



*What's a Snippet?* Glad you asked! A Snippet is short article about meetings or parliamentary procedure. New snippets are released on the first day of every month at [www.agreatmeeting.com](http://www.agreatmeeting.com).



## Snippet #170 The Chair's Work Area

Think of a meeting as a decision factory. Raw material comes in, is processed, and emerges as recorded decisions that move the organization toward its mission. Although hard hats are not required, here are five important things to do.

First, learn a bit of terminology. The thing that holds the chair's script is a lectern (think lecture). The podium is actually the platform on which everyone stands (think podiatrist). It's also called the stage, the platform, or the dais.

Second, heed a safety tip. **Always** check to be sure there is a railing on the back of any raised platform stage and for any stairs! Make sure the area is deep enough for people to move about, and make sure no one can fall. Even a six inch drop can break an ankle or cause a head injury.

Third, understand the difference between a meeting and a show.

Far too often, the business meeting at a convention or conference is treated like all of the other events: as a show. A stage for a show is set for visual attractiveness; for a meeting it is set for efficiency and production. Audio-visual companies will want scripts of everything that is going to happen – but during a dynamic process we don't know what's going to happen! Create a diagram of all of your needs and update it annually at a production meeting 60-90 days prior to the meeting. Give it to your A/V vendors and discuss your needs well before the day of the meeting.

- A show is a static process, not intended for audience participation-- except perhaps for a controlled question and answer session. It's all scripted and rehearsed. A business meeting is a dynamic process – the “audience” is just as – or more – important than the “star.”
- The A/V people will want to put a bright spotlight on the chair – but the chair is looking out at the members and the glare can bring on migraines. They will also set the house lights low, so the screen is not washed out, but the members (audience) are working, not watching. Members need to see their materials and the chair needs to see the members. Set a compromise level for lights and enforce it.
- A/V companies will expect to have full control of the microphones, but any and all microphones placed on the tables onstage must have individual controls so they can be turned off when not in use. This is called “push to talk” and yes, you will be told that it can't be done. These companies pride themselves on having lots of different equipment and most microphones can be switched by opening the bottom and flipping the dip switches. Then you'll only have them live when *you* want them to be.
- Some companies will suggest the chair use a teleprompter for the meeting. But when things suddenly change, how will they know where to go in the script? This is one time when the old way is the best way – use good old fashioned paper on which you can write notes, switch pages, and have everything available at all times. It's far easier for the parliamentarian to tell you to go to page 6 than to help your shaking hands find the right place on your tablet or communicate with a teleprompter technician.

Fourth, keep in mind the purpose of the meeting.

The purpose of a meeting is to make decisions, not for board members to get “face time” – there are plenty of other opportunities for that. If some board members have a function that is important to the meeting, by all means they should be on the podium. But members don't need to see the board checking their phones, talking with others, yawning, reading email, putting on lipstick, or filing their nails. At the very least, board members who **MUST** sit on the stage need to learn how to behave accordingly.

Fifth, don't be afraid to let the members see the workers.

Don't be afraid to put the people who have an important part of the meeting on stage – in the background if necessary. This might include timers, scribes, or keypad personnel.

Keep the chair's work area a place to facilitate the decisions of the members, not window dressing.

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