

The Indecisive Committee

We've all been there. Wading through hours of Committee meetings where decisions that need to be made just don't get made. Important and often surprisingly unimportant items tabled for weeks, months... Sometimes years! Pretty soon the Business Arising section of the agenda has a list of 25 items! Ugh! Why is that? And what can we do to help our Committees along in making decisions? I've put together some standard causes of Committee paralysis and how we can (maybe) help them move through it for their and the community's sake.

The major roadblocks to action

Lack of leadership. Probably our **biggest issue, a lack of leadership within a Committee** results in one that can't or won't make timely decisions as there is no one with focus, purpose and vision leading them to make them. A Committee without a leader is reactive, not proactive, and moves whichever way the wind blows.

Don't understand their role. A lot of Committee members don't understand their [role](#); generally defined as "in charge of:

- the administrative and day-to-day running of the body corporate
- making decisions on behalf of the body corporate
- putting the lawful decisions of the body corporate into place.

Don't understand the issue. Oftentimes Committees deal with complicated issues that are 100% new and news to them; and have out-sized financial and/or political ramifications. This can paralyse a Board for weeks or months as they try to absorb the matter and its effects on them and the community.

Afraid of the political results. Getting any Committee to make what will inevitably be an "unpopular" decision (special levies, raising levies, enforcing certain rules, etc.) is always a challenge. It's never fun to get harassed as you're laying around the pool or heading to the mailbox.

How we can help

Help them understand their role. The role of the Committee is as defined above, and they are charged with **preserving, protecting, maintaining and enhancing** the property of the community. As a manager, it's your job to know what the role of the Committee is and be able to articulate it at any time.

In addition, it's also incumbent upon you to guide your Committees to the **many resources available that explain these concepts** and others as they relate to Committees and Bodies Corporate. If you don't know of the resources, you can find many available in from The Office of the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management [website](#); however, I highly recommend you involve yourself in one or more professional organizations that can get you up to speed, and as a result help your Committees efficiency and effectiveness.

Know your Committee and get in front of the issues – way in front. Managers should always know what's coming down the road for their communities, but if you have a Committee that has trouble making decisions, you'll need to get very proactive and give them as much time as possible to evaluate, process and study it – whatever "it" is. You don't have the luxury of reactivity with a Committee that itself is reactive - and slow to act as well. This is you managing (herding) them, and it's a part of your job.

Present complex issues in an organized, easily understandable fashion. In other words, try not to present bits and pieces of information to the Committee outside of meetings so they won't have to remember the 7 emails you sent and the 35 that resulted from their own internal discussion. Give them (if you can) all information in a Committee packet or a supplemental thereto, so they all have the right information at the same time.

Present options for action. Once you've provided the necessary information in that very organized and easy-to-understand manner, provide the Committee with **options for action** in order of 1) what's been recommended by an expert or legal professional, 2) what like communities have done in similar situations (this means you must be aware of what's happening in the local or larger industry) and 3) nothing else. Try to avoid presenting inadvisable or unrealistic options that promote further indecisiveness by the Committee.

Call in a Big Gun. Never feel as if you can't ask your supervisor, senior manager, executive or even a legal professional to step in and help you with a Committee that is continually failing in their duties. You may have been telling them the same thing any one of these folks will tell them, but nothing beats having an "authority" back up your expertise. And don't be angry or embarrassed about it – **your job is to get them there as best you can with whatever it takes.**

For the experienced manager: You may have to become the "shadow" leader, whether they realize it or not. Sometimes we get there by working intensively with the Committee Chairperson and guiding them to decisions that need to be made; other times, we "shadow chair" Committee meetings by sitting next to the real Chair and keeping them on task. Whatever it is, most managers who've been around awhile know that at times they become the de facto leader of the Committee, sometimes overtly but usually covertly.

No decision is a decision. Other times, no matter how hard we try, a Committee will simply not make a decision, preferring the comfort of inertia as opposed to the risk of a decision. For the manager, simply think of that no-decision as a decision: The Committee has decided not to decide, not now or maybe ever. Document your recommendations, send them to the Committee one last time (get them in the minutes if you can) and then file them. You've done your best, it's time to let go and move on.

Practical help you can provide for the decision-averse Board

Now that you've read the above, here are some questions you can actually ask your Committees as they struggle with a decision – big or small. It may help them put their fears and phobias in to some perspective (note: you may have to help them with answers):

1. Is the matter before the Committee to preserve and/or maintain the physical elements of the community?
2. Is it about protecting the community from current/future damages or liabilities?
3. Is it required to properly maintain the community to a physical level that preserves or increases the home values?
4. Is the matter a legal requirement?
5. What funds are necessary and available?
6. What are the real political ramifications of the matter?

If you present these questions – perhaps along with your orderly, organized and easily understandable information on the issue within the Committee packet... You may be able to get the Committee to make a more timely decision and with a certain degree of emotional comfort (theirs). And as a great visual reminder, always include their job description (shortened version) with the questions: "To preserve, protect, maintain and enhance" the common elements (which often includes the common emotional health) of the community.

The Wrap

It's my observation that most Committees who won't make decisions or take a very long time to do so are not clear on the issue or the importance of the issue, or simply do not understand their roles and how to act as a governing body. It's our job to ensure they are given the tools and information they need to be better at their jobs. Will our good Committees always use those tools and that information? Hardly. In fact, if you can get 50% of your Committees functioning well, you're doing a great job. Just keep in mind that many Committee members are new to the politics and pressure of community leadership, so making decisions of any kind becomes a challenge. The next thing you know, here comes annual meeting, and it's "like deja vu all over again!" My advice for you is for YOU to understand the role of the Committee, be able to articulate it to them, as well as provide the information they need; for not only their sake, but the community's and yours as well.

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