

The Astronomical League - Leadership Manual

A Guide for Officers (and Potential Officers) of the Astronomical League and its member societies



By James H. Fox

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Leadership Positions
3. Running Meetings
4. Resolving Conflict
5. Communications Guidelines
6. Hints and Tips

Copyright 1999 by the Astronomical League. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by an information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the Astronomical League. Limited permission is granted for the downloading, reproducing and/or printing of the material for personal use.

A. L. Leadership Manual Section 1 - Introduction

Leadership ... an Introduction

A *Leader* is usually defined as one who guides or shows the way. It is important to note that a leader is not one who tells or forces the way. Effective leadership is the ability to create, share and engage people in a vision of the future that is worth striving for.

Any organization needs effective leaders if it is to survive. But what does it mean to be an effective leader? Even those who have served in various leadership roles may have a difficult time explaining it to someone else – perhaps because we are always unsure of our own abilities in those roles. It is particularly difficult to define in terms of an all-volunteer organization in which members are associated because of their sharing a common hobby.

Many of us who have been in a leadership position have wished for Star Trek's Captain Picard's ability to command, "Make it so." Instead, the leader must have a vision for the organization and be able to articulate that vision to others in such a way that they want to share and be a part of that vision. That is the guiding part ... the fun part. Leadership is teamwork, not dictatorship.

Unfortunately, there is also a bit of drudgery associated with being a leader. Certain activities are expected; certain customs must be observed; certain tasks must be done. A hobby is not a business, but some skills and techniques, originally developed for business applications, can be used to minimize your leadership obligations' impact on the more satisfying, fun part.

Within these pages you will learn some of these techniques. Perhaps you can pick up some hints about how to develop a vision. The best way to learn is to try it. Be willing to share what you learn with others and encourage others to share their ideas with you. That way, we can all benefit from stronger societies, stronger regions and a stronger Astronomical League.

Characteristics of Effective Leaders

(Don't worry if you don't have all these characteristics, few of us do!)

- Well defined sense of purpose.
- Knowledge of your own strengths and weaknesses – and a willingness to admit both.
- Desire to learn new skills.
- Ability to establish strong human relationships.
- Willing to be guided by the needs of those you serve.
- Persistent effort to produce results.
- Ability to transform mistakes into learning situations.
- Ability to unite people into a common effort.

Do not think you have to do it alone. Even though the president of an organization may think, "The Buck Stops Here," remember that you usually have a leadership team comprised, at least, of all the officers. You can help each other and learn from each other. Each of you will bring certain strengths to the group. Hopefully, those strengths will help balance the weaknesses.

Know Your Members

Just as it is difficult to lead if you do not know where you are going, it is also difficult to lead if you do not know whom you are leading! You know the members are interested in astronomy by the nature of your organization. You probably know many of the members' specific interests: deep-sky, astrophotography, CCD, telescope making, etc. But you may not know why they decided to join your club or what they expect of you as a leader. Generally, the members break down into four main categories.

There are those who want to "do something." These are the activists. They may be school politicians who held a class office and enjoyed it and want to do more of the same. They simply may have great enthusiasm for a current project and want to share that enthusiasm with the group. They may have a desire to help others and feel they can channel that desire through their hobby. This group is often the easiest from which to draw officers – it gives them something to "do."

There are those who want to "learn something." Amateur astronomy is a technical field and many of its participants are not technically trained. They have a basic fascination with space and objects they observe, but seek broader information so they can understand what they see. Association with others having a similar interest allows them to "test" their understanding in a non-threatening way.

There are those who want to "be part of something." Extroverts who draw personal energy from association with others may use their interest in astronomy to find yet another association. Some people are just natural "joiners." Others may see your group having a good time and want to have one too.

There are those who are merely curious. They may have seen your booth at Astronomy Day. A bright comet or an eclipse of the sun or moon may have piqued their interest. They may have bought a telescope (for whatever reason) and want to know what to do with it. They have joined your club to see what it is all about, and they may or may not stay.

You need to address the needs of all of them. Perhaps you can not address all at the same time, but you must be mindful of their various needs so that one group is not addressed at the expense of another. If you can do so effectively, members will tend to "move up" in the categories, as listed.

A. L. Leadership Manual Section 2 - Leadership Positions

The leaders of any organization are usually the officers. The officer titles and certain specific job functions are most often defined in the organization's Bylaws, Constitution, Operating Rules or other defining document. The positions described below are the officers defined in the Astronomical League Bylaws, July 1993. They not only describe the duties of the national officers; they also provide guidelines upon which duties of local officers might be based. (Numbers in parentheses reference the appropriate sections of the League Bylaws.) All national officers are limited to two successive terms of office. All officers of the League and its regions must be League members.

The Council is the governing body of the Astronomical League as defined in Article III. The Executive Committee consists of the officers indicated below and this committee acts between formal meetings of the Council, which usually occur at the annual convention. The officers, both as individuals and acting as Executive Committee, may be limited in their actions by direction from the Council.

Many local societies have a similar organization wherein a selected committee conducts the society's business and sets direction, while the general membership retains ratification power over certain classes of actions. Locally, this committee may be called an executive committee or board of directors or some other designation.

President (II.4.a.)

The President is the chief executive officer of the League and a member of the Executive Committee and Long Range Planning Committee. S/he is elected for a two-year term and has general charge of the business and affairs of the League. In particular, s/he has the power to execute all legal instruments, such as contracts, deeds or other obligations, in the League's name. S/he presides over all business meetings, Council meetings and Executive Committee meetings and may or may not vote on all issues. (The President's voting rights should be spelled out explicitly in an organization's governing documents. There is no definitive pattern which may be assumed.)

The President may call special sessions either of the Executive Committee or of the full Council. Such sessions may be conducted by teleconference or by mail.

Certain committees are defined within the Bylaws and Standing Resolutions. The President has the power to appoint membership to those committees and to other special committees that s/he may create. While s/he is an ex-officio member of all committees except nominations, the President is specifically charged with chairing the Long Range Planning Committee and, together with his/her two immediate predecessors, selecting the recipient of the Astronomical League Award.

A typical annual calendar of the President's routine activities includes the following:

January	February	March
Uses input from Long Range Planning Committee to determine future issues for Council.	A.S.P. amateur board member nominations due (every 3rd year after 1997).	Deadline for May REFLECTOR . Determine plans of ALTF Trustee whose term expires. Seek candidate for replacement if necessary.

<p>April</p> <p>1st solicitation for Council agenda items.</p> <p>Remind convention chair to provide time and space for Council and business meetings.</p>	<p>May</p> <p>Assemble nominations for AL Award and submit to 2 immediate past presidents for vote.</p>	<p>June</p> <p>Deadline for August REFLECTOR.</p> <p>AL Award engraving.</p> <p>Select AL Service Awardee and prepare plaque.</p> <p>Send out preliminary Council agenda and solicit items for new business and written motions.</p>
<p>July</p> <p>Finalize Council agenda.</p> <p>Prepare Business Meeting agenda (finalize after Council meeting).</p> <p>CONVENTION – chair Council and business meetings; present awards.</p>	<p>August</p> <p>Follow-up on Council action items.</p> <p>Remind V.P. to solicit officer nominations in November REFLECTOR and from Regional Reps.</p>	<p>September</p> <p>Deadline for November REFLECTOR (request nomination for AL Award).</p> <p>Order AL Award plaques if out of stock (3-5 years' worth for discount).</p>
<p>October</p> <p>Appoint Long Range Planning Committee and pose initial issues for discussion.</p>	<p>November</p> <p>Notify Long Range Planning Committee of any response needed for issues raised in October.</p>	<p>December</p> <p>Deadline for February REFLECTOR.</p> <p>Every 3rd year after 1996, consider a nominee for amateur seat on A.S. P. board.</p>

Note that some activities may shift if the annual convention is not held in mid- to late- July and that other, non-routine activities inevitably require attention.

Vice President (II.4.b.)

The Vice President is elected for a two-year term and is a member of the Executive Committee and Long Range Planning Committee. S/he assists the President and performs the President's duties in case of the latter's absence, death, disability or resignation. S/he chairs the Nominating Committee (co-chairs during years in which s/he is a candidate for an office).

A typical annual calendar of the Vice President's routine activities includes the following:

January Status check with convention chair. Report status to Executive Committee.	February	March Submit slate of officer candidates to President and Executive Secretary.
April Status check with convention chair. Coordinate League awards process.	May	June Final status check with convention chair. Finalize League awards.
July CONVENTION Coordinate with and assist chairs of following years' conventions.	August Follow up on Council action items.	September Deadline for November REFLECTOR to solicit nomination for next year's officers.
October	November Solicit nominations for next year's officers from Regional Reps.	December

Note that some activities may shift if the annual convention is not held in mid- to late- July and that other, non-routine activities inevitably require attention.

Secretary (II.4.c)

The Secretary is elected to a two-year term and is a member of the Executive Committee and Long Range Planning Committee. S/he records the minutes of all business meetings, Council meetings and Executive Committee meetings. S/he distributes copies of minutes to all Council members within 30 days of each meeting. S/he prepares a summary of the national Council and business meetings for inclusion in the **REFLECTOR** following the national convention.

At the annual meeting, the Secretary provides each Council member with a notebook containing the latest version of the Bylaws and Standing Resolutions plus minutes of all business meetings, Council meetings and Executive Committee meetings since the last convention and the minutes of those meetings at the prior year's convention.

January	February	March
April	May	June Prepare Council notebooks for annual meeting.
July CONVENTION – take minutes of Council and business meetings.	August Send minutes of Council and business meetings to Council members.	September Deadline for November REFLECTOR – prepare summary of Council and business meetings for inclusion.
October	November	December

Note that some activities may shift if the annual convention is not held in mid- to late- July and that other, non-routine activities inevitably require attention.

Treasurer (II.4.d.)

The Treasurer is elected for a three-year term and is a member of the Executive Committee and Long Range Planning Committee. S/he receives all money due the League and pays all bills owed by the League. (An exception is made for certain committees authorized in the Bylaws or by Council to maintain separate bank accounts.) S/he maintains an inventory of all property owned by the League.

The Internal Revenue Service recognizes the Astronomical League as a not-for-profit, tax-exempt organization. Still, the Treasurer must file an annual return with the IRS to maintain our tax-exempt status. In addition, s/he must prepare reports to Council on all financial activity of the League, at least annually.

A typical annual calendar of the Treasurer’s routine activities includes the following:

<p>January</p> <p>Provide quarterly budget update to Executive committee.</p>	<p>February</p> <p>Work with REFLECTOR editor to determine dues requirements according to S.R. #9.</p>	<p>March</p>
<p>April</p> <p>Provide quarterly budget update to Executive Committee.</p>	<p>May</p> <p>Send out dues notices to all members.</p>	<p>June</p> <p>Request financial information from all authorized committees.</p> <p>Prepare year-end report and budget proposal for Council meeting.</p>

<p>July</p> <p>CONVENTION</p> <p>Prepare federal tax return.</p>	<p>August</p>	<p>September</p> <p>Deadline for November REFLECTOR – prepare budget summary for inclusion.</p>
<p>October</p> <p>Provide quarterly budget update to Executive Committee.</p>	<p>November</p>	<p>December</p>

Note that some activities may shift if the annual convention is not held in mid- to late- July and that other, non-routine activities inevitably require attention.

Executive Secretary (II.4.e.)

The Executive Secretary is elected for a three-year term and is a member of the Executive Committee and Long Range Planning Committee. S/he maintains the national headquarters of the League and the mailing list of all League members. S/he receives written nominations for the AL Award and transmits them to the President for consideration.

It is not unusual for the Executive Secretary to have a high volume of mail and telephone contact with the membership and the general public. S/he is usually the first point of contact for inquiries about the League.

A typical annual calendar of the Executive Secretary’s routine activities includes the following (but much of the activity is not routine):

<p>January</p> <p>Prepare the mailing list for February REFLECTOR.</p>	<p>February</p>	<p>March</p>
--	------------------------	---------------------

<p>April</p> <p>Prepare the mailing list for May REFLECTOR.</p> <p>Send out ballots for election of officers.</p>	<p>May</p> <p>Receive election ballots cast.</p>	<p>June</p> <p>Mail out copies of reports, proxy cards and Council agenda to all council members.</p>
<p>July</p> <p>CONVENTION – bring society member counts for tallying by nominating committee.</p> <p>Prepare the mailing list for August REFLECTOR.</p>	<p>August</p> <p>Follow up on Council action items.</p>	<p>September</p> <p>Mail convention minutes and Bylaws ballots (if any) to ALCors, Patrons and Members-at-Large.</p>
<p>October</p> <p>Prepare the mailing list for November REFLECTOR.</p>	<p>November</p>	<p>December</p>

Note that some activities may shift if the annual convention is not held in mid- to late- July and that other, non-routine activities inevitably require attention.

Regions

Administratively, the Astronomical League is divided into ten geographic regions. Specific boundaries of the regions are defined in S.R. #13. National Bylaws specify that the regional officers are Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and/or Treasurer, and a Regional Representative to Council. The affairs of each region are conducted in accordance with the national Bylaws and the Constitution of each region. The duties of the officers generally follow the duties of the national officers with the Chair and Vice Chair being analogous to the President and Vice President. Note that the Secretary and Treasurer may be combined into one office if so desired by the region.

The regional Constitution may assign additional duties to each of the regional officers. Except as noted below, regional officers may be elected for either one- or two-year terms as determined by the region. Regional officers should prepare calendars of routine activities, such as presented above for national officers, and pass those calendars on to their successors to aid them in administering the region.

Regional Chair (III.2.; IX.2.,3.)

The Chair represents the region on the national Council. Any member wishing to have an item discussed at Council may do so through the Chair of the member's region. The Chair, together with the other regional officers and the Presidents (or their proxies) of the Region's societies, make up the regional council. As the title suggests, s/he chairs the regional council and business meetings and, through the regional council, generally conducts the affairs of the region.

Regional Representative (III.3; IV.2.a.; IX.2.,7.)

The Regional Representative is elected to a three-year term and represents the region on the national Council. Any member wishing to have an item discussed at Council may do so through the Representative of the member's region. The Representative is also a member of the regional council.

The Regional Representative is a member of the national nominating committee, chaired by the Vice President. The Representative should be familiar with individuals within the region who would make good candidates for national office.

ALCOR

This is a position unique to the Astronomical League, but the duties associated with the function are nowhere defined! The closest definition can be found in (II.4.e) under duties of the Executive Secretary, which states, "He she shall, in cooperation with the Treasurer and a correspondent from each Member Society, verify that an up-to-date membership list of the League is maintained." ALCOR, then, is a contraction for the Astronomical League CORrespondent.

While the term "correspondent" is a carryover from the time when written (paper) mail was the most common form of communication, current ALCORs may use any form of transmission for communicating. Essentially, an ALCOR is the single point of contact for communications between the League and the individual Member Society. As inferred from the ByLaws extract, a prime function is to keep the League advised of changes in the club membership. That is the only way the League has of keeping the mailing list for *The Reflector* newsletter updated. But the ALCOR also serves as the recipient for communications from the League to the society. Minutes of Council and Executive Committee meetings, ballots for electing national officers, convention announcements and many other topics may be sent out from time to time. It is then up to the individual club to decide how to further disseminate the information to its membership.

Another important function of the ALCOR is to act as a communications point to the world outside the local club. If the League gets an inquiry from an amateur who is not in a club, that person may be referred to the nearest ALCOR. Such referrals often result in new members for the club. A listing of all club ALCORs is published periodically in *The Reflector* and the address provides a contact point for allowing League societies to communicate with one another. Notice that all along the ALCORs function has been tied to **communication**. Perhaps a better acronym today would be "ALCOM"!

The League does not specify how the ALCOR is chosen or what the ALCOR's term should be. That is left to the discretion of the Member Society. The position may be filled by appointment, by election or by assigning the job to one of the existing officers. Often the club secretary, treasurer or other "maintainer or the membership roster" doubles as ALCOR. All that the League requires is that someone is

designated to receive official communications and be responsible for returning membership address updates. The person who accepts the position of ALCOR must understand that their address and, possibly, telephone number and e-mail address will be published in the Reflector and on the League web page.

A. L. Leadership Manual Section 3 - Running Meetings

Generally, officers are involved in running two kinds of meetings: general membership meetings and business meetings. They are covered in that order.

Membership Meetings

General meetings of a society are often broken into at least three separate parts: business, program, and social. Depending on your group's location and practice, observing may follow the formal meeting or be included as part of the social activity.

The program is usually devoted to some topic of interest to the membership. A society program committee may be charged with establishing suitable topics and finding appropriate speakers/presenters. If the program is to be given by a guest speaker, it is often presented first so the speaker can leave at its conclusion and not have to listen to society business in which s/he may have little interest. This is particularly important when some of the business might be controversial and evoke prolonged debate.

All business meetings should follow a prescribed agenda as discussed below. This applies to the business portion of a general meeting as well. It helps to keep the meeting flowing and allows the President to budget time for each topic on the agenda.

The social part of a general meeting often begins before the meeting itself. As members arrive, they will naturally congregate in groups to discuss items of common interest. A second part of the socializing usually follows the formal meeting. Refreshments may be served and members have an opportunity to network among the group to have questions addressed in an informal setting. For some members, this informal give-and-take is the most valuable part of their society membership.

Business Meetings

One of the most important functions for an officer is to preside at a business meeting. Often seen as "a necessary evil," such meetings are vital to the smooth operation of a club or society. Business meetings may be a part of a general membership meeting, as mentioned above, or a separate meeting of the officers or governing board.

Effective meetings do not "just happen." They must be well planned and conducted in a fair, timely manner.

Planning

Always prepare an agenda of the items to be discussed. An outline of a typical agenda is given below. The specifics of an agenda will

depend on the purpose of the meeting. By referring to the agenda, the leader makes sure that all topics are covered and that appropriate time is budgeted for each. **The time budget is important:** without it, a meeting may get "bogged down" in one area without leaving time for discussion in other areas.

One of the great advantages of being the president or meeting leader is that **you** control the agenda. Not only do you control the content for a particular meeting, you also control the time allocations. If some item is taking longer than you budgeted for discussion, you can either redistribute your time allocations or suggest that the item be carried over to a future meeting, perhaps one devoted exclusively to that item if the interest seems sufficient.

Typical Agenda:

1. Call to order.
2. Secretary's report.
3. Treasurer's report.
4. Committee reports.
5. Old business.
6. New business.
7. Adjourn.

The secretary's report is usually a reading of the minutes from the last meeting followed by a motion to accept or amend the minutes. Often, the reading of the minutes can be skipped, especially if the minutes have been published in the organization's newsletter. In that case, a motion to accept the minutes "as published" would be in order. The treasurer's report is a summary of income and expenses since the last meeting, concluding with the balance in the treasury as of the current meeting. The treasurer's report should also be accepted via a motion. Old business consists of items carried over from prior meetings. New business consists of new items being introduced for the first time.

Whenever possible, publish the agenda with the meeting notice. This gives people a chance to decide if there are items of sufficient interest for them to attend. (You can be sure that having "dues" as an agenda item will assure good attendance!) More important, it gives attendees a chance to think about items of interest and, if necessary, to research them prior to the meeting. A well thought out discussion is much more valuable and is less likely to lead to unexpected results than an impromptu discussion. Some people are less able than others to "think on their feet," especially during heated discussion, and will welcome the opportunity to "mull things over" before the meeting.

Running the Meeting

Almost all organizations refer to *Robert's Rules of Order* as the parliamentary guide for running meetings. Almost no organization follows "Robert's Rules" in the strictest sense. Still, the guiding principle, originally laid down by General Henry M. Robert, is the mainstay of most structured groups today: **all shall be heard, but the majority shall decide.** Your key job as meeting leader is to ensure the first part, that all are heard who wish to be before the group is asked to decide. The right to be heard is a "freebie reward" for participants in the meeting. Of course, in order to get the "reward," individuals must first participate.

Often, the leader's behavior may influence participation more than any other single variable. There are two main reasons for not participating. First is the fear of retribution by an organization's culture or an evaluative leader. Second is the natural introversion of some people. You can help overcome both fears by actively encouraging others to participate. When organizing an agenda, put "safe" subjects ahead of known controversial topics. This will help set the mood for participation by everyone. If you think it is appropriate, ask

individuals for their thoughts on a topic, especially individuals who have not yet spoken.

Participation may increase if the group adopts and **publicizes** meeting *groundrules*. This may be a short or long list of rules describing how meetings are to be conducted, sort of your own "Rules of Order." They can cover such simple items as "meetings will start on time" and "only one person will speak at a time." But they can also cover "we will treat each other as equals" and "it's OK to present another point of view." Often, the rules are developed over time in response to particular difficulties experienced by the group. If members know these groundrules up-front, they may be willing to participate more openly.

The meeting should run smoothly if you have done your homework beforehand. While preparing the agenda, review their expected input with key members, especially anyone who has asked for an item to be included on the agenda. This not only avoids surprises (at least for you), it also helps you allocate time for the agenda item and it prompts the member to be prepared.

At some point, each topic on the agenda must be brought to closure so that you can proceed to the next item. In many cases, this happens naturally as discussion dies and someone "calls the question" (asks for a vote). If you notice that a consensus is developing, **make it visible to the group** and ask for agreement. Less formal is to offer a "trial balloon" and ask, "It seems from the discussion that we should ..." This is particularly effective if you notice that speakers are repeating themselves and not offering new thoughts or suggestions. Riskier but very effective for getting commitment is to ask some else to summarize the decision prior to a vote.

Remember that it is not necessary to reach unanimity (unless specifically required in bylaws), only a consensus. The consensus may not be an individual's personal choice, but it is something with which s/he can live. Everyone has some minimum acceptance criteria on any issue. Realize that the majority decision may not be acceptable to everyone.

At the conclusion of the meeting, thank everyone for participating. This is hobby activity. They did not have to be here, but they were willing to give up some other activity to come to this meeting. A simple "thank you" will let the members know that they were appreciated and will encourage future participation.

Dealing with Difficult Participants

It is a rare organization that does not have one or two members who are difficult to deal with during a meeting. Note that *difficulty* does not necessarily mean *conflict*, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Difficult participants probably do not feel they are being difficult, only that the group is ignoring their position. They may be seeking greater attention. In either case, actively listening and repeating their points may satisfy their need, "Let me be sure I understand, are you saying ..." Never get into one-up-manship with a difficult participant. Doing so may alienate others in the group if you are perceived to be unfair.

Three types of difficult participants are most common. Specific suggestions for dealing with them follow.

The Long-Winded Participant

Some people just naturally tend to ramble as they "think out loud." Break in at the end of a thought or a pause (they have to take a breath sometime) and summarize what s/he is saying. Gently remind everyone of the time commitments. Ask the long-winded individual to meet you at a break to discuss the points more thoroughly. If s/he does, s/he probably has a legitimate concern – listen to him/her.

The Expert

There are two sides to every problem: the expert's side and the wrong side. Pick out the key point the expert is making and summarize it, giving him/her credit for the contribution. Ask others for their views or for comments on the expert's contribution. If the expert continues to dominate, speak directly to him/her in private about the impact on the group of the dysfunctional behavior.

The Negativist

The negativist always knows why things will not work. They rely on our natural questioning of what is realistic and on our natural resistance to change. Do not get drawn in and do not argue. Keep your own optimistic but realistic perspective. Set a "horror floor" by asking, "What is the worst that can happen if we do this?"

A. L. Leadership Manual Section 4 - Resolving Conflict

Conflict is not bad per se. It would be a rather dull world if everyone were already in close agreement. Consider conflict to be the basis for defining new directions to explore, new challenges from which to learn. Difficulties usually arise from the way in which conflict manifests itself, most often from a clash of personalities.

Some of the aspects of conflict are summarized below. There may be many other aspects.

Pros of Conflict	Negatives of Conflict
Stimulates discussion	Creates stress
Brings out concerns	Hurt feelings
Understand peers	Frustration
Brings out a broader view	Breakdown in communication
Get it off your chest	Divisiveness
Better prioritization	Destructive behavior
Addresses needs of others	Hidden agendas
	Loss of respect

Tuning out and missing a chance for input

Two strong-willed people may have genuine differences of opinion on a matter under discussion or a single individual may take sharp exception to the consensus that is developing within the group. A problem often develops when these individuals take another's difference of opinion as a personal attack on themselves. That is when you, as a leader, must take steps to defuse the situation before it acts to polarize the meeting so that nothing can be accomplished.

Try to separate the people from the problem. Listen for the true concern and try to formulate a win-win solution. Focus on the reasons behind the problem and ask questions for clarification. Maintain flexibility and try to help all members save face. Suggest that if one proposed solution/resolution does not work out, the other may provide an alternative and thank the individual for suggesting it.

Sometimes the conflict is more widespread than just between one or two members. In that case, examine how the issue under consideration is framed. The issue's presentation may be contributing to the conflict.

Is the issue too narrowly focused? Consider the issue's implications and try to place the issue into a larger perspective. Suggest, "This may be just part of a larger problem. Maybe if we consider ..."

Is the issue too broadly focused? Look for the key point and narrow the issue. Suggest, "Isn't the key factor really ..."

Is the issue so broad that it has become too general or ambiguous? Look for key points that can be separated and considered individually. Ask for help from the group to be sure all the points are identified. Then ask their help again to prioritize the order in which they might be considered. Suggest, "This all seems a little confusing, but one key point might be ... Can anyone pick out any others?" followed by, "Which of these points should we consider first?"

If the "combatants" simply refuse to be mollified, table the item for further consideration at a future meeting. This will provide a cooling off period during which you can discuss each individual's concerns with them privately where they do not feel so defensive. Many times, simply showing that you care enough to listen to the individual will make it easier for that person to accept alternatives at the next meeting. S/he knows his point has been made.

Have a Good Fight!

What if you find yourself in the role of one of the "combatants"? Another member may take (a usually unexpected) strong issue with some plan you propose. When trying to mediate a conflict between others, one (or both!) may turn on you if s/he perceives you as being unfair – and perception is the keyword here.

You cannot adopt a passive approach and hope that the conflict will simply go away. It seldom does. Nor can you adopt a hostile or intimidating approach with the other person. That may alienate others as well as strengthen your antagonist's resolve.

First, apply the time-tested palliative of "count to ten." Develop an automatic response that is neutral and gives both parties a chance to calm down. Then prepare for a fight! Depending on the number of people involved, you may wish to fight in front of the group or, more often, in private, just between the two of you.

A Good Fight should be conducted according to rules and it is up to you, as an officer/leader to see that the rules are followed. You should not refuse a fight. If something is important to one member, it is worth resolving. The fight should focus on reaching a solution, not winning a victory. Is the conflict over a question of fact or a matter of opinion? If a question of fact, call a "timeout" so each of you can ascertain those facts. If a question of opinion, both parties must realize that a compromise may be the only solution. If multiple issues are involved, only discuss one at a time.

Avoid name calling and "You" statements. Talk about yourself and then ask for feedback to be certain your "opponent" understands what you are saying. Do not try to read your opponent's mind. Ask for clarification. Do not make a speech or try to assign guilt. Remember, your purpose is not "to win."

Once all the issues are identified, work toward solutions that are mutually agreeable. Seek areas where you agree and build from there.

A. L. Leadership Manual Section 5 - Communications

Communications Guidelines For Astronomical League Representatives

Public communications are a rich source of legal liability in today's society. Public statements can give rise to claims of defamation, invasion of privacy, intentional interference with contract, interference with prospective economic advantage, copyright infringement and negligent or intentional infliction of emotional distress—among many others.

Each of us, as individuals, can be held liable for our public statements. And your organization can be held liable for the public statements made by officers and representatives who are acting, or appear to be acting, in their official capacities. Therefore, the League offers these Communications Guidelines to help its national and regional officers, its committee and activity chairs, its representatives and their counterparts in member societies better understand where some of these dangers lie ... and how to avoid them.

While these guidelines cannot guarantee freedom from liability, adherence to these guidelines can greatly reduce risk to you and your organization.

What Is A Public Communication?

These guidelines apply only to "public communications." "Communications" include all written or oral statements and utterances, and all visual or aural presentations, which are heard, read or seen by other persons. Communications include such things as private letters, e-mail messages, computer forum postings, personal conversations, speeches, television and radio appearances, telephone calls, interviews, letters to editors, written articles, videotape presentations, advertisements, promotional literature and public exhibitions. If you say it, write it or display it and some other person hears it or sees it, it is a communication.

In the organizational sense, a communication becomes "public" when it is shared with any person not having an official "need to know"

the content of the communication in order to do his/her job.

The Guidelines

No officer or representative of the Astronomical League or its regions, committees, activities or member societies, acting in an official capacity, should publicly communicate with any person where it is reasonably expected that the effect of the communication, either directly or by implication, will be to:

- a. accuse any person of wrongful, illegal or unethical conduct;
- b. question any person's honesty, competence or morality;
- c. cause any person to be viewed in a false light;
- d. attempt to damage, inhibit, disparage or limit the success of events, products or activities of another person or organization;
- e. encourage or induce a person to breach an existing contract with another person or organization;
- f. make malicious, false or reckless statements about any person or organization;
- g. embarrass any person publicly;
- h. transmit material which is potentially offensive to any person on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, religion, disability or age;
- i. transmit material which is obscene or offensive;
- j. reveal private personal facts about any person without their express permission; or
- k. publish, copy, reproduce, distribute or transmit copyrighted material (including the public exhibition of videotapes, articles, art, photos etc.) without the written permission of the copyright holder.

Privileged Communications

Organization officials enjoy a legal defense, called a "qualified privilege," to communicate frankly among themselves about the organizational issues. This means they may be able to communicate among themselves if everyone in the meeting has an official need to hear the communications in order to discharge their organizational responsibilities -- e.g. a board member has the right to discuss an issue affecting the organization with other board members and with the organization's attorney or accountant.

Internal communications, however, can lose the benefit of this qualified privilege if (a) the communications are shared with even one person not having a need to know about them or if (b) the communications are made maliciously or with knowing or reckless disregard for the truth.

Truthful Communications

Technically, truth is a complete defense to a defamation claim. Truth, however, is in the eye of the beholder and the defense of truth is only useful if one is willing to establish the defense in prolonged and costly court proceedings. Further, truth is not a defense to certain other claims, like invasion of privacy.

There will be times when you must make truthful statements even though they may violate some of these guidelines. If so, protect yourself and your organization by (a) seeking approval from the organization, (b) seeking advice of counsel if the communication is particularly likely to create risk and (c) making sure you can prove every element and implication of your public statement. For example, it is a lot safer to accuse someone of "unauthorized possession" of your bike (requiring proof that he had the bike and did not have permission to have it) than it is to accuse someone of "stealing" your bike (requiring, in addition, proof that he intended to permanently deprive you of

it). If he claims he borrowed it and you accuse him of stealing, you may be defaming him.

Electronic Mail

A recent phenomenon of interest to psychologists is the almost universal tendency of people to treat e-mail as face-to-face conversation. People tend to be unusually abrupt in writing and responding to e-mail. They ignore the important buffers of tone, expression and body language which temper face-to-face conversations. And, people copy their e-mails to dozens of people who would not otherwise be privy to a face-to-face conversation. The usual result is an e-mail storm which becomes widely disseminated and

serves as fertile ground for hurt feelings, anger and even legal liability. Because people tend to speak with incredible candor in e-mail communications, attorneys have found e-mail to be of extraordinary value in legal proceedings and routinely discover or subpoena electronic records (even deleted ones).

E-mail is, in reality, a form of written communication just like a letter, and it should be treated as such. If you are angry when you type an e-mail, put your response in your electronic "outbasket" and read it again the next day ... as you have undoubtedly done with letters which were written in anger and never sent. With letters, you have a built-in cooling off period – you have to get to the mailbox the next morning. With e-mail, that time buffer is not there – you just hit "Send."

Avoid over-copying your e-mail. It is a lot safer to criticize the addressee of your e-mail if you do not send a copy of your critique to the entire Free World. Nothing will anger your recipient more and, once again, it will increase your risk, and your organization's risk, of litigation.

The rule is simple. Do not say anything in an e-mail message that you would not be happy to see placed in front of a jury box or the person you are writing about. Remember – what we say to third persons is not privileged and, if unfortunately phrased, public communications can create needless hostility and misunderstanding. Even one blunt e-mail to a friend can become a problem if it gets forwarded repeatedly to persons increasingly less sympathetic to your views.

E-mail communications should never be viewed as private and, when sent to non-privileged individuals, should never contain material which exceeds these guidelines. Even when sent to privileged individuals (those having a "need to know" in order to discharge their official positions), messages arguably violative of these guidelines should be plainly marked "CONFIDENTIAL AND PRIVILEGED; DO NOT FORWARD". Many e-mail recipients will honor this type of instruction. At the very least, the instruction may stop someone from forwarding the message thoughtlessly.

A Note About The Guidelines

These guidelines are not offered to create censorship or to violate anyone's free speech rights. They are offered to help our representatives avoid personal liability and, at the same time, to help protect the organization as well. Second, Constitutional free speech rights do not apply to the League or to other private organizations. Finally, these guidelines are not intended to limit the public statements of rank-and-file members – they only apply to the public statements of persons holding official, elected or representative positions, i.e. people who reasonably appear to the public to be speaking on behalf of the organization.

If representatives are unsure whether a proposed communication might violate the guidelines, the safe course is to contact an officer of the organization first. That way, the organization has a fair opportunity to review, modify or seek legal review of communications for which it might later be held liable. If representatives insist on making communications which exceed these guidelines, the representatives should

mention in their communications that they are speaking strictly as individuals and not in their official capacities ... and the organization can then publicly disclaim or disavow the communication.

These Communications Guidelines are not to be used, adopted or relied upon as legal advice, as a complete list of conduct giving rise to potential liability or as a substitute for private or organizational legal consultation. These Guidelines may, however, be freely copied, modified and adopted by League member societies and members in order to meet their specific needs.

A. L. Leadership Manual Section 6 - Hints and Tips

Random thoughts on leading an amateur astronomy group.

You need not be an expert in astronomy; there are plenty of those in the club already. You only need to be willing to give some of your time to help get things organized and keep things focused.

Always be on the lookout for potential officers. When someone speaks up at a meeting, does the individual appear self-confident, or nervous and unsure? Does a program presenter have good "presence" in front of a group? Once identified, do a little coaching to spark the individual's interest in running for office.

Often, a member will present a proposal "out of the blue." Unless you think fast on your feet and can see the way to implement the idea, thank the proposer for the suggestion, but explain your difficulty envisioning the implementation. Ask the individual to develop the idea more fully, including the resources needed and where they will come from, and report back at a future meeting when the idea has been "fleshed out." Do not bog down a meeting trying to implement the proposal "on the fly."

Be sure to give recognition to those in your organization who really do the work. It may sound trivial, but a few "ataboys" and "attagirls" for a job well done not only reward the recipients, but they also let others know that help is appreciated when given.