



ARTICLES, INSIGHTS & IDEAS by Eli Mina

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SHOULD MOVERS AND SECONDRERS BE RECORDED IN MINUTES?

By Eli Mina, M.Sc.

With the principle of objectivity in mind, minutes of meetings should have a **collective** focus and not a **personal** focus. It is therefore important to record the group's collective actions and - if needed - an objective point-form summary of the discussion (without attributing specific comments to individuals). With objectivity in mind, here is a piece of advice that may surprise you at first, but will hopefully make sense as you read on: Names of movers and seconders should not be recorded in minutes.

Let me start with the seconder. The individual seconding a motion does so only to get the motion debated, and not necessarily because he or she favors it. In fact, a person may second a motion because he or she opposes it and would like to see it formally rejected. Recording his or her name next to the motion would give a false impression. Further, the current (11th) edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR) states that the name of the seconder of a motion should not be recorded in minutes.

As to the name of the mover, RONR suggests that the mover's name "*should*" be recorded in the case of main motions. "Should" is an advisory word and does not mean "must." I suggest your organization adopt its own rule that makes things clear and explicitly says that the mover's name is also not recorded on minutes. Why?

Recording the mover's name in the minutes is bound to be misleading. Yes, the mover is generally presumed to be in favor of the motion when he or she moves it, but the mover is entitled to change his or her mind and vote against the motion. This is the essence of a healthy debate, where people truly listen to one another, keep an open mind, and can be persuaded to change their views (otherwise why have a meeting?) Another situation where the mover may end up voting against his or her motion is when it is amended against the mover's wishes. With the above scenarios in mind, it should be clear that recording the mover's name in the minutes can lead to false impressions.

Then there is the question of ownership. Recording the mover and seconder gives the false impression that the two own the motion forever and have exclusive control over it, when - in fact - nothing could be further from the truth. I say this despite the fact that you may have heard a presiding officer ask the mover and seconder if they agree to amend or withdraw "their" motion. Despite this common (and incorrect) practice, neither the mover nor the seconder own the motion once debate on it begins. Ownership then shifts to the group. From this point onwards decisions to amend or withdraw the motion are to be made by the group, collectively, and not unilaterally by the mover and seconder. The fact that such practices are followed in many meetings does not make them correct.

The issue of who owns the motion is more than just a technicality. I never cease to be amazed at how the false idea that the mover and seconder own the motion in perpetuity can paralyze a governing body. On several occasions, I have found Boards and Councils believing they could not rescind or amend a previously adopted motion because the mover and seconder were absent or refused to allow to rescind or amend it. So much for "the majority rules"...

Another negative outcome of recording movers and seconders is that it personalizes and politicizes the decision making process. Individuals rush to make motions to get their names in the minutes and be personally credited for "having done something" for the community. Others are afraid to move and second motions because they want to avoid public attention. Under such conditions, the focus is on individuals, and objectivity is compromised.

There is also the question of FOI (freedom of information) legislation, under which minutes are a public record (with the exception of minutes of closed, or "in-camera" meetings). With FOI in mind, the less names go in the minutes the better. Several clients have asked me what they needed to do to remove those names from minutes. My reply is simple: Adopt a rule or bylaw to take them out.

Here is my final reason for taking names of movers and seconders out of minutes. Many meetings are run informally and proposals are made, discussed and voted on without ever being moved and seconded. In principle, there is nothing wrong with this practice, as long as proposals are clearly articulated, opened for debate, and voted on by the group. But whom do you record as having "moved and seconded motions" in such cases? How about "the floor moved and the ceiling seconded"? This anxiety will be avoided if names of movers and seconders are not recorded.

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Eli is the author of the newly published "***101 Boardroom Problems and How to Solve Them.***" He is also the author of several other books and publications on meetings, shared decision-making and minute taking (see [Eli Mina's Books](#) at www.elimina.com). Eli can be reached at 604-730-0377 or via e-mail at eli@elimina.com.

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