm' is an assertive chairperson. So a firm chairman will be making sure that everyone, I guess, participates in the meeting according to the ground rules. We'll talk about those shortly, but makes sure that everyone plays the same game so to speak.

A meeting is no different to a game of football or any team sport, Rugby, soccer, whatever. The team of players gets on to the field, then they play the game according to a set of rules. But the interesting thing is, it's no the players who know the rules only that win. It's the players that know the rules and have some strategy. And so the people who tend to, if you'll forgive the term, 'get their way', more in meetings, are ones who not only know the rules, that is the ground rules of the meeting, but also have adopted or learned some strategy over the years, as to the best way to negotiate their way through the process, about the content.

Robyn - Mmmmm, interesting. Okay, and the focus?

David - The focus really comes down to the agenda. If there is no agenda, then it's almost impossible to have a focused meeting...

Robyn - Right

David - ... and agendas is a whole new issue in terms of how to get the best out of the meeting, but very briefly the key is this, here is a truism that sounds contradictory but it's not, 'the longer the agenda, the shorter the meeting', 'the shorter the agenda, the longer the meeting'. Now I know that sounds contradictory, but this is what I mean, when I say the longer the agenda I mean this, each item needs to be expanded out so that the item, as written on the agenda says exactly what is required.

Robyn - Right

David - I'll give you an example, the three worst types of agendas are no agenda, standard agendas and topic based agendas. No agenda is obvious, standard agendas mean the same agenda for....

Robyn - Month to month to month

David - Month to month, week to week whatever. And they generally generate very poor meetings. Your topic-based agenda is your most common agenda and it would be something like this, for instance, it might say 'Item four - Computer', and that's all it will say. So one person interprets that as meaning training, second person it means the networks down, the third person means, "I can't get my password to work", the next person thinks it means...

Robyn - So, unspecific

David - And so they all bring their own interpretation to the meeting, and that's not only what they want to talk about, but it's what they actually expect to talk about. They also feel they have a licence to talk about it because the agenda said 'computer'. And so they think they now have the licence to talk about anything.

Robyn - Yeah, sure

David - So lets just say that hypothetically that that blows out to six agenda items, or six interpretations which will blow out to six agenda items, but there's now seven because there's the real one as well.

Robyn - Yes, which probably wasn't one of those....

David - Exactly. So now we have to expand that item out, so it might end up reading like this, 'item four - computer- decision to be made about which word processing software the organisation will by'.

Robyn - Right

David - And it might be for instance, 'Robyn Henderson to recommend Word XP.'

Robyn - Yes

David - And so that's what I mean about longer agenda item, so if you receive that a agenda, or another person...

Robyn - You know exactly...

David - ...you know that's it's a decision about the word processing software, and you know that Robyn Henderson is going to make a recommendation, and that the recommendation is Word XP and there will probably be in brackets of the agenda, 'Report attached', because...

Robyn - Meetings that I haven't been able to get out of (laugh)

David - Well yes, and the agenda is the secret to it..

Robyn - Yes

David - Now you imagine if you receive the agenda, and you're the chair, your ability now to be focused is now enhanced...

Robyn - Easy, Easy.

David - ...because you simply say to people who talk about anything else, that's not that decision to make about the word processing software, you say 'that's not the agenda item we're speaking about'.

Robyn - Yes, "we'll come to that it 'general matters'", or something....

David - So of the three, the fair, firm and focused, the 'focused' is easy to implement if there is a good agenda.

Robyn - Okay, so just on that point then, is it always the chair that puts the agenda together?

David - Often, interesting you ask that, it's actually leading in to what we're about to speak about. If you have a person who chairs meetings who sees themselves as the boss, you remember I referred earlier that some people perceive themselves as the boss, then those people nearly always not only expect to do the agenda, but will do the agenda. And it will be focused on what they want...

Robyn - Their issue

David - The best agendas are infact prepared by the minute taker. Because the agenda really comes directly from the last minutes.

Robyn - Comes out of the previous minutes, oh ... of course..

David - Now we can polish that a little, with the minute taker and the chair sitting down as a team, and it works best when they are a team..

Robyn - Yes

David - And work out the agenda, in advance obviously, and put it in writing and send it to everyone, either manually, hard copy or by e-mail, most agendas are sent by e-mail now days, it doesn't matter, but it needs to be put together by the minute taker and the chair.

Robyn - Yes, that makes sense. Yes of course. Ok, so what are the two major styles of chairmanship?

David - Ok this is really interesting, and people listening to this program will think about the people they've experienced at the meetings they've attended in the past and they'll start to very quickly put people into one or other category. The two categories are these Robyn; the first category is the person who comes to the role of chairing a meeting from the perspective of serving the group. The second category is the person that comes to the role of chairing for the purpose of getting power. So we have the service chairperson and we have the power chairperson. I'll give you a few points about each and you and others will start to see people very clearly fitting into the role.

The first one is the service persons most common pronoun that they use is we. The power person uses "I" all the time. The perception of the need of the service chairperson is to work for the greatest good of the greatest number. The perception of need of the power chairperson is to work to get the decision they want.

Robyn - Right

David - The management style management of the meeting although it often flows over to the general management style, but the management style of the service chairperson is democratic, the management style of the power chairperson is autocratic. The style of communication the service person will tend to adopt a style of asking questions. The power chairperson will tend to adopt a style of making statements or telling if you like.....

Robyn - Oh and not allowing others to... contribute.

David - Not necessarily allowing others... the service chairperson will listen, the power chairperson will tend to talk a lot. And a funny one if you like gives the theme song if there were such a thing of

the service chair person would be, 'We are the champions', and the theme song of the power person would be, 'My way'.

Robyn - (laugh)

David - So if attendance for instance is not compulsory then lots of people tend to go to the service chairperson's meetings..

Robyn - Because they enjoy them....

David- Exactly, they not only enjoy them, they feel that their contribution is wanted and valued.

Robyn - Yes

David - The power chairperson's, if their meetings are voluntary, and by the way the power chair person would not make their meetings voluntary.

Robyn - No

David - They would tend to make them compulsory. But if they were voluntary, hardly anyone would go. And I do have some interesting stories about that. The interesting thing about recognition, the service chairperson doesn't look for recognition, but receives it frequently. But when they do receive it, they makes sure it is passed on..

Robyn - Shared...

David - ... to the people, shared. The power person often does seek recognition but because of their style they frequently don't receive it. But when they do, they keep it. They don't share it.

Robyn - Mmmmm pass it on... so a lot of the corporate AGM's would be the power style.

David - Oh very much so, now it's very interesting that you use the word 'corporate' because that draws an interesting distinction. When you're using the word corporate, we're talking about company meetings, so broadly there are ... I guess three types of meetings in the world. The first type is the one you've just referred to, the corporate meeting, but you've specifically said Annual General Meeting....

Robyn - Yes

David - ...So a company meeting required by law, by legislation, company law. So that's the first type of meeting, a very different type of meeting to others, but I'll come back to it in a moment. The second type of meeting is again in the corporate world, but it's a meeting held in the workplace. It's not one held by the (inaudible) of legislation, it's just the day-to-day meeting that would happen in any workplace. It's still in the corporate world, so you could broadly call it a corporate meeting, but it's usually not conducted with any set of rules.

The third type of meeting is your association meeting, and by that I mean a voluntary group. A typical sports club for instance, or a charity, any of those sorts of meetings, or any group, the Quilters Guild or the Wood Turners Association, all those voluntary groups. Now they're different meetings again. So let's come back to the first one, since you asked about that, the corporate annual general meeting. First of all, the rules are set down in legislation how that meeting will be run, but the person who chairs that meeting is nearly always the chairman of the company....

Robyn - Yes

David - ...And they have a very set agenda to get through usually.

Robyn - Well it good or bad news really isn't it....

David - It's often good or bad news, so looking at the corporate AGM is not necessarily the best way to look at this whole style of chairmanship because it's a very different type of meeting, and it's almost scripted. The shareholders are given the opportunity to have their say, but it usually doesn't influence any real outcome. It receives media attention....

- Robyn - Yes, and that's probably what we see when the shareholders... yes.
- David - Precisely. Now it's the second and third type of meeting that we're really talking about here, which is the meeting that happens in the workplace. And so in that role, the people who chair meetings cover the whole range of everything we've talked about that the meeting in the workplace, but interestingly, exactly the same occurs in the voluntary groups.
- For example, you could get, well I used the example of the Quilters Guild, and I only use that as a hypothetical example... that we could have a president of the Quilters Guild who is very much a power person, or we could have a president of the Quilters Guild who's very much a service person. We could have a soccer club, we could have a power president or we could have a service president.
- Robyn - And it may actually... the service chair may...maybe determined by the nature I would think the quilters would be the service, the soccer would be the power, because of the different sorts of people that it would attract. Or is that not the case?
- David - You would think so.
- Robyn - But not always... no. Ok.
- David - If you'll allow me to use a, what some people would call a derogatory term, but I certainly don't mean it that way, but I think you'll understand when I say it, I have met some very lovely, if you'll pardon the term, little old ladies who are very much power chairpersons.
- Robyn - Oh. Ok
- David - Oh yes, um....
- Robyn - It's part of their identity.

David - Yes, they want their particular association to run their way.

Robyn - Right

David - Interestingly, those particular people have frequently been in the position for many years.

Robyn - Right

David - So I do a lot of work with voluntary groups and I have this particular opinion of them which some people would disagree with me on but nevertheless I hold the opinion based on my experience, and that is, that a person should not be president of any group for more than two, or at the maximum, three terms...

Robyn - Yes, I'd agree with that, yes

David - Now a term may not be a year, it may be two years, so I'm talking terms not years. For instance, I experienced a person some years ago who was the president of five voluntary groups, and when I pointed out that perhaps they couldn't do the job well if they were president of five, they may be better to be on the committee of four, but the president of one. The person involved didn't agree with me, but her husband and sons did..

Robyn - Yes

David - ...because they never saw their Mother.

Robyn - Sure, sure

David - And so that a peripheral point, but nevertheless it comes back to the service power.

Robyn - ...And the different styles... yes

David - ...And the different styles, that's right.

Robyn - Ok, so what does an effective chairperson do when they start a meeting?

David - Ok, let's go through it. First of all they welcome everyone, now that sound pretty obvious, but it surprising how many of the power people particularly, just walk in sit down and start...

Robyn - That's it... yes.

David - ...without any of the pleasantries. The pleasantries I think are important because they set the atmosphere for the meeting and a chairperson who can generate a friendly, relaxed atmosphere would generally get a lot more from the people than the chairperson who creates a very cold, very strict...

Robyn - Blunt.

David - ...yes, blunt. So that's the welcome. The second, and this is the one that is missing in almost all meetings, and that is, they need to explain the specific purpose of the meeting. Now the interesting thing is, if you go and ask the average person, "What is the purpose of this meeting?", the answer will actually be the frequency. So what I mean by that is this, if you walk into almost any group and say to them, and I've done this, "What is the purpose of this meeting?" The answer will be something like this, " Well, it's the first Tuesday of the month, we always meet on the first Tuesday."

Robyn - Oh right, regardless of the fact whether they need it or not.

David - But if I repeat the question and say, "Yes I know it's the first Tuesday, but what is the purpose of the meeting?" They will look at me vaguely and think I live on another planet, and they do look at me vaguely and think I like on another planet, and then they come back at me with the exactly the same answer. They say "Well what do you mean, we always meet on the first Tuesday".

Robyn - Right

David - In other words they answer with the frequency

Robyn - Whether they... so what you're saying is, whether they need to meet or not, whether they've got anything to cover because they do it, they do it.

David - Exactly. So there isn't necessarily a purpose.

Robyn - But at the same time, some groups that may actually be the only time that they're all brought together.

David - And that's fine, if that's the purpose...

Robyn - Yes, if you're clear on the outcome.

David - ...so all I'm saying is, it's fine that they meet on the first Tuesday of every month, that's not a problem, but I would suggest that a standard purpose, an all purpose purpose if you like is this, to review and to plan.

Robyn - Right, Ok

David - Almost every meeting exists to review and to plan. And that, while it sounds a very broad purpose, nevertheless provides the magic five-letter word for meetings, and that is focus. Let's review what we've done and let's plan what we need to do.

Robyn - So that's a really good for those listeners taking notes, that really is the purpose of meetings, is if there isn't a specific situation that you're addressing, that is really is to review and to plan.

David - Exactly. Yes and as you say, people taking notes everything that we're covering here is on our web site, which is www.masterofmeetings.com It's a resource site, just about information and meetings and the summary of everything we're covering in this program is there.

So the next thing, we're up to...we've done two. We've welcomed people and we've explained the purpose. Now we need to explain the process. Now that explanation could go something like this - so I'll do the whole thing for you if you like.

"Thank you for coming everyone, to our monthly meeting, I declare the meeting open. The purpose of this meeting is to review what we decided we would do at our last meeting, and then plan what we need to do in the future. The process that we're going to go through is our normal process that we always follow and that is that there will be suggestions made from the floor, we'll have people who can discuss that for and against, then at the end we'll make a decision and then we'll allocate some action".

It can be as broad as that.

Robyn - And is necessary to say "I declare the meeting open"?

David - Most definitely, there is a legal requirement to declare the meeting open, now most meetings wont need to call upon that legal requirement, but it is important, and there will always be the pedantic person who'll say, "You haven't opened the meeting".

Robyn - Yes, yes. So it's good to know that...yes

David - Now the apologies and the confirmation of the minutes you put into all of this as well.

Robyn - Sure

David - ... but I'm not going into that level of detail, but it is again on the web site, if people need that. So we've explained the process, now we come to the really important one that most meetings miss, and that is, setting the ground rules.

The ground rules don't necessarily need to be explained in full at every meeting, but at the first meeting and perhaps the first, second or third meeting of a particular group then the ground rules are well worth visiting. I do a lot of work with mining companies, and the interesting observation

I make about mining companies, is almost all of them have in their board rooms and their meeting rooms small charts or small posters on all the walls saying, these are the ground rules for meetings in this organisation. They go like this: All meetings will begin on time. Every person will bring a copy of their agendas and their last minutes, no extra copies will be provided - I'll come back to that in just a moment. It might say, all meetings in this organisation will be held on the contentious decision making model, and then they say consensus is defined as...

Robyn - Ok

David - ...for instance a working definition of consensus, a common one is, that 80% of the people agree with the decision and the balance if they disagree, can nevertheless, live with it. Then they might say as a fall back decision, if consensus cannot be reached, because there may be people who can't live with it, so you don't have consensus. Then they may say then decisions will be made by a vote, and 80% is required for the decision to be made. So there's the set of ground rules as to how the meetings are held. Another aspect of ground rules might be what I call the 'speak once' rule. The 'speak once' rule shouldn't be taken literally, it means this, when you're discussing a particular item everyone has the opportunity to speak once, but no one can speak a second time...

Robyn - ...About the same topic.

David - ...about the same issue, until everyone who wants to has spoken once. Then no one can speak for a third time until everyone who wants to, has spoken twice. And so it basically evens it all out and makes it fair, and it deals with the people who tend to take over the meeting.

Robyn - Yes, that would be very helpful.

David - A couple of other things are no repetition, you say to people look we're not going to repeat issues, no side issues, the discussion should be focused on the decision and be focused on action. So they're the ground rules.

Robyn - Ok, so are there any magic words that a good chairperson uses?

David - Well you'd be surprised at the simplicity of this, the magic words are these, the first set is, "I suggest", so it would go like this, at the beginning of any process the chair might say, "I suggest what we do, is go round the meeting and ask for anyone who has any ideas to contribute those".

Robyn - So that's definitely a service chairman that would be doing that.

David - And then the second magic word, or magic words are, "Is that okay?"

Robyn - So when would you use "Is the okay?"

David - I'll give you the exact example of using both. "So people the issue that we need to discuss are whether we will buy some more word processing software. What I suggest we do is go around the room ask for anyone who wants to, to make a comment on Robyn's report, which you've all received.

Robyn - Right

David - ...is that okay?

Robyn - Ok so...

David - And everyone will nod, and you now actually have group agreement.

Robyn - And if they don't, is that okay and then someone says, "No".

David - Then they may well have a better idea than you.

Robyn - Right okay, so you're open to that.

David - And then the group decides which is the best process.

Robyn - Okay

David - I'm yet to hear of a group where they don't agree to the "Is that okay?"

Robyn - Mmmmm, sure

David - ...because in a way it's leading the group down, now bear in mind that the chairperson will have thought through the best process.

Robyn - Sure

David - ...hopefully, so what they're suggesting is usually going to be the best process based on their experience.

Robyn - And it goes without saying that this chair is prepared, they don't arrive... you know you must be prepared.

David - You cannot chair a meeting by just arriving.

Robyn - And having the minutes in front of you.

David - ...you need to think through the process.

Robyn - Yep, so how do you handle people who want to speak continuously, you know those real rowdy...

David - Well they're not necessarily rowdy. People may want to speak continuously, and not be rowdy about it; they just want to say lots. So one of the ways is to go back to the 'speak once' rule and have that implemented in your ground rules. So most of the solutions will lie in setting the ground rules in the first place. The second one though, is if they do speak is you simply interrupt and you might say, "excuse me Fred, could we just listen to everyone else's view, and then we're happy to hear what you've got to say again, but you've already had your chance to give your view once.

Robyn - Sure

David - ...we'll let everyone else have their view.

Robyn - Sure

David - ...and then we'll come back. So the trick of being the chairperson is to remain calm.

Robyn - Remain calm, okay. Even under difficult situations I'm sure. So what about conflict then, how can you handle that?

David - Well that's one of the ones isn't it where it's always a challenge to remain calm more frequently. There are a couple of things you can do with that. First of all, if you can put people in specific seats, and you won't always be able to, but if you can the best... you'll know the people who are in conflict with each other...

Robyn - Yes

David - ...everyone knows who they are. The funny part is that they often don't know that everyone knows, but you'll know. So if you can seat them in a particular position. You put them on the same side of the room, same side of the table, but with two or three people between them.

Robyn - Right

David - It's very difficult for people to have a conflict when they need to lean forward or back and look along the table...

Robyn - Ah, yes

David - But if you sit them opposite each other...

Robyn - Yes, easy

David - Oh, very easy to have a conflict. The next one is the more strategic answer and that is this is what the really experienced chairperson would do. Let's just say that Fred and Betty are in conflict with each other. And they're probably making it perfectly obvious that they're in conflict by talking across the table to each other or perhaps even shouting. What you do is this, you would say, "Okay, just hang on", you get silence, then you say...you name them, "Fred, Betty you are obviously in conflict about this issue". Now this is a really interesting point just here, everyone else almost covers their face in horror that you've said the word conflict. It's almost the unsaid word, but the reality is, they're in conflict so you acknowledge. So Fred and Betty are obviously in conflict with this, and here comes the really strategic line, "Let's establish what you two do agree on about this issue". In other words you force using the word 'force' in inverted commas, force them to go to the positive and the common ground. And you might establish that they agree on three or four aspects of the issue and they only disagree on one or two. Now you focus on those one or two to see if you can resolve that. So that's how you can deal with conflict.

Robyn - And what if just say, you manage to fix one but there's still one issue that looks like it won't be resolved with the time frame that you have on the meeting. What's a way of handling that?

David - You need to very much read the body language of the meeting to determine whether it is an issue just for these two people, or whether it's a universal issue for all of the group or a majority of the group. If it's an issue for just the two, then I would be suggesting that you suggest to those people that they resolve this afterwards and offer to help to mediate in that.

Robyn - Right

David - If however, you've read the body language and you've perceived that it's an issue for the entire group, but the meeting is getting to its end point, then the best thing is to schedule another meeting with just that item on the agenda.

Robyn - Fair enough, Okay, yeah and so you would address that then, and would you say something like, "look due to the time, we can't give this matter sufficient time today, but I realise how important it is so let's reschedule that for...."

David - Broadly yes, but I would change the words slightly Robyn, I would say, "Look in the time frame we have, we're clearly not going to resolve this issue today.."

Robyn - Right, okay....

David - "...so I suggest", coming back to the two, the magic words, "I suggest that we schedule another meeting where we resolve this issue, is that okay?"

Robyn - Alright

David - You also used a word there, and that is, address. My suggestions for people in meetings, particularly people chairing meetings is they attempt wherever possible to get out of the meeting vocabulary, the word, discuss, and replace it with the word, address. Discuss tends to be open ended and it tends to give people the licence to talk forever. Address, is a much more focused word and I know that I'm just talking semantics here, and I'm not generally one for doing that, but in this case it is important I believe. The word, address, will tend to give the meeting focus and that's the magic word. The word 'discuss' will tend to do the exact opposite, it'll say to everyone, or imply to everyone that they can talk forever.

Robyn- Yes, okay, yes. And what happens if you get to the end of the meeting and you haven't got through everything?

David- Ah, now that's a very interesting one. Let's go back to the start of a meeting, how do you start a meeting on time, and I am answering your question, but I'm going back to the beginning.

Robyn- You said you'd say, "The meeting's open".

David- Yes, but the way you start a meeting is to start on time. You will have noticed Robyn I'm sure that the people who arrive late at the meeting are always the same ones.

Robyn- Mmmmm, sure.

David- The people who don't bring a copy of their minutes are always the same ones. The people, who don't have a copy of the agenda, are always the same ones. So people will rise to the level of efficiency that is demanded of them....

Robyn- Right

David- ...and they will fall to the level of efficiency they can get away with. So if you start a meeting on time, and everyone knows that you start on time when you're in the chair, they'll be there. Now, your specific question, "How do you finish a meeting?", exactly the same thing, you set a finishing time, and you finish. Now your question is "What if you're in the middle of some discussion?". Well if you're very close to getting to the decision, then I would extend the meeting by the two or three minutes that's necessary. But if you know you're not close to a decision, I would say, "Our time's expired, we'll reconvene this discussion at our next meeting.

Robyn- Oh okay, just like that. And even leave it unresolved?

David- Yes, I have consulted with a large organisation, which is an international organisation, and they have their meetings from 8-10 every Monday morning, no matter where any of them are in the world, and some of them log on by telephone and by computer to participate in the meetings. Thirteen people around the table. At 10 o'clock, no matter where they are in discussion, their meeting finishes.

Robyn- Yes, interesting.

David- Now that's probably the best meeting I've ever attended in terms of the process that is run, in relation to the content they have on their agenda, and they're making very high-powered decisions.

Robyn- Mmmmm, and that's an interesting point also isn't it, the diversity of meetings with technology today, so in say the rural community groups, you might have people from all over the state who come together via a phone ...so another whole area I'm sure and another whole session, chairing a whole meeting over the phone.

David- Yes, but well there's one yes it is another area completely but there is one very quick hint I can give people who need to chair tele-conferences. And that is, simply ask every one to state their name before they speak.

Robyn- Oh, okay.

David- And have a very detailed agenda, exactly the style that I've already suggested, with the agenda expanded out and don't allow any cross chat and don't allow any red herrings, or for the agenda to wander.

Robyn- Right.

David- And a tele-conference is no more difficult then to chair than a face-to-face meeting.

Robyn- And would you suggest though that with a tele conference that for the minute taker that you record...with permission...you record the...

David- No, never. Minute taking again is another whole issue. But if you record a meeting, by the way it's in many jurisdictions, illegal to record a meeting, unless you have.

Robyn- Permission, yes.

David- Even if you have the permission, you need the written permission sometimes. But let's not go down that path, although that is an issue people need to be aware of. The main problem of recording a meeting, is our research shows, a person taking the minutes from a recorded meeting, will actually sit through that meeting the equivalent of four times instead of once. A good minute taker can take the minutes once. Bearing in mind this major understanding about modern minutes Robyn, and that is, minutes are not a record of the discussion. So you're not trying to capture who said what.

Robyn- Right.

David- ...all you're capturing is the issue, the decision and the action.

Robyn- Okay

David- And when that's understood then the minute taking task becomes much easier and the taping is unnecessary. Very interesting point however, a major aspect of the role of a good chairman is that at the end of every item, they will ask the minute taker to read out what's been recorded on that item. So it would go like this, this is what would happen. I would be chairing the meeting and I'd say when we get to the end of an item, "I'm just going to ask for our minute taker, Robyn, to read out what's been recorded on that item to make sure that we haven't missed anything". You then read it out, not the chairman, because the chairman is to maintain their impartiality.

Robyn- Right

David- So I would get you the minute taker to read it out, and I would then say, "Is that okay?". People if they want to add anything, will then say "Robyn, I'd like you to record this" or "no that not quite what we've decided, we decided this not that". Then we've essentially clarified the minutes, as we've gone along. By the end of the meeting, there is nothing for you, as the minute taker, to do afterwards. The minutes are not only done, but they're also....

Robyn- Agreed on.

David- ...agreed.

Robyn- Yes, fantastic. Okay, so just to wrap up David, is there a check list of things that people can do or know about, if they want to be a really effective chairperson

David- Okay, yes there is a check list let's go through. First of all, people who chair meetings well, listen a lot and say very little. They listen far more than they speak. Secondly, they speak after everyone else has spoken, not before. So I'll give you an example by using the power and the service chairperson model. When an issue is raised at a meeting the first thing a power chairperson will

say is, "I think we should.." . The first thing a service person will say is "What do you think we should do?" So to illustrate the point that the chairperson should speak last is this, let's imagine that we're in a meeting with say, fifteen people. And let's imagine that you, Robyn, are chairing the meeting. Because the fifteen people are together, there's going to be some mutual interest. And so, in any item, the likelihood that someone in that meeting has the same view as you is very high. So the wise chairman will let someone else....

Robyn- .ah let someone else say it....

David- exactly, they sit back, and let someone else say it. The person who is an inexperienced chairman or certainly a power chairperson wont let that happen, because their ego rules and they need to be seen to be the one to say it. Whereas the wise chairman knows that it doesn't matter who says it, it's the meeting, not the person, that's important, as long as it's said. So that's why the wise chairman will speak last, not first. The good chairman, the wise chairman, sees themselves as a facilitator, not the boss. They ask the minute taker to read out every item as were mentioned earlier, so that the minutes are completed by the end. They clarify at every point the exact meaning and wording of any resolution, so for instance, if you're in a formal meeting where people are moving motions, then the wise chairperson will always, not even begin discussion on the motion until the exact wording of the motion has been clarified. Now there's information about motions, again on the web site, www.masterofmetings.com . Ah, there's a lot of what I call 'meeting myths' about motions, but they're very clear that they need to start with the word 'that', and they need to have only one issue per motion. And they need to be very clear, but frequently in meetings people will say, " Yes, I will move in that direction".

Robyn- Mmmmm

David- No, what does that mean? And the problem is, the minute taker is the one that receives the criticism later, cause they've written down in all sincerity their best understanding of what that direction meant. A wise chairman won't allow that motion, they'll say, " Okay, that's fine you're moving in that direction. But we need the wording of your motion, what exactly are you moving?".

Robyn- Right

David- And it might say, "I move that we authorise Robyn Henderson to purchase a site licence for Word XP", whatever the issue is. And it's very clear-cut, now the action from that also then very clear-cut. It's clear that Robyn Henderson carries out the action, and the action is to order the site licence.

Robyn- Sure

David- And so, that's what the clarification needs. A wise chairman will allow the minutes to be sent directly to the participants, in modern meetings usually by e-mail. They'll read the body language accurately, and they'll learn to read body language, so that a good chairperson will nearly always know the result of any vote, before the vote actually happens. Because they would have read the body language, and they will have 'sussed' out the meeting so to speak. They'll very much focus on the process of the meeting, more than the content of the meeting. And they acknowledge and manage conflict. They'll sensitively draw out the wisdom, the experience and the knowledge of the quieter people, so that those people...quiet people always have experience...

Robyn- Sure... something to say...

David- ... they always have knowledge, and they always have wisdom, they just don't offer it. So you need to ask, however, the wise chairperson will know which of the quiet people have something to offer, by reading the body language. And very simplistically for instance, a quiet person who has something to say will be leaning forward.

Robyn- Yes

David- But a quiet person who's listening, but doesn't have anything to contribute, would generally be leaning back. Now, that's a generalisation, they'll be exceptions to that, but that's a general rule for reading the body language of a meeting. A really good thing for a wise chairman to inject into a meeting is sensitive and appropriate humour. Now I don't mean that they tell jokes.

Robyn- Sure

David- ... I just mean, that they run the meeting in a friendly atmosphere.

Robyn- A bit of fun

David- ...add a little bit of fun yes, but with the key words being appropriate and sensitive. So the final thing I guess is that a good chairman has to manage a skillful blend of three things. The people, the tasks and the results.

Robyn The people, the tasks and the results. Okay, so if we work on those three and review and plan I think...

David- Yes, and be fair, firm and focused and do everything else we talked about...

Robyn- Okay, and the content versus the process. Okay David, just for our listeners who may like to revisit that website..

David- www.masterofmeetings.com

Robyn- www.masterofmeetings.com

David- That's a resource site for a lot of other material on minute taking, and on chairing meetings, on meeting procedure... a lot of people may not know the specific procedures that are adopted in meetings. So it's a resource site for people to get information on almost any aspect of meetings.

Robyn- And of course your 'Book Meeting Procedure Made Easy' would also be a good resource....

David- That's available....'Meeting Procedure Made Easy' is about formal meeting procedure were motions are moved, and the procedural motions and all of that sort of thing. If people need that sort of information, they really need to be a bit of a whiz, a full bottle on the procedures, because you can't chair a meeting that is being run on procedures, if you don't know the procedures.

Robyn- Yes. And it's really a great skill to have isn't it...

David- Yes, it's a great skill.

Robyn- ...because you never know when you're called on to use it.

David- And many people think that formal meeting procedure is a dying art, infact it's coming back. More and more meetings are using them, because it's a bit like going out into a football field and playing football with no rules. People are starting to realise that meetings are falling down in their effectiveness, because there're no rules.

Robyn- Yes, absolutely. Well David, I can certainly speak on behalf of our listeners in saying that now we know why you're called 'Mr. Meetings', and congratulations, we've enjoyed the session.

David- Thank you Robyn

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