

Your Role As A Committee Chairman

June Cline*

You have an important job — heading a committee for an organization. Important? Yes indeed, for it is up to you to stimulate the committee members so they will share their views, gain a clear understanding of the tasks at hand, discuss current issues, implement necessary action, and evaluate the results.

A committee needs organization and leadership if it is to be effective. And you, the committee chairman, are responsible for providing both. That is important!

Selecting a Committee

Sometimes an entire committee is appointed or elected when the committee chairman is named. At other times, the committee chairman selects committee members.

Whether you select the committee personally or only have a vote in their election, you should know what kinds of people make good committee members. A committee will be most effective if its members:

- are concerned about the work of the committee.
- represent a variety of ideas about the topic.
- have the time and energy to participate.
- have some experienced and some new members to generate new ideas.

Usually, a committee should be limited to five to ten people. Five people make an ideal working committee — a committee assigned to compile a report or plan an activity. As many as 12 people may be needed for a committee to generate ideas. A group of less than five has trouble functioning if any member cannot attend a meeting. A committee of more than 12 may be overcome with too many ideas and find it difficult to set meeting times.

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What's Next?

Once the committee has been named, you are ready to get started. This means you have planning to do before the committee even meets. As chairman, you need to make arrangements for the meeting, making sure the facilities are appropriate and comfortable. You also will need to see that the proposed time and date are convenient for all the committee members. Remember to notify all committee members of the plans.

Include specific instructions in the meeting notice. If committee members are to carry out an assignment, let them know about it before the meeting.

The chairman should also invite any resource people who would be an asset at the committee meeting. Give resource people plenty of advance warning and fill them in on all necessary details.

You may want to mail the proposed agenda to committee members before the meeting, giving each member a chance to make additions. The plan does not have to be elaborate — just a working plan to give you some direction when the committee meets. It might look like this:

Chairman's Committee Plan

Committee _____

Purpose _____

Number on committee _____

Date _____ time _____ to _____ place _____

Special instructions or homework for committee members _____

Agenda

Person responsible

Call to order _____

Introduction of participants _____

Report of last meeting _____

Progress reports _____

Discussion of _____

Materials needed

Person responsible

Refreshments (optional) _____

Audio-visual equipment _____

Mimeographing _____

At the Committee Meeting

As committee chairman, you will have plenty to do at each committee meeting. Be careful that you do not take over completely. The trick is to keep the meeting on track and provide each committee member a chance to participate. At each meeting it is your job to:

- Make sure all committee members know each other. For this reason, it is a good idea to allow time for some socializing at each meeting.
- Be sure all committee members understand the committee's purpose and responsibilities.
- Be sure that each committee member takes part in the discussion of ways to accomplish the goals and that you assign tasks evenly among the members.
- Be sure that all options — both pro and con — are presented during the discussion. You can promote good feelings among members who oppose each other by such statements as: "What do some of the rest of you think about this?" "Getting back to Jane White's point about . . ." "Mary, you were about to say something."
- State the group's decision clearly so everyone understands the final outcome. Prepare or help committee members to prepare a report for the entire club.
- Set up guidelines to evaluate the decisions made.

Keeping Track

As committee chairman, you may assign several different tasks to the committee members. If there is more than one thing to be done and more than one person to do it, it is easy to become confused about who is doing what. A committee work record can help prevent this problem.

The record is merely a sheet that outlines what needs to be done, who is assigned to do it and when it should be done. The record will do more than help you remember who is doing what; it will help you identify any committee member who is being overlooked or any members who are being bogged down with too much to do. Suggest that all committee members keep a similar record.

Work Record for _____ Committee

Deadline _____

Things to do	Person Responsible	Date Started	Date Completed

The information in this publication is adapted from *Your Job As A Committee Chairman*, Agricultural Information Department, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.

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