

How to Keep the Meeting on Track

It is very important to keep a meeting on track and focused on the topic at hand. An article in the December 2005 *NABCCCE News* electronic newsletter offers some ways the meeting might get off track. This article follows up with some suggestions for keeping the meeting focused and productive that may be helpful to both chairpersons and members.

1. Before the meeting starts, have the agenda clearly visible, with a time frame for the items. It may be on a paper in front of every member, but it may be more effective to have it on a newsprint or board near the chairperson, so that it is always in view and a common point of reference for everyone.

2. The chairperson begins with a brief, positive, affirming statement, such as the following:

You have all given your time to be here, and I want you to know that you are all needed and appreciated. You are an important part of this meeting. A number of important things need our attention tonight—some may be routine and some may be controversial. We may bring different ideas and opinions to the table, but that is why we are here: to consider all aspects of an issue. I know we all want to make the best decisions we can. And I will appreciate your assistance in sticking to the agenda, so that we can respect one another's time and finish on time. (The agenda could be reviewed at this time.)

3. During the meeting, an idea might be generated that is not germane to the issue on the table but is worth further consideration. The temptation to pursue it might be avoided if the chairperson recognizes it as a good idea and adds it to a list of issues to be addressed later. The recording secretary should keep such a list, and/or it could be on newsprint. The chairperson or executive committee later reviews the list and decides when and how the issues will be brought up. A "Bin Board" serves this purpose. It

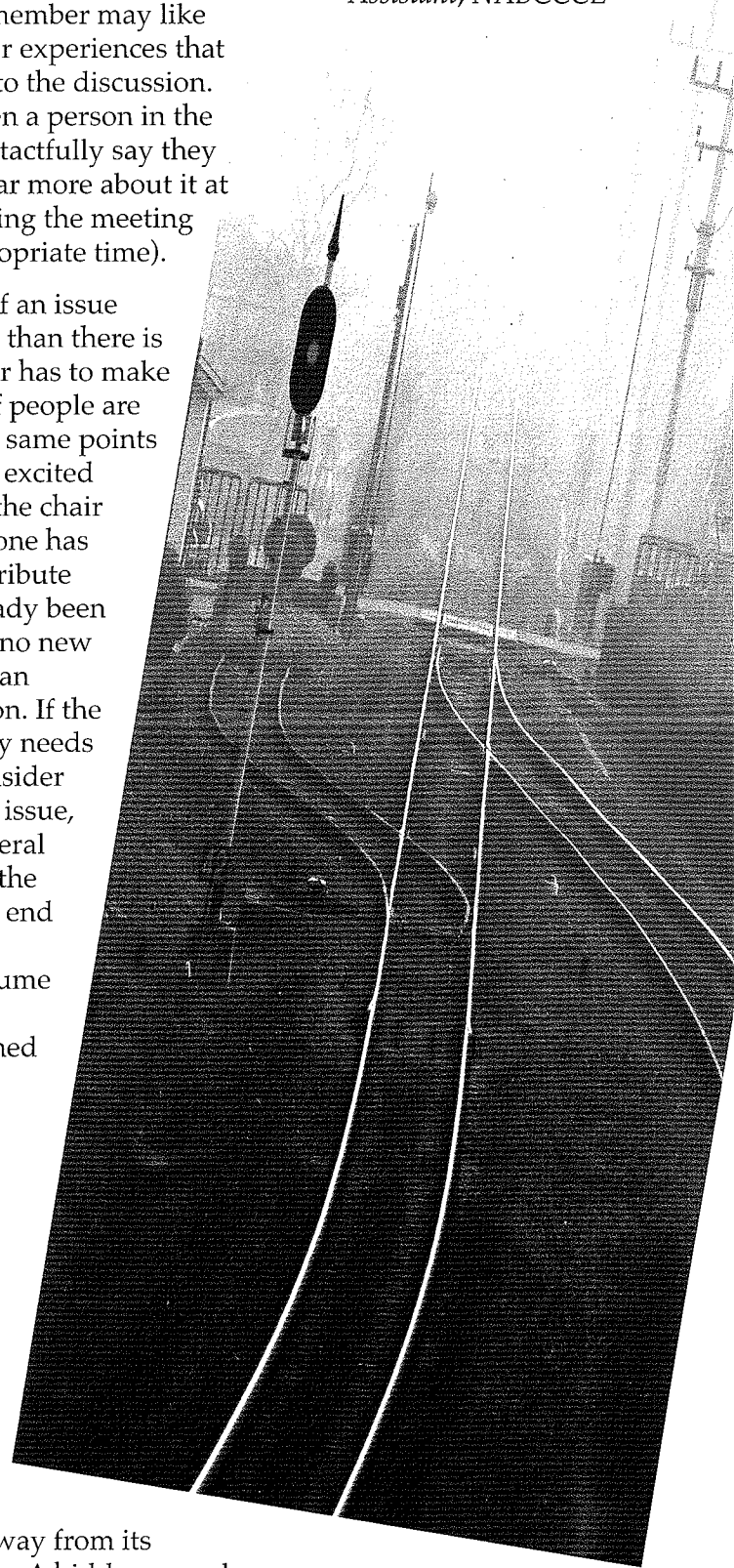
is described in the November 2003 *NABCCCE News* electronic newsletter.

4. Sometimes a member may like to share stories or experiences that are not relevant to the discussion. The chair (or even a person in the next seat) might tactfully say they would like to hear more about it at the social following the meeting (or another appropriate time).

5. If discussion of an issue continues longer than there is time for, the chair has to make an assessment. If people are just restating the same points because they are excited about the issue, the chair might ask if anyone has anything to contribute that has not already been said. If there are no new ideas, the chair can decide to move on. If the discussion clearly needs more time to consider all aspects of the issue, the chair has several options: resume the discussion at the end of the meeting if there is time, resume the discussion during "Unfinished Business" in the next meeting, or refer it to a committee for further investigation.

6. Participants may come with their own agendas, often called "hidden agendas." Hidden agendas pull a meeting away from its intended purpose. A hidden agenda

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"Endangered Species: Urban and Rural Catholic Schools" National Summit

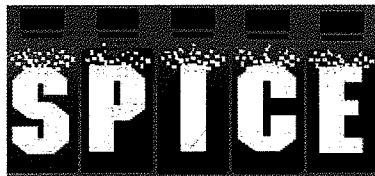
June 22-24, 2006

Boston College

Any educators interested in engaging in conversations that may improve the viability of your school and of schools across the country that are struggling to exist in difficult urban and rural environments are invited to attend.

Selected, successful approaches will be showcased. Speakers will include Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta; Bishop Robert McManus of Worcester; Sr. Dale McDonald of NCEA; Mary Gautier of CARA; Joseph O'Keefe, SJ, Dean of the Lynch School of Education at Boston College; Peter Lynch; Tony Watt; and others.

Details and registration form are on the NCEA Web site under "Institutional Services"



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is usually a (sometimes unconscious) desire either to manipulate the group into considering/doing something that the person cannot get on the agenda, or to stop the group from making a decision that probably will not go the way he/she wants it to. Signs of this are: a person speaks only to obstruct the flow of business (and the chair does not know what this person is really advocating), tries to reopen a matter that has already been decided, or interjects a matter that is not at all what is being considered. One way to handle a person with a hidden agenda is to rule that the item does not speak to the issue at hand, but it can be considered at another time. (Here is another instance where a formal agenda is useful. A fairly formal statement about the agenda may not be taken as a rebuff.) Sometimes it may be effective to ask the person directly how he or she thinks the issue on the table should be decided. That may reveal the hidden agenda so that it can be dealt with openly.

7. The chair can be flexible enough to take some things out of order, if it seems it would be helpful, by appealing to "Common Consent." A formal vote is not required unless at least one person objects, but the group should be generally agreeable to any change. ■

Archdiocese of Hartford Expands Tuition Grants to Elementary Schools

In June 2005, the U. S. Catholic bishops approved the document, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, which was developed by the Committee on Education of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). In this important document, the bishops reaffirmed their conviction that "Catholic schools continue to be 'the most effective means available to the Church for the education of children and young people,' who are the future of

the Church (To Teach as Jesus Did, no. 118)." They also pledged their personal commitment, in cooperation with the total Catholic community, to continue striving "towards the goal of making our Catholic elementary and secondary schools available, accessible and affordable to all Catholic parents and their children, including those who are poor and middle class."

This pledge recently has been given very practical and meaningful expression in the Archdiocese of

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