

HOW CAN A GROUP CHANGE ITS MIND?

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A. CORRECTING MISTAKES

A meeting might never end if those who were defeated in one vote could repeatedly try to overturn the decision by making the group vote on the same matter over and over. For this reason, it's a rule of parliamentary procedure that once a motion has come up and been disposed of at a meeting, another motion that raises the same question can't be brought up at the same meeting in the normal way.* Another important principle is that, as a protection against instability—arising, for example, from such factors as slight variations in attendance—the requirements for changing a previous action are generally greater than those for taking the action in the first place.

But every once in a while—either after reflection or because you learn of new facts—you may come to the conclusion that maybe the group did something it should not have done or should have done differently, or that it made a mistake in choosing not to do something it should have done. There are special procedures for dealing with such cases in meetings.

B. THE MOTION TO RECONSIDER

If a motion has been either adopted or defeated during a meeting, and at least one member who voted on the winning side wants to have the vote reconsidered, such a member may make the motion to *Reconsider*.

This motion can *only* be made by a member who voted on the winning side. That is to say, if the motion was adopted, the motion to *Reconsider* can be made only by a member who voted in favor of

*The same is true during a series of connected meetings called a *session*—for example, a convention lasting several days. In an ordinary club each meeting is usually a separate session. RONR (11th ed.), pp. 81–88.

the motion, or if the motion was defeated, then only by a member who voted against it. This makes sense because, if there is no such person, there is virtually no chance that the result of the vote will be any different on the second go-round. This motion can, however, be seconded by any member, no matter how he or she voted.

Another important thing that you must know about *Reconsider* is that there is only a limited period of time within which it can be made. In the usual case, this motion can be made only on the same day on which the vote sought to be reconsidered was taken. The only exception to this rule is in the case of a session (such as a lengthy convention) in which meetings take place over a period of more than one day. In that event, the motion to *Reconsider* can be made on the same day the original vote was taken or on the next succeeding day within the session on which a business meeting is held. By and large, however, the thing for you to keep in mind is that if you change your mind after the meeting is over, in the usual situation you can forget about the motion to *Reconsider*. It will be too late to make such a motion.

Let's assume that, at a meeting, a motion is made to make a contribution of \$500 to some worthy charity. You are concerned that there is not enough money for this purpose, and for that reason you vote against the motion. Other members apparently have similar concerns, because the motion is defeated. Later during the meeting, maybe because of additional information you have received, you change your mind and decide that the contribution really ought to be made, and you think that perhaps other members may have changed their minds as well.

If so, you may then make a motion to *Reconsider* the vote that defeated the motion to make the contribution. When you make this motion to *Reconsider*, remember to tell the presiding officer that you voted against the adoption of the motion relating to the contribution, so that it will be clear that you are entitled to make a motion to reconsider. You might say something like:

"Madam President, I move to reconsider the vote on the motion relating to the contribution to the XYZ Charity. I voted against that motion."

If your motion to *Reconsider* is seconded, the chair will then state the question on your motion,* and the assembly will then proceed to consider the question of whether or not the motion concerning the contribution should be reconsidered. After any debate, a vote will be taken on the motion to *Reconsider*. If it is adopted by a majority vote, the motion to make the contribution will be back again before the assembly, just as it was before the original vote on it was taken. If a sufficient number of members have changed their minds after whatever further debate may take place, the motion to make the contribution may well be adopted this time. [RONR (11th ed.), pp. 315–32.]

C. THE MOTIONS TO RESCIND OR AMEND SOMETHING PREVIOUSLY ADOPTED

Suppose, however, that after a meeting is over (so that it is too late to move to reconsider) you feel that the assembly made the wrong decision when it adopted some motion.

For example, assume the assembly has adopted a resolution authorizing the purchase of certain property, which you now think was a mistake. At the next meeting (assuming, of course, that the property has not already been purchased), you may make a motion to *Rescind* the approval of the purchase. You might say something like:

*Unless another motion is pending at the time. See RONR (11th ed.), p. 316, l. 32 to p. 317, l. 15; pp. 323–24.

"I move to rescind the motion relating to the purchase of the Smith farm property which was adopted at our June meeting."

Alternatively, if you are concerned only that too much money may be spent for this purchase, you may make a motion to *Amend Something Previously Adopted*. You might say:

"I move to amend the authorization previously adopted to purchase the Smith farm property by adding 'provided, however, that the cost shall not exceed \$200,000.00.'"

You may make either of these motions regardless of how you voted on the original motion, and there is no time limit on making either of them.

Both of these motions are main motions, and in most respects are treated like any other main motion. However, there is an important difference between them and other main motions in the vote needed to adopt them.

If *previous notice is not given* of an intent to make one of these motions, so that members are not alerted ahead of time to the fact that the motion will be made, adoption of the motion requires either

- a) a two-thirds vote, or
- b) the vote of a majority of the entire membership of the voting body,

whichever of these is the smaller number at the time.

If *previous notice is given*, however, a majority vote is all that is required for adoption. **Previous notice** of a motion is given either:

- a) by announcing an intent to make such a motion at the meeting immediately preceding the meeting at which the motion is to be made; or
- b) by having the secretary include notice of that intent in the call of the meeting at which the motion is to be made. This is the written notice of the time and place of the meeting, which is sent to members in advance of the meeting. [See p. 143 in this book.]

Therefore, if you know that you are going to want to make either of these motions, make every effort to give previous notice of your intent to do so. You will then need only a majority vote in order to succeed. [RONR (11th ed.), pp. 305–10.]

D. RENEWAL OF MOTIONS

Making a motion again after it has been defeated is called **renewal** of the motion.

As is obvious from the names of the motions to *Rescind* or *Amend Something Previously Adopted*, these motions only relate to things that have been *adopted*. What, however, if the matter concerns a motion that was defeated?

Suppose, for example, a motion to make a contribution of \$500 to a worthy charity is defeated at one of your monthly meetings. You cannot simply make the same motion again at the same meeting. But after the meeting is over (so that it is too late to move to *Reconsider*), if you feel that the assembly has made the wrong decision and the motion to make the contribution should have been adopted, the solution is very simple. All you need to do is make the same motion again at your next monthly meeting. You can do this regardless of how you voted on the original motion. [RONR (11th ed.), pp. 336–37.]