



Feature Article

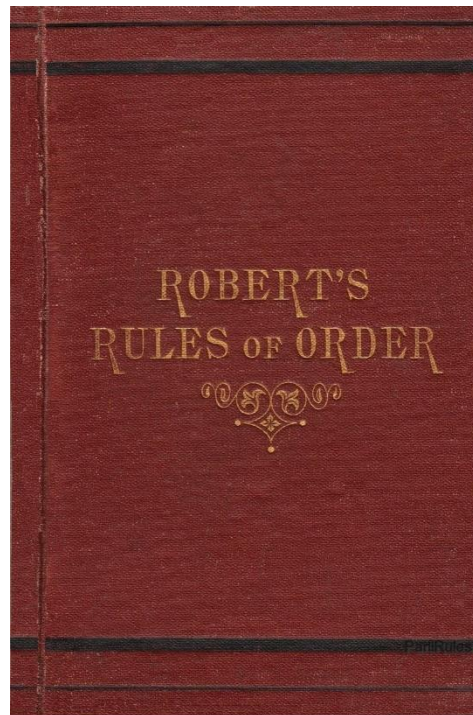
A 19th Century Process called: Robert's Rules of Order

by George Anderson

“Professional Meetings are a continuing source of frustration both to the participants and to those counting on the outcomes.”

While a lot of people have written guidelines on proper conduct of meetings, Robert's Rules of Order (RRO) is unquestionably the most successful de facto standard ever published on this subject and although an American institution since 1878, has been imitated and adopted internationally to a surprising degree. This standard covers three important areas:

1. The intent and objective of parliamentary derived rules
2. Instructions and responsibilities for the conduct of meetings
3. An ordered and comprehensive process for conducting business in a meeting.



As is the case with any process oriented standard, an identifiable cottage industry of resistance to Robert has emerged using the same type of arguments that systems engineers frequently hear in opposition to many other process improvement efforts or methods. This thought alone should be enough reason for us to review Robert's basic ideas and try to understand why RRO has become so successful in spite of his detractors.

Robert was seeking ways to manage meetings. He examined the parliamentary law and procedure that was practiced in large governing bodies and especially that provided to the United States Congress by Thomas Jefferson. According to one source, these laws were designed to protect:[1]

[Return to Newsletter](#)



Our Chapter now has a presence on



Check it out and join our group so we can together discuss the latest in Systems Engineering news and events.

Mark your Calendars:

Date: 17 November 2010

Presentation: Panel: Cyber-Security

Speakers: Various

Date: 17 December 2010

Holiday Dinner and Awards Ceremony

Location: ??

1. The right of the majority to decide
2. The right of the minority to be heard
3. The rights of individual members
4. The rights of absentees

Additionally, parliamentary procedure embraces the requirement to protect and carefully balance the rights of the organization, subgroups and individual members.

Roberts cut through the complexities of parliamentary law by restating it all in just ten declarations.

These are:

1. The rights of the organization supersede the rights of individual members.
2. All members are equal and their rights are equal.
3. A quorum must be present to do business.
4. The majority rules.
5. Silence is consent
6. A 2/3 vote rule to limit or take away rights of members or change something that has already been decided.
7. One question at a time and one speaker at a time.
8. Debatable motions must receive full debate
9. Once a question is decided, it is not in order to bring up the same motion or one essentially like it at the same meeting.
10. Personal remarks in debate are always out of order.

The meeting members must execute defined duties to follow the ten laws. RRO develops the following duties:

1. All meeting participants must obey the rules.
2. Presiding officer (chairman)-
 - a. Maintains order
 - b. Starts on time and has agenda
 - c. Is organized
 - d. Teaches when required
 - e. Controls the floor
 - f. To accomplish the above, the president must be impartial, composed, precise, focused, and temperate.

The participants' duties are to be prepared for the meeting and speak only when recognized by the presiding officer and normally address only to the issues in debate.

The actual conduct of the meeting follows a process that involves ordered debate and voting. Terminology and procedure are followed to prevent a lapse in the enforcement of the ten basic rules. In large organizations with many factions, the rules take on a complexity that is necessary to prevent confusion and miscarriage of the meeting purpose. Robert recognized that these rules needed to be tailored to each organization and thus could be considered as an early practitioner of Systems Engineering techniques.

The Chesapeake Chapter is always looking for volunteers to speak at our upcoming meetings! Please contact our Programs Director, [Mr. Donald York](#), if you would like the opportunity to speak or can recommend someone.

Events in the Area:



NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center

Date: November 2, 2010, 1:00 pm
Presentation: *Common Sense Engineering and the BP and Upper Big Branch Oil Spills*
Speaker:
 Beverly A. Sauer, Ph.D.
[More Info Here](#)



IEEE Baltimore Section

Event: Baltimore Section - IEEE Signal Processing Society

Date: Oct 19, 2010, 5:30PM

Location: National Electronics Museum -- Pioneer Hall

Presentation: *Constant Amplitude Zero Autocorrelation Sequences and Waveform Design*

Speaker:

What then, is our relationship to RRO beyond the professional interest in making rules about rules? The relationship is that virtually every non-profit organization (NPO) in the US, including INCOSE, mandates RRO in its charter or bylaws as the process for conducting meetings.

Does this mean that every meeting echoes with motions and formalities? No, of course not. What it does mean is that the rules are followed when any of the ten principles comes under risk of compromise. Usually, the chairman is the first to note an issue and impose the RRO process on the meeting.

It stands to reason that one cannot impose formality where there is no familiarity with RRO among the membership. For this reason, a parliamentarian is often included in the duties for the meeting so as to instruct and judge issues of procedure for the proper flow of business. It is interesting to note that two of the three parliamentarians who edited subsequent editions of RRO reside in Baltimore, MD while the third is from Washington, DC.

The Chesapeake INCOSE BOD uses RRO and our members receive a briefing that includes the fundamental rules and concepts so that they are able to participate and vote properly. [2] Minutes of each meeting are recorded and the records available to the membership. While we do not have a parliamentarian, one is available to support our meetings if divisive issues arise.

The pressure to shelve Robert's work is ongoing. Human nature is always seeking the easiest path and it is not uncommon for an NPO board to discuss abandoning the pesky and inconvenient process from the charter. Given Colonel Roberts 132 years of successfully dominating the meeting room, its not likely that any membership would be foolish enough to abandon it or that a better method for guiding an organization will be competing with his masterpiece soon.

Please take a moment to examine Roberts in more detail starting with the Roberts Rules of Order site. His legacy appears to be in good hands including those of his own descendants. This is mandatory for any systems engineer who aspires to the study of process development or improvement methods. The "we don't need process" crowd is endemic to corporate America and could in a light-hearted way be related to the message in several currently running ads for ORKIN pest control products.

www.robertsrules.com

<http://www.amazon.com/Roberts-Rules-Order-Newly-Revised/dp/0738203076>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert's_Rules_of_Order

[1] Roberts Rules in Plain English, Doris P. Zimmerman, Harper Collins Publishers, 1997, pp 5-6.

[2] Bylaw XII, section 7. Of the Chesapeake Constitution and Bylaws. "Robert's Rules of Order- Revised shall determine the conduct of business in all meeting of the CSPK,

John J. Benedetto

[More Info Here](#)

Event: Workshop on Green Communications

Date: October 14-15, 2010

This is a fact-finding and research agenda-building workshop on the increasingly important topic of energy efficiency in communications and networking.

Location: Inn and Conference Center; University Of Maryland

College Park, MD

Speakers:

Rajesh Gupta, UCSD; Kaushik Roy, Purdue; Anant Sahai, UC Berkeley; Vinod Sharma, Indian Institute of Science; Anand Sivasubramaniam, Penn State; Mani Srivastava, UCLA; and Roy Yates, Rutgers

[More Info Here](#)

Averill M. Law & Associates

Event: Simulation Modeling for System Design and Analysis

Date: November 15-19, 2010

This course is designed for systems analysts, operations research analysts, engineers, military planners, computer scientists, and technical managers who would like to use simulation to design and optimize real-world systems.

[More Info Here](#)

its governing body and committees, except when inconsistent with this Constitution and Bylaws.

[Return to Newsletter.](#)



This article is from the monthly newsletter for INCOSE Chesapeake, a local chapter of INCOSE International. We are a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing a forum for professionals practicing the art and science of Systems Engineering in the Northern & Central Maryland & Southern Pennsylvania area.

Keep up with the latest news and events. Find out about our new Board of Directors. Explore our extensive library of previous lectures from our Monthly Dinner Meetings. Learn of the Benefits of Joining INCOSE. Check out Systems Engineering education in the local area. All this and more awaits you at our [INCOSE Chesapeake Chapter Website](#).

For any comments or suggestions about this newsletter please e-mail our [President, George Anderson](#) or our [Communications Officer, Paul Martin](#). We value your feedback.

Board of Director Officers, 2010

- President: Mr. George Anderson
- Past President: Mr. Glenn Townson
- President Elect: Mr. John Lewis
- Treasurer: Mr. Glenn Gillaspay
- Secretary: Mr. Bob Berkovits

Directors at Large

- Communications: Mr. Paul Martin
- Programs: Mr. Donald York
- Membership Committee: Ms. Bhanumati Sunkara



Sign up for our Email Newsletter

GO

Privacy by SafeSubscribeSM
For Email Marketing you can trust