

About the Use of Time Outs and the Value of Our Differences

By Anna Von Reitz



Here I am explaining --again--- the process of how time-outs are to be used and NOT used:

Marshals at Arms are required to speak to each individual and explain precisely what they are doing that is disruptive, and then place them on an appropriate first-time-offender time out, of perhaps a week. If the same person continues the same behavior, the Marshals at Arms may have to address them again, explain (again) what they are doing and why that is disruptive, and give them a second, longer time out to think about it and change their behavior. A second time out might be for a two week or one month period, and so on. Each time the individual repeats their bad behavior, the time outs get longer.

Time outs are most typically applied for "brawling" and "drunk and disorderly" behaviors --- people who can't refrain from coming to our meetings and taking them over with their complaints and anger over their personal issues --- usually while under the influence, but not always.

Refusal to use the agenda process and follow the agenda, chronic refusal to limit one's comments to the allotted time each speaker has, swearing and name-calling in public, malicious physical behaviors at public meetings (slapping, ear-boxing, etc.), refusal to take issues to the appropriate committee once advised to do so, and similar things that detract from the ability of the group as a whole to maintain a positive focus and conduct business in an orderly way can all be grounds for a time out.

What time outs can't be used for --- includes political differences, differences of opinion, censorship, bringing up unpopular issues, "strong statements" which are not to the level of mud-slinging and name-calling in public, and where the agenda allows for it, public debate. Americans are free to disagree and our Assemblies are

free to be forums for dissenting ideas, because at the end of the day, the group as a whole is seeking consensus and a well-rounded view of the topics under discussion.

We don't WANT to quell opposing opinions, because we want to consider all possibilities before making important decisions as a group. Even if what someone brings forward is illogical or wrong-headed in the logical sense, or even immoral --- have the courage to face ideas contrary to your own, and consider them for what they are--- someone else's opinion, to which they have a right, no matter how much you may disagree.

Individual opinions are not sacrosanct and don't reflect on the group and the expression of contrary opinions is not a "danger" to anyone nor is it grounds for a time out.

The past five years have shown that in addition to leaving us woefully ignorant, our Public Fool System has left us without basic social and communication skills that used to be commonplace.

People routinely "take things personally" when they shouldn't, they routinely feel constrained and suppressed and don't express themselves fully or coherently because they are afraid and unaccustomed to doing so, and people no longer appear to know the difference between public and private forums, so they say and do things that are inappropriate in a group setting.

Helping our members grow and better understand the impersonal nature of debate, improving their communication skills and ability to communicate, and developing a sense of how people conduct themselves "in public" is all part of what should be a gentle and encouraging guidance from the Assembly as a whole.

Always remember that we want and need to hear opposing ideas in order to know that we are making the right choices. Just as a penniless beggar offers us the chance to be charitable, opposing ideas offer us the chance to review our own logic and see things from a different point of view.

We may or may not change our minds, but we will have gone through the process of reviewing data and perception --- and that is what leads to integrity. When people consider all the possible angles and come to a consensual decision, they know where they stand on an issue and they know why. This gives their whole decision-making process integrity.

When you are operating as the Government of an entire State of the Union, you want that kind of integrity to go into every decision-making process and result.

You want the whole process of discussion to flow forward in an even-handed and reasonably impersonal way, so that the facts and the pros and cons can be considered without a lot of emotion clouding our view.

Total consensus on every issue isn't possible, so we all have to learn to "agree to disagree" and at a certain point, realize that the group has considered our opinion and made other decisions. That's okay. That's the way it is, and the way it has always been. We have all had the experience of "I told you so" ---and we just have to accept that there is a certain amount of that no matter what we do.

Sometimes you're the bug, and sometimes you are the windshield in public discussion forums. Sometimes people hear and respond to your urgent concerns and sometimes they don't hear you and it works out to everyone's detriment. As groups and as individuals we all make mistakes and we all pay dearly when we do. Our best insurance against making mistakes is hearing everyone and really listening to pick out the merit in what they say.

From the standpoint of the speaker, the trick is to learn how (and having the courage) to present your ideas to the group in an open, easy-to-understand way that isn't confrontational.

That way, the group gains the benefit of hearing a different view, whether they ultimately agree or not, and you have brought forward your insight and put it on the table. Realize that in the rough and tumble of public debate, leaders often rise to prominence --- not because their ideas were popular, but because they were later proven right.

Our goal as Assemblies is to provide a safe, open, and fair-handed forum where issues can be passionately but peacefully debated, where group consensus can be sought and hopefully realized, and where the integrity of the decision-making process is upheld.

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