



Modern Day Committee Do's and Don'ts

by Nathan Kahn, Negotiator AFM Symphonic Services Division

More often than we would prefer, my colleagues in the Symphonic Services Division (SSD) and I are finding

that we would like the assistance of a federal mediator to accomplish a major initial task in negotiations: setting up a meeting of the negotiating committee. Our members are extremely busy running around everywhere, trying to make a living performing, teaching, working in other career endeavors, fulfilling family obligations, and God forbid, taking some down time. Multiply that times five or more committee members and you can easily understand this dilemma, for which there is no apparent simple solution.

Moreover, it has been 20 years since the former beloved Symphonic Services Director Lew Waldeck went all over the US presenting his "dog and pony shows" to local unions, committees, and orchestra members on how to best conduct business as an orchestra committee or a negotiating committee. Those presentations made a significant positive difference in assisting locals and their committees on how to best conduct their business.

It is worth restating some common do's and don'ts relative to service on an orchestra or negotiation committee.

DO'S:

- 1) **If you serve on the orchestra committee or the negotiating committee, you must be available to attend meetings with the committee and with management.** If you are unable to attend meetings due to other commitments, etc., then perhaps you should not serve on the committee.
- 2) **Know that committee service and meetings will involve disagreements and conflicts.** If you are uncomfortable with disagreements and conflicts, perhaps you should reconsider service on the committee. However, know that disagreements are part of life. Developing and exerting the leadership for resolving disagreements, coupled with analyzing and working out disagreements and compromises in a professional manner, is perhaps one of the greatest life skills one can learn through committee membership.
- 3) **Know that the role of committee members is to function as advocates for the musicians.** Should you find yourself in a position as being unable or unwilling to advocate for a musician's issue (be it in a grievance or other situation) recuse yourself from involvement. But by all means, do not work against the aggrieved musician(s). If you do so, whether by leaking information to management or another activity, you could find yourself subject to charges in your local, and potentially be the catalyst

for charges against your local for an alleged breach of the duty of fair representation, as a result of arbitrary, discriminatory, or bad faith actions on your part.

DON'TS

- 1) **Don't run for the negotiating or the orchestra committee if your primary reason for running is to pursue your personal agenda in negotiations or in the administration of the contract, or if you somehow view committee service as fulfilling personal power aspirations.** You were elected to serve and fully and fairly represent your colleagues, and their views take precedence. Your personal views about what goes into contract proposals, while important, do not take precedence over the will of the majority.
- 2) **Don't operate as a "drive-by" committee member.** If you show up to committee meetings only during full moons, do not expect your committee colleagues and local to suddenly undo and change all that has transpired and agreements reached in your absence to meet your personal preferences. The business of the local/committee must and will proceed, with or without you.
- 3) **Don't use e-mail as the primary source of communication between the committee/local and with management.** We all know that e-mail is a helpful tool, but you cannot and should not attempt

to conduct all committee business via e-mail. So much can get lost in e-mail communications as to what each person is actually expressing. There is no substitute for a group discussion, be it in person, or if necessary, by telephone conference call. Moreover, do not put anything into e-mail relative to strategy or of a confidential nature, which you would not want to see on local news. All it takes is one person to inadvertently, or otherwise, forward an e-mail to management, or other inappropriate people, to be potentially responsible for huge setbacks in negotiations or ongoing relationships. That is in no one's best interest. Resist the temptation to put confidential material into an e-mail "just this one time"; instead, pick up the phone.

An orchestra committee or negotiating committee serves to assist the local union in the administration and negotiation of the collective bargaining agreement. The local union is legally responsible for all activities undertaken by its committees. Therefore, constant communication between the local and its committee is critical on any and all activities, strategies, and so forth. To not do so, risks legal jeopardy for the local and committee members involved.

As always, AFM Symphonic Services Division is available to consult with locals and their committees on any matter relating to the administration and negotiation of their collective bargaining agreements.