



COURTESY SUSAN LEAHY

Raise your hand if you're sure: During one of her workshops, Susan Leahy seeks out volunteers to participate in a *parli-pro* role-playing exercise.

Amend Your Meetings

Five steps for teaching *parli-pro*

By Susan Leahy, MA ABS

Motions, seconds and amendments are commonly misused and create chaos and confusion during meetings. The following five steps will help you think differently about how to teach student leaders the skill of parliamentary procedure.

Step One: Emphasize Other Benefits

Most students are told that they have to use *parli-pro* “because the bylaws say so.” However, being able to run a meeting effectively is essential to their success as future business leaders.

When students learn how to use *parli-pro* formally, they can use it informally in any other type of meeting. Stress that struggling a little today while learning the rules is far better than having to catch up tomorrow as they emerge in the work force.

Step Two: Treat It Like a Foreign Language

Teaching *parli-pro* is similar to teaching a foreign language. Often you’ll find that the majority of your team is made up of “beginners,” who get lost easily and may feel too intimidated to participate. “Intermediates”—those who are just starting to speak and make sense of this language—know just enough to take part but can get easily lost, thus throwing the meeting into a space of confusion rather than work. And you’ll probably have a small number of “advanced” speakers who

are fluent in making motions.

The ratio of beginners to intermediates and advanced needs to flip so that there are more students who know how to speak the language than those who don’t. Also, pay close attention to your fluent speakers. Advanced students sometimes take advantage of their superior knowledge and use it as a “weapon,” speaking over the heads of other members. Make certain that advanced students are helping the rest of the team learn this tool rather than intimidating them by moving too fast or dominating the conversation of the meeting.

Step Three: Stick to the Basics

There are only about seven motions that a group uses on a regular basis. Make sure that everyone understands these basics first:

- The Main Motion
- Amendment
- Amend the Amendment
- Refer to a Committee
- Postpone to a Definite Time
- Previous Question
- Adjourn

Students need to have a good grasp of these motions before you move on to the more complicated (and less commonly used) ones.



Susan Leahy

Step Four: Reinforce Lessons with Ongoing Training

Most advisors spend only about one hour reviewing *parli-pro* during the annual leadership retreat—and then suffer through an entire year with students not understanding what’s going on in meetings.

Parli-pro can’t be learned in one day. Set up at least three different training dates that focus solely on *parli-pro*. This will give the entire team the opportunity to learn the basics together. Attendance at training sessions should be mandatory, since the knowledge learned in each one will build off the last.

Parli-pro is easiest to learn when you can see it, hear it, and do it. During your training sessions, have your students verbally role play each motion. Also consider holding some mock meetings, which will give students the opportunity to practice and learn the motions before they have to use those skills for real.

Along with the training program, provide additional resources students can reference on their own such as books, handouts, or instructional DVDs. Create a small library of *parli-pro* resources that students can check out when they need to.

Step Five: Feature a Motion at Each Meeting

Whenever you have a new group, take 10 minutes at the beginning of each meeting to review one of the basic motions listed in Step Three above.

During each teaching session, share the featured motion, its definition, and an example of how to use it. Then, let one or two of your beginners role play using the motion. When ten minutes is up, resume your regular business meeting. Having a featured motion to start each meeting will remind students that *parli-pro* is an important tool they’re expected to learn and use.

Also, don’t be afraid to teach during your meetings when needed. Too many Student Governments struggle when they could be making better use of the time. If your group gets lost, informally pause the meeting to explain the motions on the table and where they are within the discussion. Once you’ve explained them, you can jump back into the meeting. **SL**

Susan Leahy, one of ASGA’s workshop leaders at national and regional conferences, is a sought-after authority on communication and presentation skills. She’s the expert behind The Freeway Guide to Job Interview and The Freeway Guide to Public Speaking. Her instructional DVD, Driving the Language of Parliamentary Procedure, reviews the seven fundamental motions used during most meetings and is the leading training resource of its kind.

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