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Engaging your Board Throughout the Entire Meeting

Let's imagine a typical meeting together. Ahead of the meeting, the manager creates an agenda of topics that they know are important, along with a management report. The agenda is then sent to the board members just one day before the meeting. During the meeting, it becomes evident that the board hasn't had time to read the management report, financials, or the previous minutes. They have misunderstandings about what needs to be accomplished during the meeting, and they want to talk about everything except what's on the agenda. It looks like it will be a lengthy, disorganized, and tiring meeting.

How do we Make Meetings More Focused and Productive?

We must understand that the meeting doesn't just occur during the actual meet-

ing time slot – it's an entire process called the Meeting Cycle. Each part requires attention and participation.

The Meeting Cycle involves three elements:

1. Preparation for the meeting (agenda and management reports);
2. The meeting itself (discussion and decisions); and
3. Outcomes from the meeting (meeting minutes and actions to be taken).

The crucial, often missing element is that each meeting member needs to have an active (but structured) role in all three parts of the Meeting Cycle.

1. Preparation for the Meeting:

Agenda: When creating the agenda, a draft should be provided to the board in advance of the final meeting package. This allows each member to add

any topics that are important to them and topics the manager may have missed or not known. These suggested topics can be added at the end of the 'New Business' section on the final agenda, along with the person's name. This way, when all On-Going Business and New Business (as determined by the manager) have been discussed, the board can then proceed with their additional items. If time is running short, some items can be deferred to a later date or not discussed depending on overall interest in the topic. Because each participant's topics are included on the final agenda, they will be less likely to interrupt another part of the meeting to bring up their own issue.

Also, remember that an agenda should contain all unresolved items from the previous meeting as On-Going Business, even if it's just to provide a simple

update. Otherwise, they should be noted as Completed Business. This maintains the topic flow from one meeting to the next while preventing interruptions about topics that appear to be missing.

Tip: Except for items like the financial review and minutes review, keep the agenda simple with only three main sections: New Business, On-Going Business, and Completed Business. This will temporally track topics from start to finish over a series of multiple meetings.

Management Report: The management report, although solely created by the manager, is a vital tool to help each participant understand why a topic is being discussed, what is being asked of them, or what is being recommended. A common mistake is to include an item on the agenda without any supporting information or guidance. It leaves room for the participants to speculate and create ideas that run off track. Instead, provide members with the correct information upfront, and they will come to the meeting equipped with better ideas to make faster, more effective decisions.

2. The Meeting Itself:

Discussion: During the discussion, each board member should be asked if they have anything to say. Using an open-ended question like “does anyone else have anything to add or ask?” is perfect. This ensures that everyone is encouraged to voice their thoughts and contribute to the conversation.

Decisions: When making a decision, it is essential to ensure that all participants are encouraged to weigh in. This especially applies to the vote of approval. Often, a majority will approve an item, but someone will remain silent. This can lead to the impression that the vote was unanimous when it was not; therefore, it's best to ask if everyone is clear on the proposal/resolution and if there are any objections. This reduces misunderstandings in the future. If someone objects against a majority approval, it's a good practice to ask whether they wish for their specific objection to be recorded in the minutes.

3. What Comes After the Meeting:

Meeting Minutes: The draft meeting minutes should be sent to the board members as soon as they are received. This allows participants to remind themselves of the recent meeting's outcomes, identify any corrections that may be needed, and ensure that their ideas are reflected correctly. If the minutes are only seen at the next meeting, the events of the meeting will be harder to remember, and the minutes will be more difficult to verify or correct; providing the minutes well in advance makes the approval process easier and faster at the next meeting.

Actions To Be Taken: The meeting minutes will also contain action items. Providing the minutes to all participants well in advance serves to remind each meeting participant of any responsibilities

ties they may have agreed to take part in. This leads to more items being completed before the next meeting, which ultimately means less re-tread at the next meeting, which is always a good thing.

Let's Imagine a Better Meeting Together.

Several days before the meeting, the board receives a finalized agenda. Each member adds one or two items that are important to them. At the meeting, they approve the minutes right away, having read them well in advance. Because everyone is clear on the topics and recommendations from management before the meeting even begins, most items are discussed quickly, with good decisions being made almost effortlessly. Amazingly, there is little to no contention between the board members. The meeting follows the agenda in order, with the board waiting until all of the manager's topics are concluded before discussing their own. The meeting then ends in record time! ■

Tim Bolivar began as a Condominium Manager in 2013, ultimately overseeing a portfolio of properties across the GTA as a Registered Condominium Manager for six years. Following that, Tim became the Service Coordinator for Minutes On-Time, a professional condominium minute-taking service, where he now acts as their General Manager. minutesontime.com

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