

## **THE VICE CHAIRMAN'S HANDBOOK**

**A brief guide to the intellectual wilderness surrounding the post of Table Vice-Chairman  
Prepared by the National Membership & Development Committee**

*"Dear Table Vice-Chairman, congratulations on your recent election ..."*

Words to strike terror into the heart of even the most fearless of young men! If you have been looking for a guide on how to cope with this most important period of your life, then you can stop worrying...

... Here it is. A whistle stop tour of what a Table Chairman is all about and how the best ones walk into the job with their 'master plans' tucked under their arms.

The year of Vice-Chairman is more important than most people give it credit for. Our friend's year in the Chair will probably tell everyone what kind of Vice-Chairman he was.

Hopefully this publication will be of some small use to the poor, bewildered soul. It may even be of some use (dare we say it?) to you, Mr Vice-Chairman, although you could probably have written it better.

In any event, have a good year. Have an even better one next year and remember – be prepared! It's unlikely to happen twice!

### **CONGRATULATIONS...**

After several years of service to your fellow Tablers they have finally (and, no doubt, not before time) recognised your true worth. You are therefore feeling justifiably pleased with yourself and looking forward to a fairly easy year before the great day when the outgoing Chairman (probably in your view a man of immense charm but limited ability) puts the gong round your neck and proclaims you the boss.

At long last you can get to work putting the Table and the World to rights.

A man of your natural ability should have little difficulty adjusting to this long overdue stardom, and will undoubtedly slip into the seat of command with effortless ease. But spare a thought in your moment of triumph and euphoria for a lesser mortal assuming this status. For him it could be difficult. . . .

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

The new Vice-Chairman becomes the new Chairman

Suddenly, saddled with the leadership of his Table, our brand new Chairman will become involved with new and perhaps unfamiliar responsibilities. The buck will be stopping firmly on his doorstep and he won't always know whether to take it for a brisk walk or clear up the mess.

His fellows, full of encouragement beforehand, then expect him to show the qualities of leadership which (often by a narrow majority) they assume were dormant and waiting to emerge; and if he is slow or hesitant in responding to the levels of their outrageous expectations he could be in for a tough time. The honeymoon will soon be over, and he'll wish he had given a little more thought to the year ahead and the ways in which he would cope with the demands and pressures.

Although never likely to aspire to the unparalleled acclaim that your efficiency, charm and sheer brilliance of personality will in due course clearly bring with the barest minimum of effort, he will knuckle down and work hard at his job.

After some initial mistakes he will no doubt get the hang of it and perhaps even start to enjoy himself. He'll find himself taking part at Area meetings and even going to National events. Towards the end of his year he will, with a bit of luck, be firmly in charge; no sooner will he start to capitalise on his new-found fortune and really get into the swing of things than his time will come to an end and he'll hand over his chain of office to the next unsuspecting innocent.

Almost inevitably, he'll wish he had got 'stuck in' sooner.

## **BE PREPARED**

So how can this lesser mortal hope to avoid a late awakening of fulfillment and rather make the transition from Vice to Chairman with ease?

'Be prepared', his year as Vice-Chairman presents an opportunity to think ahead and not be taken by surprise. It allows time to learn about the Association in which he is poised to play an active and prestigious role.

The extent to which he succeeds in doing so will be of crucial importance to the enjoyment derived and the quality of leadership he is able to bestow on his fellow Tablers.

Part of being prepared is also getting to know his counterparts in Ladies Circle, 41 Club and indeed other Tables in his Area. All should meet and work together for the greater benefit of all.

He should also consider who might be appointed as Table President.

So, let's pretend for a moment that we have to give him some guidance. He's looking to us for a bit of advice – us because we've read the book and you because you don't need it!

## **THE CONDUCT OF TABLE MEETINGS**

Many Tablers resign from the Round Table movement because they are disillusioned and downright bored with the standards adopted by their Table in the content and style of its programme and meetings. Our trainee Chairman can't hope to promote fellowship through the medium of casual inefficiency, and no one will respect him for not bothering to try and run the show to the best of his ability. Here's the six-pointer to success.

### **1. Preparation**

A meeting which is well chaired is not normally the product of intuition but of careful preparation and an awareness of the issues likely to arise. No one is more important to our man than his Secretary. Between the two of them they can have Table meetings ticking along as smoothly as a 41 Clubber's Rolls. So, perhaps early on he should have someone in mind for that partnership. Then, when it is put into action, a few minutes discussion before and after each meeting will work wonders.

### **2. Punctuality**

He must ensure that meetings start at the appointed time. It's not always easy to prise Tablers away from the bar, but a show of determination by starting the proceedings in a firm, but businesslike fashion will soon get over the message and earn respect for it.

### **3. Keep it moving**

Ample opportunity should be provided during the evening – normally at the beginning and end of business – to allow for personal contact between the Tablers. This can be achieved by starting on time, conducting the business efficiently and avoiding lengthy breaks and interruptions which break the continuity.

### **4. Formalities**

Each Table chooses its own style. Tablers are out to enjoy themselves and not get bogged down with pedantic formality. But they do expect the Chairman to have a working knowledge of the Table rules and the procedures for conducting a debate.

Too often one sees debate on serious and important issues degenerate into a complete (and even acrimonious) shambles because the Chairman has no idea of the procedure and thus loses control of the proceedings.

So, he has to keep it firm, but without ever losing sight of the fact that people will choose to do other things rather than sit through a disorganised rabble, especially if smiles are hard to come by.

### **5. Read the manual**

The Chairman doesn't have to become a barrack-room lawyer or a 'Rule Book Merchant' to acquire the basic grasp of proper procedure. But an efficient and properly run meeting is much more likely to be enjoyable for those taking part

An understanding of the rules will ensure that he has an answer for other barrack-room lawyers, which every Table seems to be blessed with. He should give more than a passing thought to buying a copy of the Round Table

Manual, which is a veritable goldmine of information and advice. And he'd be better doing some of that 'reading up' during his year as Vice.

Well, you didn't start learning the Highway Code on the way to your driving test did you? Yes, you probably did!

## **6. Programme**

Within one month of taking up office (if not before), he should publish a programme of business meetings, social functions and fund-raising events for the coming year.

A boring, uneventful programme will lead to absenteeism and resignations. It needs a lot of advance thought and preparation. Good speakers, Quazar, football, Go-karting and social events need to be booked early; original ideas don't just 'happen'. So, just as the new boy has to 'seek out' his potential Table Secretary and it will pay him dividends to also have someone in mind for Programme or Speaker Convener. After all, his year in the Chair can be remembered or filed in the memory's waste-paper basket depending on its level of enjoyment.

## **COUNCIL MEETINGS**

The degree of respect he commands within his Table will rest on his ability to control and influence his Council. This is where a substantial part of Table policy will be formed, and the various council members will look to the Chairman for overall guidance.

As Vice-Chairman he has a whole year to think ahead and consider the following:

- Who else he would like to see on his Council, and if necessary encourage them to stand for election.
- Whether he will be happy with the existing committee structure or whether he wants to consider changes; if so, he would probably find it helpful to discuss these in advance.
- What roles he wants each committee to fulfil, so that they can be given a clear brief immediately on taking office.
- What particular direction he hopes the Table should go (e.g. in the form of a special community service project and where some initial planning could be undertaken).
- Whether there are any future dates for special occasions such as a 21<sup>st</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> Charter Anniversary where long-term planning is needed to book a venue and speakers, as well as publicising and promoting the function widely.
- If there is any hint of a problem with membership he should be applying himself to that. In fact, it is an excellent idea for Table Vice-Chairmen to be on the Membership Committee with the Chairman and Membership Officer.

To you and us this will, of course, sound all very obvious, but it's well worth re-stating that for his year in the Chair to be successful, he must undertake some forward planning, and the time to do it is during his year as Vice-Chairman

Exactly how he chooses to run his Council meetings is a matter for him and nobody else to decide. Some may choose a very informal approach, others less so. What really matters is that his Council and its members are motivated to do the job efficiently and conscientiously.

They, like him, have been elected to do a job – it's his job to see that they do theirs; reporting on discussions and correspondence received, passing on information and responding promptly when requested to do so by their Area or National Counterparts.

## **AREA & NATIONAL**

Concerned as he should be for the standing and well being of his own Table, a Chairman who regards his Table as a self-contained and isolated unit does his Table a disservice. It is part of a National Movement and he should ensure that it is aware of, and contributing to, development at all levels.

The Chairman should ensure that all correspondence etc from headquarters or from the Area is brought to the attention of Table at the earliest opportunity. If the Association is to be democratically controlled by its members it is essential that they are given every opportunity to discuss as many matters as possible emanating from Area or the National Association, and in particular items on the Agendas issued by the National Honorary Secretary and Area Secretary. It is only in this way that the Individual Tabler can learn what is being done by the Association in his name. In the case of long reports, agendas etc it is a good idea to pass these to an Area Councillor so that he may put them (or a summary) before the Council or full Table with his comments and recommendations.

Delegates to Area or National meetings should be fully aware of the wishes of the Table, but it is suggested that they should not be instructed so rigidly that they cannot vote as they see fit following the discussion they will have heard.

The dates of National and Area Council meetings should be obtained as soon as possible in the Table year. From these it should be possible to plan business meetings well in advance, and give the appropriate consideration to National and Area business at the appropriate Table meetings.

'National' is not a remote, academic organisation separate from and out of sympathy with the 'Grass Roots'. If our man doesn't believe this, he should go to a National Council meeting as an observer and see for himself. Any Tabler is entitled (and encouraged to do so) and he'd probably be surprised at the level of good humour and backchat akin to ordinary Table meetings.

But we know (don't we?) that the year of Vice gives him greater freedom to study Area (unless he's been a regular attender) and be truly 'aware' when the gong is donned.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

The National Membership and Development Committee can assist in your preparation for the year ahead. Every year, a growing programme of Table Vice-Chairman's Forums is run throughout the country. All Table Vice-Chairmen should try to attend one of these, where they will meet fellow Vice-Chairmen, share experiences and best practices as well as picking up useful advice and exchanging diary dates for future events.

One of the major unsung benefits of Tabling and in particular preparation for, and subsequently being, Table Chairman is that of personal development. People management, public speaking and organisational skills will necessarily be called upon and developed. Make the most of your year ahead as Table Chairman and you will almost certainly be a better and more self-confident person at the end of it.



## **MARCHESI HOUSE**

As well as providing all of the administrative support to RTBI, the staff within Marchesi House can and do provide assistance on many matters. These services are available for the use of all members and often an answer or response can be obtained over the telephone. Alternatively they will direct those who call to someone who is able to answer the particular query. Marchesi House also offers a direct sales service for RTBI goods as an alternative to processing orders through the Area Sales Officers. Even more direct, the Sales Shop is open to personal callers during office hours.

Membership literature is either freely available or at nominal cost, as are all the forms, guidance booklets and rule book to assist with the smooth running of your Table. Pre-printed address labels can be requested at nominal cost for various selection criteria e.g. membership of your Table, all Table Vice or Chairmen in your Area. Subject to various criteria and approval, Marchesi House can also assist with National Mailings.

Marchesi House staff are pleased to be able to assist. Please help them by ensuring the Active Members Roll and in turn the Capitation Fees for your Table are returned to them on time.

## **WEBSITE**

In the meantime, please go to the Membership News pages on the website: visit [www.roundtable.org.uk](http://www.roundtable.org.uk) and log into the Members Area (login=members; password=marchesi), click on Current News and then follow the link. There you'll find about 20 pages of useful info, guidance and best practice on all kinds of membership issues, and it's all regularly updated.