

LESSONS FROM THE SIDE CAR

Principles to Effective Parliamentary Strategies

While rare on the roads of America, motorcycle sidecars are easily recognizable in all their types and varieties. They draw the attention of all who witness their passing by and remain in all our memories.

The motorcycle sidecar represents the perfect analogy to our role as parliamentarians in meetings and organizations. While often we are along for the ride, there are times when we must react and throw our weight around to get the performance which is required to safely navigate our journey.



To achieve speeds up to 175 mph and safely navigate the tight twists and turns of a trip around the Isle of Man during their annual Tourist Trophy race, the driver and passenger must work together in keeping all three wheels on the ground and the weight evenly distributed. Mistakes by either member of the team can result in the flipping of the machine risking injury, even death, to each.

Running an effective meeting is a team sport requiring the often unspoken coordination between Chair and Parliamentarian. While the Chair is always in charge, the Parliamentarian must be pro-active in the efforts to keep the meeting running smoothly.

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THE ROLES OF THE PARLIAMENTARIAN

LAW OF THE SIDECAR

When a Parliamentarian interacts with the Chairman and other officers of an organization they must obey the Law of the Side Car. They must remember that they are represented by the passenger in the side car while the Chair is represented by the Driver of the machine.

A good Passenger makes the Driver appear more skillful

LAW OF THE SHEEPDOG

The Parliamentarian serves as a Sheep Dog to all the members of an organization. When interacting with the members, the parliamentarian must remember that while he is to educate and assist the members, he still reports to the Chair as the shepherd of the organization.

A good Sheepdog makes the Shepherd appear more engaged

LAW OF THE WATCHTOWER

Every organization must be protected from all the threats that can come from the outside, so therefore, the Parliamentarian must serve as the Watchman atop the Watchtower. When the watchman detects dangers he must report those dangers to the commanding officer of the garrison, namely the Chairman of the organization.

A good Watchman makes the Commander look wiser

THE LAW OF THE SIDECAR

INTERFACING WITH THE CHAIR



1 The Driver is in control

While Parliamentarians play a key role in meetings, they are never the key player in meetings. The Parliamentarian should never risk upstaging the Chair or risk presenting them in a poor light. The Parliamentarian is always the passenger, never the driver.



2 It's not about the scenery

While the Parliamentarian is not the driver, they cannot be passengers that are just along for the ride. Too many untrained parliamentarians understand it is their role to sit quietly until asked a question. But a professional parliamentarian takes notes, keeps track of the meeting and actively feeds the Chair assistance in a quiet and discrete manner, as necessary.

3 Throwing your weight around

When the road is straight and even, the passenger stays tucked out of the wind but when the curves and bumps in the road comes, the passenger assists the driver by moving and placing his weight where required. A good Parliamentarian anticipates when his action will be required.



4 Its all about trust

While driving the driver can't instruct the passenger on his actions, he must trust that the passenger will be in the right place at the right time when making the corner. So too, the Chair must have complete trust in the Parliamentarian.

5 The right action at the right time makes all the difference

The Chair looks the most skillful when the Parliamentarian takes the right action at the right time, feeds the proper information and makes the Chair look to be in total control of a meeting.

THE LAW OF THE SHEEPDOG

INTERFACING WITH THE MEMBERS

1 The Sheepdog expects the sheep to be sheep

The members of our organizations are happy to do as little as possible so they must be treated with respect when educating and assisting them. The truth is they don't want to be sheep dogs themselves. Proper expectations should be placed on the members.



2 The Sheepdog is responsible for all the sheep

While today's organizations are rife with conflicting factions, the parliamentarian must remain impartial and assist all members equally. That doesn't mean that the parliamentarian can't work with an eye towards unification which is in the best interest of everyone. Above all, the Parliamentarian must appear to be neutral in all issues.

3 The Sheepdog protects the Sheep from Predators

In every organization, there are those who would use the rules to prey on the unsuspecting members. The Parliamentarian must be a strictler for the observation of the rights of all members while not being over excessive strict on the rule violations which are harmless to all involved.



4 The Sheepdog protects the Sheep from Themselves

The members often endanger themselves by ill-considered motions. When possible the Parliamentarian advising the membership on the development of better motions.

5 The Sheepdog makes the Shepard look good

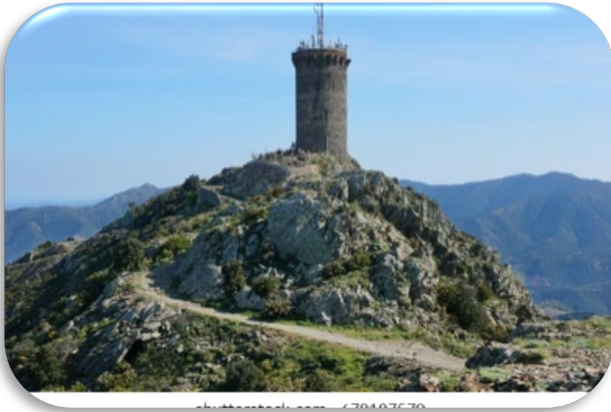
By assisting with the members education and process outside of the meeting, the Parliamentarian helps the Chair look more in engaged and in control of the meeting. The more help before the meeting the smoother the meeting will be.

THE LAW OF THE WATCHTOWER

INTERFACING WITH THE ORGANIZATION

1 The Watchman maintains alertness to dangers

The Parliamentarian must stay in touch with the entirety of the hierarchy of documents, especially those outside of the normal usage of the officers. Knowledge of Bylaws and Rules are often not enough.



2 The Watchman must stay at his post

While changes in Bylaws are rare and predictable, the changes in the other documents may be less so, therefore the Parliamentarian must be ever vigilant to changes, especially in laws and those from parent organizational authorities.



3 The Watchman alerts the garrison

When there are changes, the Parliamentarian must communicate with the officer as necessary. The Parliamentarian has roles outside of the meeting.



4 The Watchman is always engaged.

To help keep the organization from being a danger to itself and to keep things running smoothly, the Parliamentarian should consider themselves as ex-officio of the Resolution and Rules Committee, even if not official so.

5 The Watchman sees first and see farthest

The one atop the watchtower will see the danger first and the danger that is farthest away. By detecting those dangers as they are still far away, the Parliamentarian can help the organization resolve the dangers before they become a crisis.

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- **The Chair must select the Parliamentarian wisely**

It is unfortunate that most Chairs will select their Parliamentarian based on friendships and other motivations and not by those characteristics that make for effective Parliamentarians. The Parliamentarian plays a key role in an organization and that role should not be taken lightly. But furthermore, it is necessary that Parliamentarians take the time to perfect the required characteristics.



Key Characteristics of a Parliamentarian

- **Skills with the Rules**

Should be able to discuss and explain the rules without excessive reference to the RONR. Referring to the RONR, only when challenged.

- **Skills with People**

Should communicate well and have a teaching spirit. The ability to explain the rules at the appropriate level and a willingness to be patient with all members is a must.

- **Recognized Impartiality**

Members throughout the organization shouldn't envision a particular bias pre-existing in the candidate. All members must be comfortable with them.

- **Trustworthy**

As the keeper and enforcer of the rules, the Parliamentarian should be trusted by the Chair, as well as the members. When troubles come, can they be trusted?