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Who Invited ELMO to the Meeting?

Bob Harris, CAE

There is a fascinating practice among association leaders responsible for convening meetings. They invite ELMO.

The red Muppet named ELMO has a seat at board and committee meetings. ELMO's name doubles as an acronym for the phrase, "Enough, Let's Move On."

Meeting discussions can wander. When the keeper of ELMO, or any board member, knows they can call an ELMO, the conversation will return to the agenda items.

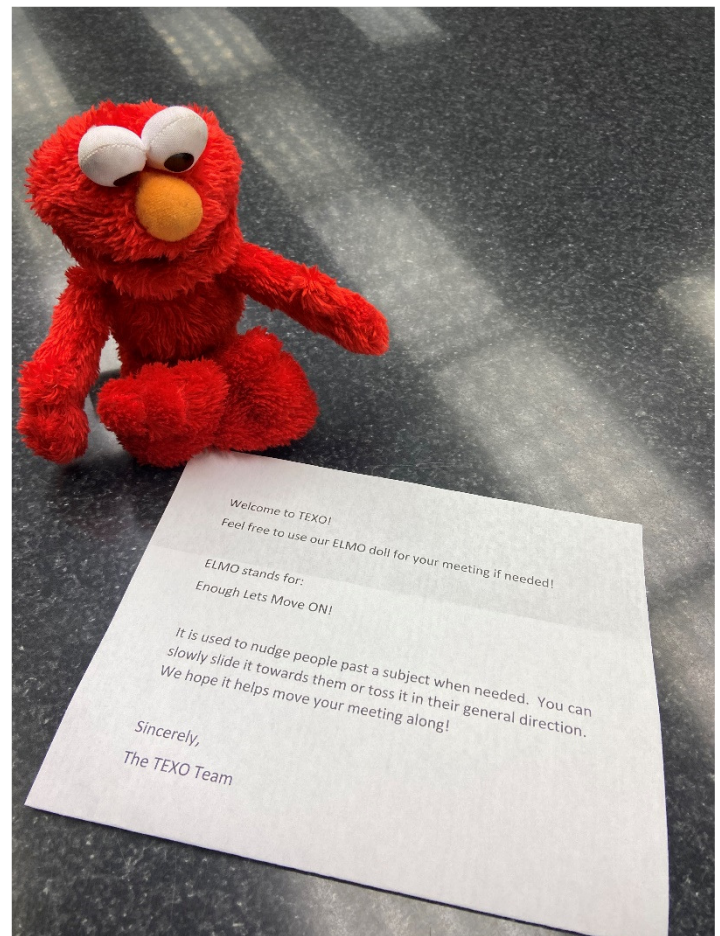
Introduce ELMO at a meeting by asking the group if it is ok to include him. Most volunteers appreciate a friendly way to keep discussions focused. Otherwise, frustration grows, time runs out and business is not finished.

ELMO is best positioned at the head of the table, near the meeting chair. Don't be surprised if ELMO gets passed around as attendees realize it is time to move on but don't want to say anything or interrupt.

"We keep a couple of stuffed ELMO's in our conference rooms so our committees and board can use the technique," explains Meloni Raney, president and CEO of the TEXO, The Texas Construction Association. *(Photo credit to TEXO.)*

Rabbit Hole

Meeting volunteers can be distracted by bright shiny objects. This is depicted in the Disney movie "Up." Doug the dog was fond of chasing squirrels. Whatever was on his mind was distracted by the squirrel.



The stuffed squirrel serves the same purpose as ELMO. When conversations take a turn from the agenda, running up a tree and back down into a rabbit hole, reference the squirrel.

Every director should be empowered to say, “this feels like a squirrel chase.” Ideas can be repositioned for another meeting or placed in the parking lot for future consideration.

Acceptance

Introduce the tools considerately. Most directors will appreciate the efficiency. A few may express offense if they feel they cannot be heard, or they have been cut-off.

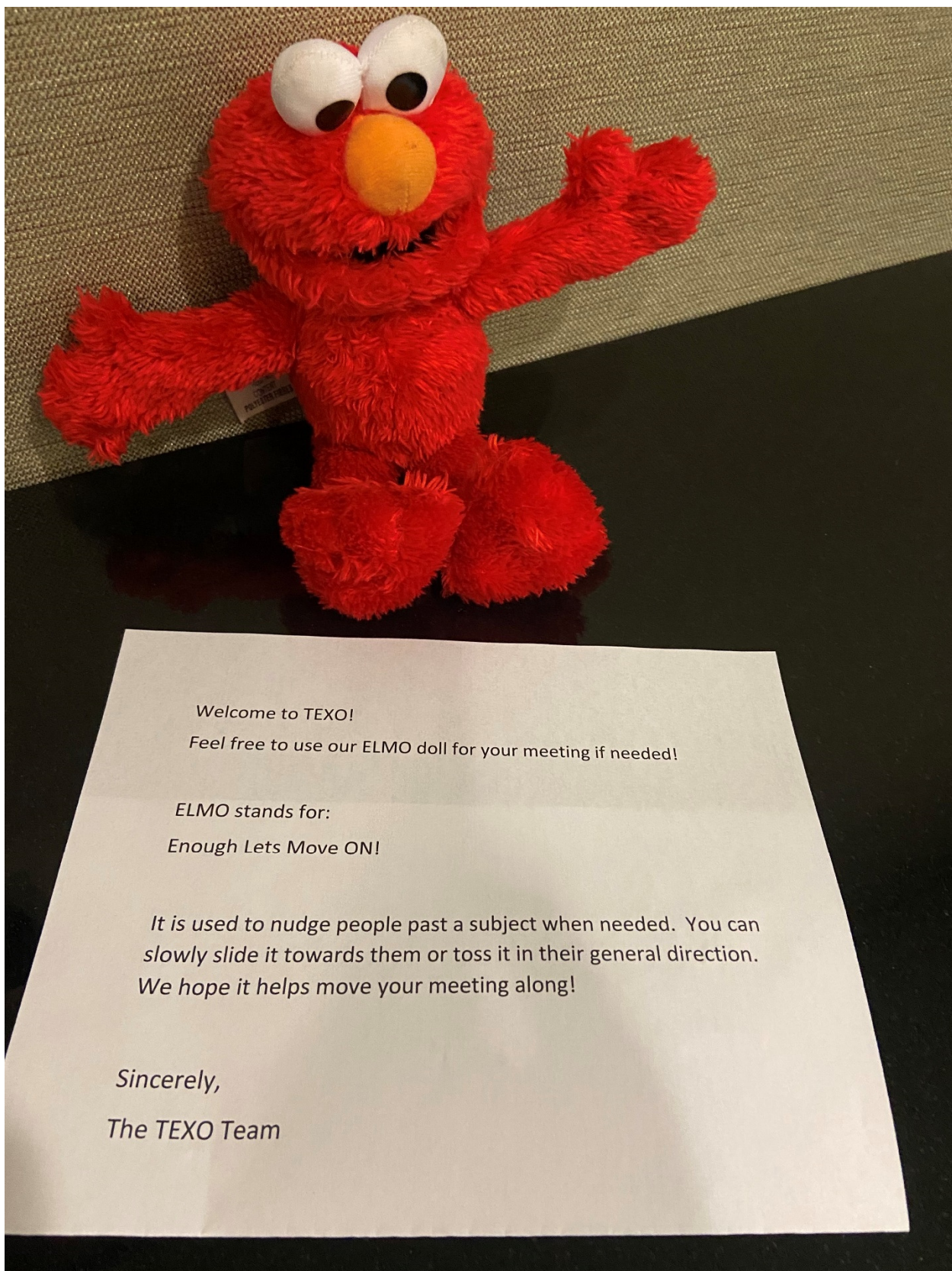
ELMO is a more relaxed method of the parliamentary procedure, “calling the question.” It is another mechanism to close discussion on an issue and take a vote.

Adapt your own guidelines for ELMO. For example, gently nudge people past a subject as needed. Slowly slide it towards the person speaking or toss it in their direction.

At Novi AMS, Jenn Norman, CAE, Director of Customer Experience explains, “Make your own rules, at our meetings anyone can ELMO the conversation. Inevitably someone in a leadership position will use it a bit more to keep things on track but everyone knows they have the right to call ELMO. For the board that I sit on, people have even started policing themselves a bit more and even ELMO themselves in a lighthearted way.”

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.



Welcome to TEXO!

Feel free to use our ELMO doll for your meeting if needed!

ELMO stands for:

Enough Lets Move ON!

It is used to nudge people past a subject when needed. You can slowly slide it towards them or toss it in their general direction. We hope it helps move your meeting along!

Sincerely,
The TEXO Team