

Roberts' Rules

By Kalee Roberts, VSBA President

I want to say what an honor it is to have become the President of the VSBA Board of Directors. Working in association with the amazing and talented staff members of VSBA (and VSA and VPA) as well as the VSBA board and board members across Vermont and the nation offers me a continuous stream of learning and professional development opportunities which I hope makes me a better board member and, more importantly, a better person.

For the board members who shared our recent Annual Meeting experience you (and I) were spared a traditional acceptance speech. However, I spent a great deal of time wondering what insights I could share if called upon to speak. These thoughts came to me to as a disjointed set of ideas that I bring to my board work as principles which give me strength and trust make me a good board member. I often think of these in terms of famous quotes or truisms from my life and will share them even if they seem a bit corny or pat.

“With great power comes great responsibility” – Uncle Ben of Spiderman.

Board members need to remember that as elected officials we often have a great deal of power and we must try to exercise that power in a responsible manner.

“Figures don’t lie, but liars figure” – Samuel Clemens aka Mark Twain

Insist on using real data in decision making. If it’s not available, postpone the decision. If a decision feels emotional it probably is, and may feel good (or bad), but usually won’t help you make progress toward a measurable goal.

“Trust but verify” – Ronald Reagan

It is not insulting or offensive to ask for proof, which is our oversight role and responsibility.

“Time is on my side” – The Rolling Stones (and many others)

Time is one commodity that boards generally do control. If something needs to happen (and is worth doing) it can be done, or at least begun, and putting something off until later increases the probability that it will not be done, or perhaps ever started.

“Don’t let education get in the way of your learning” - Mark Twain

Never let the process outweigh the end goal.

And finally -

“Question Authority” – unattributed bumper sticker/graffiti

The origin of the phrase is murky, although some attribute the first use to Benjamin Franklin postulating on good citizenship. I urge you to keep this close at hand; there are no experts in education authority (if there were we would all be out of a job along with literally hundred of thousands of other education authorities). Remember to always question authority, but keep in mind you are the self same authority you also need to question.

This motley assortment of concepts may give you some new ways of thinking about the tasks you perform as board members, and I encourage you to share these and your personal ideas and principles with others as you work together for Vermont's excellent schools. Happy fall.

Kalee Roberts is serving her first year as VSBA President.