

Smooth Operator

How to Be an Effective Chair and Chair a Meeting

Juan Miguel Muñoz-Morris

Let's Set the Table



75 Minutes in
Total

15 Minute
Presentation
60 Minute
Conversation

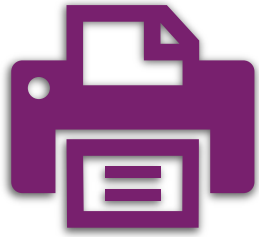


Tools & Resources



Lots of Audience
Participation

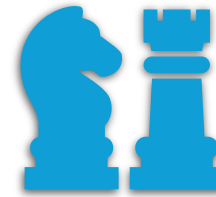
What's your Learning Style?



Copy of the Slide Deck



Thinking in Motion



Let's make this a
Game!

Allow Me to [re]Introduce Myself

- Planning Commissioner for the City of **San Luis Obispo**
- Planning Commissioner for the City of **Morgan Hill**
 - Chaired both bodies
- Public Servant by Day
 - County Mental Health Services
- Combined 18 years' Experience in Public Service
- Attended 5 PCA's



A simple wooden chair with a slatted back and a curved seat is positioned on the left side of the frame. The room has walls covered in vertical wood paneling and a dark, textured floor. The text "You're the Chair. Now what?" is overlaid in the center in a white serif font.

You're the Chair. Now what?



It's a Party, and YOU are Hosting

- Hosting vs. Attending the party
- Timing, planning, prepping
- Find the Right Flow
- Know When to End the Fun

The Host with the Most: 5 Best Practices

USE CLEAR, STRUCTURED MEETING PROCEDURES



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graph TD; A[USE CLEAR, STRUCTURED MEETING PROCEDURES] --> B[FOSTER AN ATMOSPHERE OF RESPECT]; B --> C[KEEP CONTROL WHILE ENCOURAGING PUBLIC INPUT]; C --> D[ADDRESS DISRUPTIONS WITH POISE]; D --> E[YOU'RE NOT ALONE: LEVERAGING STAFF & STATUTES];
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FOSTER AN ATMOSPHERE OF RESPECT

KEEP CONTROL WHILE ENCOURAGING PUBLIC INPUT

ADDRESS DISRUPTIONS WITH POISE

YOU'RE NOT ALONE: LEVERAGING STAFF & STATUTES

1. The Power of Structure

Using Clear Protocols and Procedures:

- **Ensures fair and consistent** decision making
- Promotes **focused discussions** and **prevents chaos** during contentious topics
- **Sets the stage** early and clearly
- **Virtual/Hybrid meetings** need additional considerations to minimize “Zoom Bombing”
 - Virtual lobbies, naming conventions, commenting, etc.

“Free expression can expire as tragically in the tumult of license as in the silence of censorship”

AGENDA

- ☐ Fix all the Roads, Unlimited Free Parking
- ☐ Everyone Gets a Home! (in Oprah Voice)
- ☐ Solve all Public Safety Problems
- ☐ Earn Everyone's Trust and Respect

2. R.E.S.P.E.C.T

Find Out What it Means to Me:

- **Come prepared.** Review the agenda packet and script (if available)
- Set the tone for civility; **model respectful behavior**
- Disagree without being **disagreeable**
- Respect builds trust. **Trust is the foundation** of any successful relationship
- Know your worth: the power of **walking away**

Trust isn't just built in moments of agreement—
it's forged in how you handle disagreement



3. Say What you Need to Say

Maintain Control while Encouraging Public Input:

- Encourage and welcome public participation but **set clear rules** for speaking **time** and maintain **order**
- Let participants know **their voices are valued**, but that decorum must be maintained
- Address **conduct** not **speech**
- Allow for **Public Criticism**





4. Balance and Grace

Address Disruptions with Poise:

- Be prepared to handle disruptions **calmly**
- **Know when** to address hateful speech, call for a recess, ask for legal assistance, or involve security when addressing disruptive behavior, harassment or threats
- **Validate** people's feelings but ask them to **back up their claims**
- Establish a **Warning and Removal Process**



5. You've Got a Friend in Them

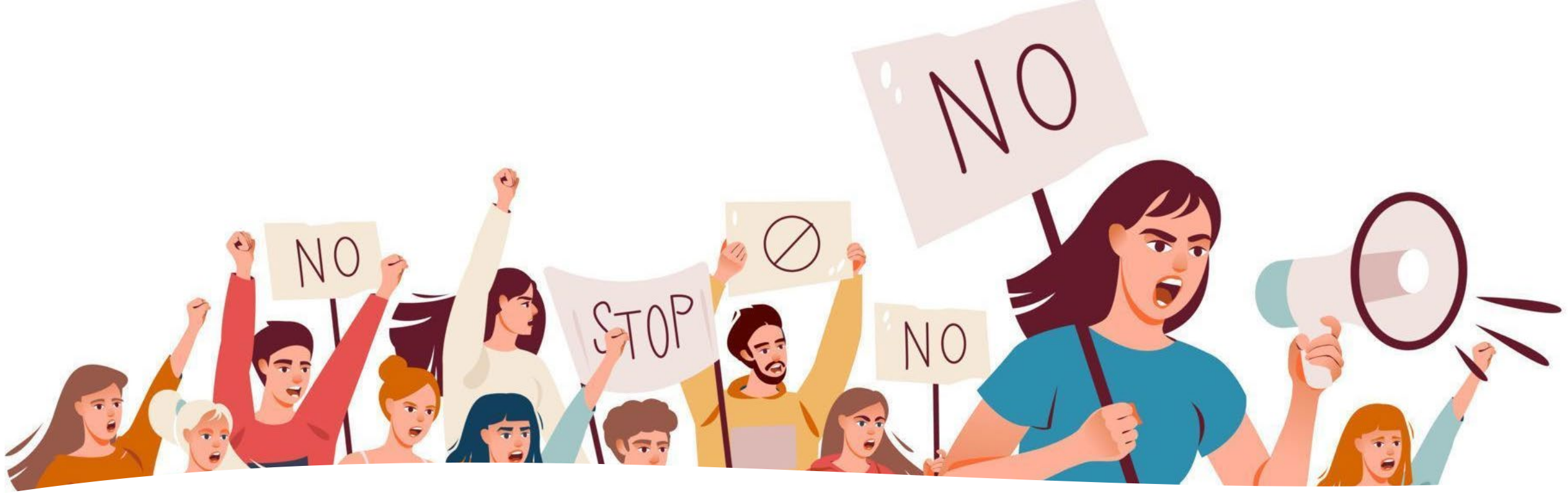
Just remember what your old pal said: You're not alone

- Review the agenda items and ask clarifying questions **in advance** of the session
 - Bring these up during the session: **educate and inform**
- Check with City Clerk and Counsel on more sensitive matters. Keep it legal
 - **Avoid gotcha questions**; you're on the same team.
 - Minimize the **risk of litigation** for the City
- Lean on staff and colleagues when unsure
 - You don't need to know all the answers, just where to find them. There is a dais full of knowledge.

A wooden chair with a slatted back and a curved top rail is positioned on the left side of the frame. The background consists of vertical wood paneling. The floor is dark and textured. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Let's Call this Session to Order! This or That

Time to put into practice what we just discussed



Managing Rowdy Crowds

A large crowd came out to support a project being reviewed. During comments the crowd cheered and clapped. This is repeated for several speakers.

1. Let's Get Loud

- Stop the hearing and ask the crowd to **refrain from/delay cheering** or engaging in disruptive behaviors
- Allow the speakers and audience to continue to **express themselves**, and **offer alternatives**

2. Excuse me, what?

Accusations/Libel Against Panel Members:

During a public comment session, a speaker accuses a commissioner or staff member of unethical behavior without evidence.

- **Address the speaker** and their statements
- Acknowledge the speaker with a “thank you” and **move on** without addressing the statements.



3. How Long is Long Enough?

Time Management in Long Meetings:

You have a long agenda, and discussion on each item has taken longer than expected. The meeting is already 2.5 hours long.

- Set a **time limit** for the session and continue items not reviewed
- Ask commissioners to be concise and stay on point so you can **push through**



4. Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Oh, I wish there was a right way:

High density housing development across the street from single family housing. The neighbors are **concerned about parked cars** on the street and increased traffic and ask that they build a **perimeter wall**.

- Agree to the request and **approve** the recommendation for the project with the **added wall**
- Deny the inclusion of the wall as a condition of approval and allow the project to **continue as planned**





5. Whoa Whoa Whoa!

Lack of Information Leads to Confusion:

A developer wants to build a new business park on their site. They have admin approval for the use but want to rezone a portion for better use. Neighbors fear it'll be a distribution warehouse

- **Take time** during the meeting to outline everything clearly for attendees and residents and clarify what can and cannot be done
- Conduct the hearing as usual, expecting folks to have working knowledge of the project and/or **ask their own questions**

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Next Item on the Agenda: Tell Me Why

Share your answers and why you want it that way

1. Do You Even Care?

Frustrated Resident(s):

Residents near a proposed development are upset about the project and feel like it is being **pushed through** regardless of community feedback. The applicant and city **followed all rules**.

- How can you ensure **folks feel heard** while keeping the meeting on track?
- What **strategies** would you employ to **prevent the interruption** from escalating?





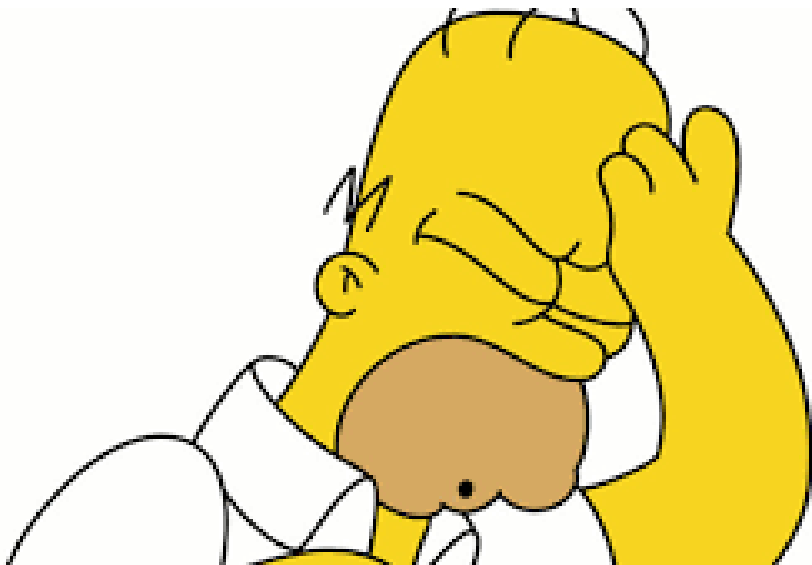
2. Tomato, Tomato

Conflicting Opinions:

Two commissioners get into a heated debate, and their discussion is monopolizing the meeting.

- What approach would you take to mediate the conflict and **bring the meeting back** to order without stifling discussion?
- Is there a **difference in how you manage** this scenario if they're staying on topic vs. drifting from the subject?

3. So... Now What?



Handling Technical or Procedural Errors:

An error is made during the meeting (e.g., a vote was taken improperly, or a motion was mishandled).

- How do you address this mistake **transparently** and in compliance [with the Brown Act] without undermining the authority of the meeting?
- Who can help you determine the best course of action?



4. Sword it Out

Safeguarding Everyone's Wellbeing

Aspeaker takes out a bayonet and starts waiving it while making offensive and hateful comments.

- How do you handle this situation?
- What resources are available to you?

5. Yo, What Up Council!

The Role of Humor in Public Hearings.

Some residents can have quite the sense of humor when commenting.

- What are your thoughts on keeping things light-hearted?
- Can humor help manage emotions during difficult topics?



SCARY STORIES

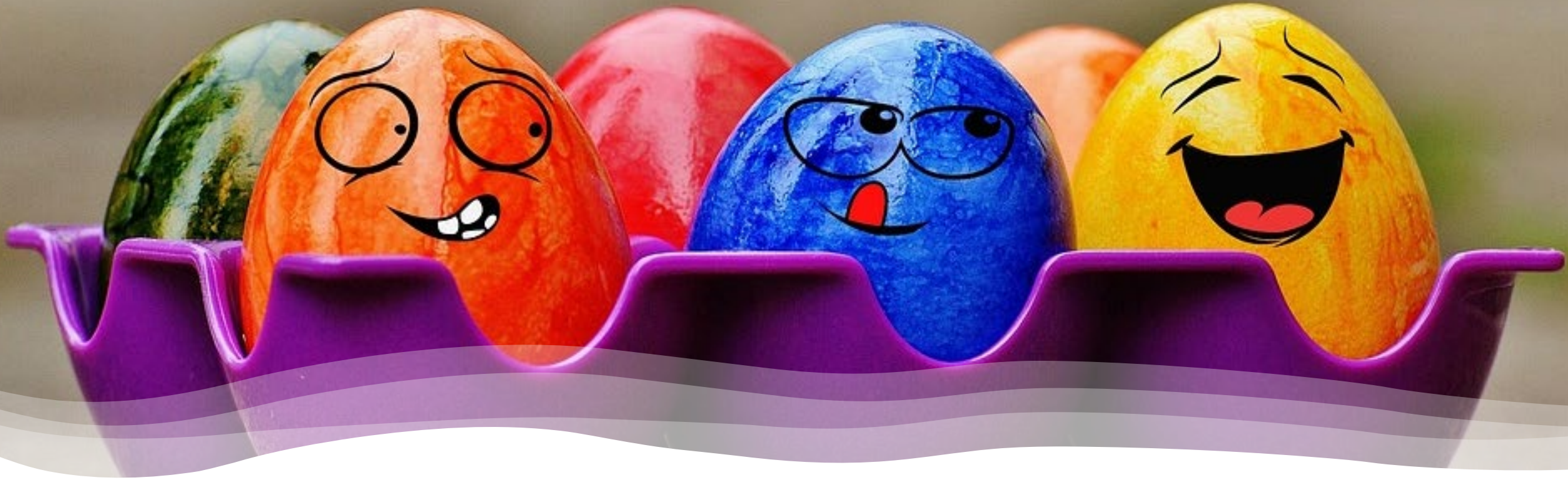
to Tell in the **PCA**



Storytime! Share your
Horror Stories

(I know you have some good ones)





Easter Eggs : Did You Find Them?

1. Smooth Operator- Sade
2. Public Service Announcement- Jay z
3. R.E.S.P.E.C.T- Aretha Franklin
4. Say (what you need to say)- John Mayer
5. You've Got a Friend in Me (Them)- Randy Newman
6. Let's Get Loud- Jennifer Lopez
7. Hard Place- H.E.R
8. I Want it That Way- Backstreet Boys

THANK

YOU !

Let's connect and stay in
touch. Scan the code below

