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NEW VERSION OF *ROBERT'S* AND WHY YOU SHOULD CARE!

The 11th edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* was released at the 2011 National Association of Parliamentarian's Convention on September 23. If the bylaws of an organization state that the organization's parliamentary authority is "the current edition of" *Robert's*, then the 11th edition is now that organization's parliamentary authority. It is also the parliamentary authority for organizations whose bylaws establish *Robert's Rules of Order*, *Robert's Rules of Order Revised*, and *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*. Since approximately 95% of the organizations in the U.S. prescribe *Robert's* as their parliamentary authority, the 11th edition is most likely the parliamentary authority for all organizations you are involved in.

In this article, I am going to highlight *some* of the major changes that are most likely to have an impact on organizations. The areas I will cover are: rules for small boards and committees, electronic meetings, notice sent electronically, *Point of Information*, offering a series of amendments in one motion, and the minutes of the meeting. There are other areas of major change, such as discipline and resolving election disputes that I will not be covering in this article, but can be found in the list of changes found on the Robert's Rules Association website (see information at end of article).

Rules For Small Boards And Committees

- The rules for small boards and committees now apply to all committees, irrelevant of size, both standing and special.
- Members may seek recognition by raising a hand instead of rising.
- The small board chairman, as well as any committee chairman, may make motions, speak in debate, and vote.
- Motions to close or limit debate are in order in board meetings, but not in committee meetings.

Electronic Meetings

Because of the variety of methods of electronic meetings that are now available, this may be the most important changes in the 11th edition.

- There is a new section on Electronic Meetings which covers the following subjects:
 - Extension of Parliamentary Law to Electronic Meetings
 - Types of Electronic Meetings
 - Electronic Meetings in Committees
 - Additional Rules for the Conduct of Electronic Meetings
- To have a legal meeting other than an in-person meeting requires authorization in the bylaws.
- Meeting should allow for “simultaneous aural communication among all participating members equivalent to those meetings held in one room or area.”
- Committee meetings
 - Because electronic meetings for committees may be authorized, the provision in the 10th edition that a committee may work by correspondence is eliminated in the 11th edition.
 - Committees that are established in the bylaws (usually standing committees) can hold electronic meetings if authorized to do so in the bylaws.
 - Committees not established in the bylaws may be authorized to meet electronically in the organization’s standing rules or in the motion that established the committee.
- Notice of electronic meetings must include description of how to participate (e.g. call in number and code)
- Additional rules for electronic meetings are recommended in the 11th edition. Some of the subjects that could be covered in the rules include:
 - Method of establishment and maintenance of a quorum
 - Method of seeking recognition
 - Handling of interrupting motions
 - Method to submit motions in writing
 - Method for taking and verifying votes.

Notice Sent Electronically

This change can be a huge money saver for some organizations. Sending out notices of meetings using US Mail can be very expensive. The new edition allows notices to be sent electronically (email, text, or fax) if the member has agreed to it being sent that way. So, here is how I see it possibly working. With the dues statement or any other communication to the member, the organization asks permission to send all notices electronically. That can be done as easy as the member checking a box giving permission. It should also include the statement that the permission will remain in effect until the member specifically notifies the organization otherwise, so you don't have to get permission periodically.

Change to the Motion: *Point Of Information*

In recognition of the frequent misuse of this motion, the 11th edition has changed the name of this motion to *Request for Information*. This motion is suppose to be used to allow a member to ask a factual question relevant to the issue being discussed. But, since *Point of Information* usually gets the member recognized by the chair before others who are waiting to debate the motion, it is all too often used to state information (or an opinion veiled as information) without waiting one's turn to be called upon to debate the motion. Since the purpose of this motion is for the member to **request** information, not **give** information, the preferred name has been changed to *Request for Information*.

Offering a Series of Amendments in one Motion and then dividing it

In the past, if a member had multiple amendments to offer that applied to the same motion, they had to be made separately. The new edition now allows a member to make a series of amendments in one motion that will be voted on in one vote. This addition was included to streamline the amendment process. But, what if they are offered together, all four changes, and you want to vote "no" on the first one and "yes" on the other three! The 11th edition offers a solution to that, but it needs some explaining and will start with the explanation of the term "conforming".

Conforming amendments are described on pages 273 – 274 as multiple amendments that must all be made if any one of them is made in order to have a coherent document after the amendment is adopted. For example, if a name occurs

five different places within a document, to change it only four of the times it occurs would not leave a coherent document. Therefore, if the multiple changes that are offered in one motion are conforming, then that motion could not be divided. That makes sense, because one would not want to create an inconsistency in the document. But, if the multiple changes that are offered in one motion are not conforming, are all independent of each other, then the motion can be divided by the request of only one member. So, going back to the example in the last paragraph, if there were 4 changes offered and you were in opposition to the first one but liked the other three, you would request that the first one be voted on separately and that would automatically be done.

Changes To The Minutes Of The Meeting

The section on page 354-5 regarding the *Reading and Approval of Minutes* has some very subtle changes. The emphasis is more on minutes being distributed in advance and not read at the meeting. Directions are given on the order in which minutes are taken up if there is more than one set of minutes to be approved – that order is from earliest to latest. Also, no formal motion to approve the minutes is necessary. After the chair asks for corrections and any corrections that are made are taken care of, then the chair simply states: “There being no corrections [or further corrections] to the minutes, the minutes are approved [as corrected].”

A correction to the minutes of the previous meeting that was approved by the assembly is made in the draft minutes. The minutes of the meeting where the corrections were made simply states that the minutes were approved “as corrected” and do not need to specify what the correction was.

In both the 10th edition and the 11th edition the name of the maker of the main motion should not be entered in the minutes, unless ordered by the assembly. The change is to the name of the maker of the motion which the 10th edition indicated should be included in the case of all important motions, whereas the 11th edition states to include it for all main motion.

The motion to *Dispense with the Reading of the Minutes* is further clarified. It does not omit the reading of the minutes altogether it is used when the members do not want to read and approve the minutes at the regular time.

The Robert's Rules Association is an organization of descendants of General Henry M. Robert. They have control of the copyright of *Robert's Rules of Order*. On their website one will find a summary list of the notable changes in *Robert's* from the 10th edition to the 11th edition. That list can be found at <http://www.robertsrules.com/changes11.html> and is extremely helpful in understanding the changes in the 11th edition.

I hope you have found this brief explanation of some of the major changes helpful. If you want to purchase the 11th edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, the link to the National Association of Parliamentarians' online store is provided on my website. The NAP store has a great selection of parliamentary books that you won't find anywhere else.