

A Good Chairperson

What exactly are those qualities that make someone a good Chairperson?

Temperament

If a Chairperson is the person who is expected to control meetings which are, essentially, the business of the Scout Group, section or whatever, then, surely, the personality of Chairperson has an influence on the whole structure and tone of the meeting.

If the Chairperson is friendly and a good mixer, then others will follow suit and the general atmosphere will be friendly and co-operative. If, however, the Chairperson is brusque and unapproachable, there will inevitably be cliques and factions.

A calm and even temperament is a great asset in a Chairperson, as this creates a feeling of stability, whereas if there is too much volatility, the reverse is the case. Such a person is also more likely to remain unperturbed by a noisy meeting or difficult committee, and it is often only the efficiency of the Chairperson that prevents the complete breakdown of a meeting or the disruption of negotiations.

Guidance

The Chairperson has to be the person who can think clearly and objectively, especially in committee work.

In order to maintain control of the meeting, the Chairperson needs to be aware of all the ramifications of the business on the agenda, and it is the Chairperson's duty to put all sides of the question to the members of the committee, before a decision is reached.

By withholding information, emphasising one point understating another in the initial stage of discussion, or by a biased summing-up, the Chairperson can influence the result – a power that is open to abuse, unless controlled by clear thinking and an open mind.

It is very easy to influence peoples' decisions if one has a knowledge and strong feeling about the matter being discussed. The wise Chairperson will only disclose their personal views if asked and will express the case clearly, leaving the meeting to make its own decision.

Meeting control

If a Chairperson is to carry out his or her role effectively, knowledge of the appropriate procedure for that meeting is essential.

Knowing what is a suitable format can generally be assessed by viewing Agendas of previous meetings and also from publications.

It should be emphasised that, in addition to general procedure, the Chairperson should possess a sound knowledge of the rules of the South African Scout Association, as published within Policy, Organisation and Rules.

A meeting will get through a far greater amount of business, waste less time and give more time for free speech and sound decisions if correct procedures and information are used as a reference point, so that everyone knows the point of the issue.

Humour and self-control

Perhaps, one of the most difficult things with which the average Chairperson has to contend is his or her own temper. Humour can be the Chairperson's best tool when wishing to diffuse rising tempers during a meeting. As has been said, the meeting often takes its tone from that of the Chairperson.

Tempers can easily become frayed from all sorts of outside causes, but nothing has a more stabilising effect than a Chairperson who refuses to get rattled by peoples' angst.

Obviously, this should not be taken to the extent that, whilst the meeting is 'actively' discussing an item on the Agenda, the Chairperson is happily saying 'Did you hear the one about the dog with no nose'..., such practice does have a tendency to increase the activity with which the item is being discussed, and may mean that the Chairperson becomes an item of discussion.

Personal Discipline

The Chairperson who has a personal sense of responsibility for their role will be a success. Having the personal discipline to assess what the meeting requires of them and preparing for all possible outcomes will benefit the meeting and, ultimately, the element of the Movement you are discussing.

One of the main factors is actually starting the meeting at the publicised time and setting a finishing time which should be adhered to, whether matters have been fully discussed or not. This provides a rigid structure of which everyone is aware. Committee members get to know that the meeting will start when it should and that they should be there for that time. It also provides a time structure for discussing items on the Agenda. If the Chairperson is seen to be organised, the meeting will be organised and beneficial.