

Robert's Rules of Order

This past Saturday, I finally purchased a copy of the official *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised Tenth Edition* published in 2000. Notice is made in the front matter to cite the book as RONR (10th ed.), so as I refer to the title of this book herein, I will simply state RONR with the (10th ed.) being implied. Why did I procure this edition of the RONR? Primarily because I have been carrying around the ninth edition for the last seventeen years and was anticipating there would be revisions incorporated that would address the significant changes in the rapidly changing macro environment surrounding the process of conducting meetings.

Let's review some of the history of this publication. Brigadier General Henry Martyn Robert was a US Army Engineer of Huguenot descent born on May 2, 1837 in Robertsville, South Carolina (I wonder if there might be a subtle connection between his surname and the name of his birthplace). Wherever he was stationed, he was active in church organizations, civic, and educational work. Evidently the straw that broke the camel's back occurred some- time in 1863 in New Bedford, Massachusetts when he was asked to preside over a meeting, apparently without any advance notice. Although having struggled through the process, he simply did not know how to effectively lead it. After that experience, he managed to locate some limited rules on deliberative assemblies and created his own "cheat sheet" of four or five motions which he carried in his wallet for several years.

In 1867, he was ordered to San Francisco and found himself in a turbulent environment created by a mix of people arriving from every state. Members from numerous organizations had brought with them differing rules and strong convictions as to their version's merits. Subsequently, confusion and misunderstanding reigned, resulting in the majority of meeting times being spent deliberating over procedural issues rather than the real work of the bodies. Over the next several years, similar situations arose throughout his assignments, so General Robert produced some sixteen pages of rules that were the rudimentary beginning of a standardized solution. It wasn't until January 1874 in Milwaukee that he had sufficient time to seriously devote to the project. The severe winter had halted the army engineering services along Lake Michigan for several months. The document thus grew to 176 pages and was based upon the principles and rules used by the US House of Representatives but, of course, adopted for ordinary societies.

Today, my copy of the RONR is a grand total of 704 pages in length. Incredibly, two pages less than my 9th edition. However, there is a note in fine print that states, "(Millennium.' Thoroughly re-edited to refine conceptual clarity and consistency of statement.)" I got the sense that modifications were scattered throughout the entire compilation, but simultaneously anticipated that the overall process had remained relatively intact. Upon cursory review, the list of motions appeared mostly preserved with the exception of a new one, §32 *Request to be excused from a duty*. I can only assume that in today's turbulent times there are more frequent opportunities to seek to accommodate exceptions to the responsibilities commensurate with participation by the members. One can use this motion to apparently "beg" for consent of the body to let you "off the hook."

The Preface does list over fifty revisions and clarifications, but it does not give specific locations within the text. Therefore, I surmise this is my subtle hint from the editors to plan to again wade my way through the entire book. Through the years, I have not participated in any committees or organizations that have actually used RONR to the level of detail written in this book, but when one reads it, RONR does present a wealth of knowledge and insight. I highly recommend you pick up a copy and peruse it at your leisure. Doing so is certainly a great way to prepare anyone who may find himself or herself in a situation of having to either chair a meeting for the first time or wishing to establish order to one that may have degenerated to a wrestling match. Subsequently, in most cases, you could confidently lead a meeting only having to use about a half dozen of the motions. Incidentally, that is roughly the number that General Robert originally carried around in his wallet.

Lastly, I leave you with a new quote from General Robert that was added to RONR: "It is difficult to find another branch of knowledge where a small amount of study produces such great results in increased efficiency in a country where the people rule, as in parliamentary law."



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