

As I mentioned at the start of last season, I would like to see Robert's Rules of Order removed from our by-laws. As it currently stands, Robert's Rules are mentioned three times in our current by-laws:

4.1.5 Robert's Rules Of Order

The rules contained in the current Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised shall govern the LNS in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with these guidelines.

4.4 Committees

Per Robert's Rules of Order, if either the Executive or Musical Director volunteers for a committee, the choir must agree via a simple majority vote of members present.

Section 5: Parliamentary Items

The rules contained in the current Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised shall govern the LNS in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with these Guidelines.

I've brought a copy of the newly revised edition of Robert's Rules. The most recent edition, the 11th, was published in 2011. It is 669 pages. It is used the world-over for leading governments, Fortune 500 companies, school board meetings, and everything in between. It covers, essentially, every possible conflict and creates an order for every single action in a meeting. When understood by leaders and members of an organization, Robert's Rules are extremely useful and productive.

I do not believe it is the correct set of rules for the Last Note Singers.

Why? There are a handful of reasons, and I'll give you a few right now:

- The vast majority of us have not reviewed Robert's Rules since somewhere around our 7th grade Civics class. When very few are familiar with the rules, those who act like they know them well can control the discussion, meeting, or group. Having them as the bedrock of our by-laws without everyone understanding them can lead to fraud.
- Our leaders, though elected, are volunteer. Most often, they are taking on a task that no one else is interested in. Forcing them to organize a meeting under rules they aren't comfortable with is unfair.
- We are a collective that, although we frequently do not follow our by-laws (nor Robert's Rules) very closely, consistently allows every member's voice to be heard. We allow discussion, we vote, and we let the majority rule within our loose meeting structure. I've yet to witness an occasion where the will of the group was not done, whether we followed our by-laws to get there or not.
- Although we have assets – roughly \$1,000 in the bank, part-ownership in some sound equipment, a random collection of props, historical artifacts of the groups' past, and roughly 25,000 pages of illegally copied music – I believe our largest asset is the relationships that are built between members. I also believe that every time we have a contentious business meeting where our leaders or members intentions are questioned, or even threatened with a law suit, or our by-laws, propped up by misunderstandings of Robert's Rules of Order, are thrown in each other's faces, we chip away at those relationships, and in so doing, chip away at our greatest asset.

It would be fair to say that our by-laws state that Robert's Rules are the governing order, and it is every member's responsibility to know them. I look at this through my own prism – I have hundreds of things competing for my time. If I am asked to become familiar with a 669 page book in order to understand the rules for a community singing group, the decision is simple. After sitting through a handful of our business meetings, I'm not surprised that many of the potential members that come to a rehearsal or two do not end up joining.

I think it is rather simple: In a group of 35 – 50 friends, I believe we can use discussion, consensus and common sense to achieve our goals. And I don't think I am alone. When I stated last fall that I thought we should look at removing Robert's Rules from our by-laws, I had numerous people contact me in person,

or via email or phone, to say they agreed. When I proposed condensing our by-laws this season, I had many people ask about removing Robert's Rules at that time.

I'll wrap up by using the words of our own Bill Howe, who said it much more concisely, and much more poetically than I could have, "A group sinks or swims based on the good will of the members, not on how precise the rules are."

In that spirit, I propose that we removed all references to Robert's Rules of Order from the LNS by-laws.