

Quaker Business Basics

Whenever we remember that we are in the presence of God, transformation is possible. Every task, no matter how mundane, becomes an act of worship, a word of praise offered to God. This is the basis for Quaker business practice. We call it “meeting for worship with attention to business”• because it is grounded in an awareness of God’s presence.

Don’t be lulled into thinking that you are there to get the job done and can dispense with the worship. Hold the work of the meeting in the Light. Listen deeply and speak tenderly. Begin with worship; end with worship; and call for worship whenever tempers fray or weariness sets in.

We should be willing to take as long as necessary to reach unity, but we are most certainly not required to take longer than necessary. There are a number of things the clerk can do to keep the meeting focused.

- Have a written agenda. Spend time before the meeting considering just what needs to be done. Remember to hold it in the Light, not just think it through.
- Ask for written reports and proposals. This will encourage advance preparation, and keep Friends focused on what is under consideration. An enormous amount of time is wasted if Friends are confused about what they are being asked to decide.
- Have each report or proposal presented by the person most involved This will provide a personal touch and an infusion of energy. (If you find you are doing all the presentations, you need to get more members actively involved in the work!)
- Present each item as if it were a question for worship sharing. Explain the guidelines for worship sharing. Make clear that you expect Friends to approach the business in hand in a way that is radically different from ordinary discussion. Here are the basics:
 1. Allow silence before and after each person speaks.
 2. Listen attentively and respectfully.
 3. Do not react to or critique what others have said, but express your own concerns and insights as deeply and honestly as you can.
 4. Speak as much as possible from your own experience.
 5. Expect to speak only once during consideration of a given item.

Paradoxical as it may seem, this approach is likely to achieve a decision, grounded on a sense of the meeting, far more quickly than a back and forth discussion would. Everyone has a chance to speak, and to be listened to. Everyone is encouraged to dig more deeply and share more honestly than they normally would. When everyone has spoken once, there may well be a clear sense of how the meeting is led to move forward. The clerk may want to reframe the question in light of what has been said and ask for another round of worship sharing. If there is no unity, further discussion is unlikely to help. Ask a few Friends to explore the question further and bring back a recommendation to the next meeting. Then move on to the next item of business.

Tips on Taking Minutes

- **Carefully record what happens in business meeting.** Good minutes help the meeting keep track of its plans and commitments, and help those who were not present to find out what is happening. Minutes should be kept in a safe, accessible place for current use and preserved for future reference.
- **Have a recording clerk who serves in this role consistently.** Asking for volunteers at the last minute does not work well. The recording clerk plays a very important role, and needs time to prepare for it. In some yearly meetings the clerk also serves as recording clerk. Try out both methods and see which works best in your meeting.
- **Remember that the purpose of the minutes is to record actions taken by the meeting.** It is not necessary, or desirable, to record what everyone said. Minutes should simply lay out the question under consideration. Touch on major points of agreement or disagreement. Record what action was taken.
- **Be sure to include the names of anyone who volunteered to follow up, or any Friends assigned responsibility to take action on behalf of the meeting.**
- **Read the minutes back in the face of the meeting for approval.** After each agenda item, give the recording clerk a chance to write a minute explaining what was considered, what was decided, and who was assigned to implement the decision. Ask for gathered worship while the minute is being drafted. This will give everyone a chance to re-center. Then have the recording clerk read the minute and ask if the minute expresses Friends' intent with regard to that particular item. This way of taking and approving minutes may seem intimidating at first, but it is worth trying. It ensures that everyone is clear about just what has been decided. It breaks the task of writing minutes into small manageable pieces, and once the meeting is over, the task is completed. There is no need to struggle afterwards with trying to reconstruct what

happened. Most important, it is enormously helpful in holding a business meeting in worship, creating a rhythm of silence and speaking that is very satisfying.

Meeting for worship with a concern for business is the crown jewel of Quakerism. In worship we learn how to listen deeply, and open our hearts to the Light and to each other. In business meeting, where we inevitably encounter disagreements and differences, we find out whether we can listen and love deeply enough to be a gathered people, obedient to divine guidance.

Suggestions for further reading:

- Drayton, Brian. “Reflections on Being Clerk of a Small Meeting.” • *FGConnections*. Friends General Conference, Spring 2004.
- Hickey, Damon. *Unforeseen Joy: Serving a Friends Meeting as Recording Clerk*. North Carolina
- Lacey, Paul. *The Authority of Our Meetings Is the Power of God*. Pendle Hill, 2003.
- Morley, Barry. *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting*. Pendle Hill, 1996.

Connect

Connect with FGC:

- FGC has resources to support new and existing groups
- FGC can help a group connect with other local Quaker groups
- FGC can help you get listed on QuakerFinder.org to help others find you

FGC staff and volunteers are happy to talk with you about this, or any other issue, your meeting or worship group is facing. Please contact us by emailing us at friends@fgcquaker.org or phoning 215-561-1700.

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