

Who wants to be president?

A year ago I attended a regional meeting of an organization which meets every two years for business and the election of officers. When it came time for the nominating committee chairman to present the nominations, the chairman rose and made an excuse for why the committee didn't have a slate to present. Before I could ask the presiding officer to read us the bylaws to see what the duties of the various officers were, a member made a motion to recess to find nominees. The motion was adopted and we recessed. The maker of the motion immediately got up and went to another member and said, "John if you will nominate me for President, I'll nominate you for Vice President." Then this member turned to the chairman of the nominating committee and asked, "Would you serve as Secretary?" By this time the current Treasurer figured out what was going on and hurried to where the plans were being laid, and volunteered, "I'll continue to be Treasurer." We all sat with mouths open watching how this person not only selected herself as president but pick all her own officers. The meeting was called back to order. There was one nominee presented from the floor for president, but the die was cast in the nominating process. The assembly adopted the slate.

Fortunately this does not happen frequently in organization. So how do organizations select the best people to serve in offices?

Choosing the right officers

Choosing the right officers doesn't begin when the nominating committee is given the membership list and instructed to find members to serve. It really begins when a member joins the organization.

Every member has the possibility of serving in some leadership position if allowed to grow and develop with the organization. But the first thing the other members have to do is recognize the abilities and talents of other members. If a few people are doing all the work in an organization, then there needs to be some soul searching and self-examination. Members might ask the following questions:

- Are we giving new members an orientation where we explain the purpose and goals of the organization?
- Do we explain what the officers do? What the various committees do?
- Do we tell the new members what we expect of them?
- Do we assign a new member a mentor?
- Do we get to know the member and his talents so that he can be assigned to the right committees?
- Do we give new members any information about basic parliamentary knowledge so that they can make motions at meetings and follow the business at the meetings?
- Do we assign them to committee work immediately or do we make them wait awhile?
- Do the members think that only certain individuals can do things?
- Is there an inner circle in the organization so that others feel excluded?
- If someone isn't doing their job well do we criticize or offer to help them?
- Do committee chairmen allow the committee members to have input or do they run the entire show and just order the committee members around?
- Does the president allow members to present business and participate in discussion? Or does the president act as a tyrant?

How an organization answers these questions will determine the kind of organization and what happens to new members.

The successful organization that retains members, is active and growing, is the one that recognizes and uses the talents of all the members. Those organizations that have an inner circle or just a few people doing the work will no doubt not exist within a few years.

Organizations must encourage all members to work and develop their skills. The older students should mentor the younger students so when they graduate, the remaining students are prepared to take over. This not only means in carrying out the day to day duties of the organization but also in such matters as parliamentary competition. Continuity is the key factor. The organization is an entity in and of itself. Members come and go. By having mentors, training sessions, and a constant appreciation of everyone's work and talents, the organization will survive the transition of graduating seniors and incoming freshman.

How the Nominating Committee should select the nominees.

The purpose of a nominating committee is to find the best people for each office. One might say that this is a screening committee for the organization. This committee is to find the best nominees for this office and to see if the person is willing to serve. So the when the members elect someone they know that the person is qualified and has said that he or she will serve.

When the nominating committee is selected, they should be given a list of all the eligible members and what the specific needs of the organization are at that time. Officers should be selected to fill those needs. For example if the organization needs to set up a new computerized system for keeping track of dues, expenditures and that would give detailed reports, then the nominee should possess the skills to do that. If the organization wants to start working with other clubs, and they want the president to be the emissary, then the committee should select someone that is outgoing and knows how to work well with others. It is important for the committee members to be unbiased and select the best people for office and not just their friends. They should also consider how the new slate would work together. If they know that two people have personality conflicts, then it might not be wise to have them on the same slate.

Passing the Torch

After the election it is important that the previous officers meet with the new ones. The outgoing officers should give the incoming officers their files and go over the information with them. If at all possible there should be a training session for the new officers. The new president should be trained in parliamentary procedure, how to conduct a meeting, prepare an agenda, and other necessary information needed to fulfill his duties.

The treasurer should be brought up to date with the financial records of the organization. If these are on the computer, then he or she should be made familiar with the program and how to give reports. The secretary should be trained in how to take the minutes, what to include in them and the correct way of writing the minutes and keeping them in a permanent book.

If the officers comprise the executive committee or board then they should be brought up to date with the activities of the previous one and what is expected of them in this new position. The more new officers are trained and mentored the easier the transition will be. This will also ensure continuity.