



OVERLOOKING THE OBVIOUS

By Jonathan Lightman

For whatever reason, my dog loves to chase his tail. It gives us a good laugh—sometimes—and it certainly tires him out. I’ve often wondered what would happen if he simply declared victory. Would he pursue another body part or would he lament the end of running in circles? Who knows?

I’ve been in many a committee and board meeting where volunteer leaders felt like they were chasing their tails. The conversations were circular in nature with never a sense of accomplishment or progress. Tiring and demoralizing would not begin to describe it.

Amazingly, there’s a key to unlocking this which should be at the top of every agenda, called “Approval of the Agenda.”¹ Seems obvious and fairly perfunctory, but it’s generally overlooked.

In my experience, those wishing to add to the agenda tend to have a report or matter of personal priority that they want to share. Without commenting on the merits of these types of additions, they don’t strike at the reason why “Approval of the Agenda” is on the agenda in the first place. It’s there for all board members to vote on whether the meeting moves the organization forward in its mission and vision so that directors don’t feel like they’re chasing their collective tails.

Think about it. When was the last time your board seriously evaluated its agenda before the meeting began? If it hasn’t done so, you may want to give it a try. After all, there’s no way to declare victory by running in circles.

¹ Public meetings must set agendas in accordance with applicable transparency laws.