

Professional insight

Dealing with those everyday issues

By Doug McCarthy

After 20 years of being a member of OECTA's Speakers' Bureau, I have come to the conclusion that people coming together to make decisions and solve problems is a very complex human endeavour. Sometimes, even two people will have difficulty becoming of "one mind." Imagine the challenge for 10 people, 100 people, 600 people.

One of the significant highlights of AGM 2014 for the Speakers was the willingness and patience of delegates to allow the democratic process to happen. Often delegates become weary when it appears that procedure is being abused and time is being wasted. At those times when the process is wearisome, we need to remember Winston Churchill's proclamation, "It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government – except all the others that have been tried." A reflection of this frustration can be the premature loss of quorum on the last day. At this year's AGM, however, quorum was maintained until 3:15 p.m., only 45 minutes ahead of the meeting's scheduled adjournment.

Another highlight was the quality of debate and the willingness of delegates to resolve opposing points of view by speaking to the merits of the question and avoiding the injection of a personal note into the debate. A courteous tone was maintained throughout the meeting, especially when there was divergence of opinion. Again this year, there were a number of delegates who were first time at the microphone and whose comments were thoughtful and prepared in advance. Winston Churchill also said, "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

What was most impressive, however, was the patience demonstrated by the delegates when electronic voting was being explained and tested on the meeting floor. This required a major paradigm shift for the delegates and the Speakers as well. Some parliamentary terms were established in the 17th and 18th centuries and no longer have meaning in the digital age. Even the newly introduced 11th edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* has sections on electronic meetings and electronic voting.

In their opening comments the Speakers shared an observation with the delegates: that more gets done when trust is placed in the process. So, it seems appropriate to call upon a quote that captures Churchill's fighting spirit: **Keep calm and carry on.**

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