

Florida State Association of PARLIAMENTARIANS



AS TEDDY ROOSEVELT SAID... BULLY FOR YOU!

by FSAP 1st Vice President, Brian Pelkie, PRP

Recently Sam King and I were the instructors for a group that was interested in learning more about Robert's Rules so they could gain more knowledge for their meetings. After hours of basics, they wanted to know more about how to handle the bully in the room. I worked them through some of the following.

There are three types of bullies we get to deal with.

Type 1. The Chair Bully

- The chair gavels through.
- The chair does not recognize speakers for debate.
- Shows favoritism towards his chosen few
- Ignores point of order
- The chair lacks impartiality

Type 2. The Assembly Member Bully

- Those that yell their Yes/No during viva voce voting thinking to sway the vote
- Crosstalk with their neighbor, or worse, making comments about the speakers loud enough to be heard
- Trying to obtain the floor more than allowed
- Constant (and probably dilatory) extending debate veiled as a point of order

How can we deal with these two types of bullies?

First, RONR (12th ed.) 61-63 are the chapters on disciplinary procedures with many great pointers. Another source I've used is *The Guerrilla Guide to Robert's Rules* by Nancy Sylvester (still available on Amazon, if not paperback, then on Kindle)

Taking power from a bully is not always easy, but there are wise ways to deal with them.

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Case 1, When the Chair is the bully.

The preferred duties of a chair are listed in RONR (12th ed.) 47:7 and sticky points that could lead to disciplinary action are listed in RONR (12th ed.) 62:4.

If you are the maker of the motion, you should be recognized first to support your position. The chair should also alternate between pro and con debate when possible. These items would be valid to rise for a point of order.

What if the Chair speaks against your motion? That seems to go against being impartial. Raise a point of order to request the chair vacate the position if he desires to debate.

Gaveling through is when the chair limits debate or forces a quick vote. Again, a point of order to remind the chair to slow down may help.

Sylvester mentions an extreme case where the bully chair adjourned the meeting and the board walked out. But astute members called the meeting back to order, elected a chairman pro tem, and continued the meeting, successfully replacing that board of directors which held up in court. Bully!

Remember: a bully is only as powerful as you allow him or her to be.

Another extreme situation is if the chair ignores your motion. Well, just process it yourself from the floor. You've made the point of order; the chair rules the point is not well taken. You've appealed, but the chair decides the appeal is not well taken. Now, you can just stand in place and put the motion to the assembly. Hopefully, you know in advance what your support from the assembly will be, that is, that they will back you.

Now we've got some pointers to corral the Bull(y) occupying the chair.

Case 2, How about the bullying assembly members?

Those that scream out yes/no during voting. That is a sign of disrespect to the assembly. Everyone is allowed one vote. Are they trying to make it sound like

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three people are voting yes? Maybe a talk with them after the meeting and pointing out the “error of their ways” might solve that.

Crosstalk during debate is another sign of disrespect. Many times in the theater or at training sessions I’ve physically gotten their attention by giving them that look into their eyes so they know I mean it for them alone, and audibly gave them the SSSHH! (even from across the room.) It’s fun to watch them sink down in their seat, and I don’t usually hear from them again. Yes, I’ve interrupted the group, but the focus is now on them, not me.

Trying to obtain the floor more or constantly raising point of order. They need to be reminded what point of order is meant for and that is not to offer more debate. RONR (12th ed.) 39 is an entire section on Dilatory and Improper Motions.

How do we stop these bullies? Knowledge is power. Do your research, be a productive member, and learn more about Robert's Rules. And, importantly, have support from other members that will back your play. Use some of these methods to slow the process by using:

- Request for Information – call them out for factual information.
- Parliamentary Inquiry – are we doing this correctly?
- Question of Privilege – ask for the motion to be clearly stated, where are we in the process?
- Point of Order – follow the rules, correct a wrong

But wait, I said there are three types of Bullies we get to deal with.

Type 3 is YOU! Are you the bully in the assembly?

Are you the one shouting yes/no, thinking to sway the vote? When serving as a chair for a large group once, I just said, “The chair is uncertain of the vote and we will take a rising vote”. Oh, the groans we heard. But those oh-so-powerful “YES” shouts were visibly and definitely outvoted when the “No” voters stood!

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Are you the one calling point of order every time the chair overlooks you? Maybe the chair noticed a quiet mouse on the other side and recognized them over your boisterous demeanor.

Are you the one calling previous question? Why don't you give others their chance to debate? And do you realize that previous question in itself requires a 2/3 vote in the affirmative to stop debate before you proceed to vote on the actual motion? In a meeting I attended, one member called previous question (of course, interrupting the person that had the floor.) A few people said, "You can't do that!" Yet another person said, "Previous question is NOT a motion; you have to vote on the pending motion right now!" Maybe it's time for you to look around and see if you are the bullied person or the bullying person in the assembly.

Our group of folks seemed to be more out for blood than for justice. We NEED to "kill" the chair. He isn't following the rules. Please remember, HE only has one vote also, so if you have the support of the assembly, you all should be able to corral the Bull(y).

Sam and I did our best to offer a lot of these pointers to our group of trainees. But in the end, I felt I was being bullied because I didn't FIX their problem right then and there!

When Teddy Roosevelt stated his slogan, it was a slang term meant for good, as in, you did great at that function: Bully for you! So, if you have learned a few methods to handle bullies, then... as Teddy Roosevelt said... Bully for you!

My request to you readers. I would like to develop a training seminar on handling bullies. Please send me your thoughts, pointers, and suggestions to develop a one or two-hour seminar. (I bet you know what one of the PowerPoint clipart pictures I'll use will be) Thank you. BrianPelkie@hotmail.com