

Being a Seneschal

I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element.

It is my personal approach that creates the climate.

It is my daily mood that makes the weather.

I possess tremendous power to make life miserable or joyous.

I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration,

I can humiliate or honor, hurt or heal.

In all situations, it is my response that decides

whether a crisis is escalated or de-escalated,

and a person is humanized or de-humanized.

If we treat people as they are, we make them worse.

If we treat people as they ought to be,

we help them become what they are capable of becoming.

-Goethe, 1749-1832

What is a Seneschal?

Duties and Role of Branch Seneschals

Record Keeping

Gift Policy

Dealing with the Modern World

Contracts

Insurance

Public and Community Relations

Minor policies

Conducting Effective Meetings

Interpersonal relations and conflict resolution

Grievance procedure

Active listening techniques

Difficult Situations—respect, courtesy and patience

Award Recommendations

What is a Seneschal?

In medieval times, the Seneschal was a household administrative official in charge of domestic arrangements and servants.

A favorite definition: “head bureaucrat, diplomat and mediator”

- First major role—be the local legal representative of the SCA
- Second major role—promote and facilitate communications
- Third major role—help other SCA members find and do what interests them

NOTE: Nowhere in the definition of the job of a Seneschal are the words “boss”, “tyrant”, “power broker” (or “doormat”, either)

Duties and Role of the Branch Seneschals

- Be the legal representative of your local SCA group: Sign contracts, co-sign on bank accounts, see that your group’s obligations are fulfilled, see that group activities are conducted according to SCA and Modern law. Protect the Corporation.
- Report on your group’s and office’s activities to your superiors
- Maintain the records for your office, especially copies of reports and contracts.
- Send waivers to the Kingdom Waiver Secretary
- Keep your group informed of policy announcements and other major happenings
- Take care of paperwork related to your group’s status
- Familiarize yourself with the governing documents of the Society
- See that your group presents a favorable image of the SCA
- Maintain your membership in the SCA
- Subscribe to the following publications:
 - The Principality newsletter (if in a Principality)
 - The antir-seneschals email list
 - The SCA-announce email list
 - If you do not have personal email, appoint someone to be your electronic deputy, and have them communicate any postings to you.

Seneschals Perform Many Important Functions

- Facilitate, communicate, and mediate
- See that reliable information gets around and that people who need to talk to each other, do
- Listen - complaints, ideas, proposals, and (sometimes) personal problems
- Delegate!
- Do not try to do everything
- See that as many people in your group as possible can participate and serve to whatever extent suits them
- Seek recognition for your people
- Welcome newcomers
- Make a good first impression—newcomers usually talk to you first
- Point newcomers to the folks that can help them get going
- Set a good example
- Stay neutral
- Behave in a manner worthy of respect

Record Keeping

Handbooks and Publications

- The following should be part of your office's permanent collection:
 - The latest SCA Organizational Handbook
 - Kingdom Law and policies, plus copies of any updates published in the *Crier*.
 - Principality Law and policies if you live in a Principality. Keep copies of updates.
 - Your branch's Governing Documents / Customary.
- Your group should have (either in your possession or in the hands of the appropriate officers, or both!) the Society Treasurer's Manual, Chirurgeon's Manual, Fighter's and Marshal's handbooks

What to File

At minimum, your files should include copies of

- Your reports
- Other officers' reports
- Signed contracts
- Correspondence related to your office
- Copies of event reports (incipient groups) and sponsorship reports (sponsoring groups)
The most recent Insurance Letter
- Change of status applications

Other Good Stuff to Keep

- Newspaper clippings, articles, etc. about your group and the SCA in general
- Copies of letters of commendation or thanks from sites, people you've done demos for, etc.
- Copies of your group's newsletter, if your group has a newsletter
- Copies of event flyers
- An inventory of group property, with pictures of valuable items
- Extra forms: membership, waiver, change of office, etc.

- A list of sites and site owners
- Receipts of money spent by the group, especially for major things like pavilions
- Meeting minutes
- Access information to your group's webpage, if you have a webpage

An important point: The group's files belong to your office, not to any one person. Make sure you get them as soon as you take over as Seneschal, and give them up as soon as you step down.

Events

- Defines events as "tournaments, feasts, and other activities"; also includes educational activities and business meetings
 - Key phrase: All Society events must be sponsored by branches of the Society, registered with the Seneschal of the sponsoring branch and publicized at least to the membership of that branch, and conducted according to Society rules
- Defines (court) business requiring prior announcement in the kingdom newsletter
- Defines individuals in charge of events: "Each Society event must have one Society member appointed by the sponsoring branch in attendance and responsible for the general conduct of the event."
- Defines requirements for participation: Wears an attempt at pre-17th century dress, conforms to the provisions of the By-Laws and Corpora, complies with any other requirements (such as site fees or waivers), and behaves as a lady or gentleman.
- Defines who must enforce the requirements:

The officers (and presiding nobles, if any) of the sponsoring branch shall ensure that each event operates according to the rules set forth in the governing documents of the Society.

Local Officers

Key points

- Appointment
 - i. Local officers are appointed by their superiors as kingdom law provides
 - ii. Local officers must not be substantively opposed by the people of the branch
 - iii. Final decision regarding their tenure rests with their superior officers and royalty
- Reporting
 - i. Local officers report upon their branch's development and activities to their superior officers and such others as requires by their administrative structure.

Gift Policy

SCA funds cannot be used to purchase gifts for individuals, including Royalty

SCA funds can be given to the kingdom for travel funds or designated funds

Groups can pass the hat to purchase gifts for individuals

Group funds can be used to purchase regalia to be used or given

Dealing with the Modern World

Contracts

- Seneschals have the authority to sign contracts on behalf of the group
- This responsibility may be delegated in writing to SCA members only

- Seneschals may not make commitments on behalf of any higher SCA level of organization
- Read the contract before signing it
- Negotiate any changes before signing and make sure the contract is amended before signing
- Keep a copy of any contract you sign!

Insurance

Always use the current insurance letter only!

- Two Functional Components: Property and Liability
 - Property coverage
 - Covers against damage to property not owned or on long-term lease by SCA members, being used for an SCA event
 - Events can include business meetings, dance practices, fighter practices, and other activities in addition to what we normally consider “events”
 - Covers damage (including fire damage) to sites including buildings, grounds, furnishings, and in some cases automobiles
 - SCA events may be held on member’s property, but the member’s own insurance must provide coverage
 - Liability coverage
 - Protects the SCA, its officers and members, while acting within the scope of their duties, against suits arising from actions performed as a legitimate part of SCA activities
 - Covers paid SCA members only
 - Includes personal injury liability and host liquor liability (but only if we do not sell liquor)
- Responsibilities
 - Our insurance company considers us an acceptable risk because we:
 - Have rules in place that are designed to make our game reasonably safe
 - Put people in charge who have the authority to enforce those rules and who are expected to do so
 - Limit our definition of covered events to those that are supervised and conducted according to SCA rules
 - Expect both members and nonmembers to abide by those rules as a prerequisite to participating in SCA activities of any sort
 - Expect both members and nonmembers to assume risks arising from their personal participation, in writing (that is, they have to sign waivers).
 - Officers are responsible for seeing that both Modern and Society laws are followed, to the best of your ability

Public and Community Relations

Always practice good PR, whether you are talking to a site owner, your next-door neighbor, or a reporter

- Expect the best
 - Don’t defend the SCA against charges that haven’t been made. Our hobby is perfectly valid, and none of us needs to defend his association with the Society
 - Focus on the positive: the educational aspects of the SCA, our emphasis on courtesy and honor, the fact that we are mostly intelligent, creative people
- Behave yourselves in public places

- Do something socially conscious: any activity that generates good will pay off
- Evaluate your group: would you want your best friend to associate with your group? How about your spouse? Your mother? Your ten-year-old niece?
 - If you can't answer "yes" to all of the above, then you have a problem
- Always leave any site cleaner than you found it

Responsibility

- Any person representing the Society has a duty to uphold its reputation and goodwill
- If you are at a demo, if you are being interviewed by a reporter, or are talking to a site owner, you are representing the SCA, Inc. Be very aware of the Media policy. If there is a good chance that the media will cover an event, contact the Kingdom Media Deputy ahead of time.
- The Seneschal of the group is responsible for seeing that our legal standing and good public image are maintained and has a responsibility to limit who attends a demo. And who escorts the media around.
- Always emphasize
 - Courtesy
 - Safety
 - Good taste
 - Educational and social value
- Strictly adhere to SCA policies concerning religion and concerning association with political activities
 - See Governing and Policy Decision #6, Policy on Religion
 - Do not become involved in political campaigns or issues
- Headline check

Minor Policies

See Society revision 5/7/07

	2-deep rule	Background Check'd Individual
Event	✓	
Activity at an Event	✓	
Branch Sponsored Youth Activity	✓	✓

See Event paperwork matrix

Conducting Effective Meetings

Planning: The Common Thread

- What is the broad purpose of the meeting?
- What will be discussed? (subject matter)
- What is the specific objective?

- Who should be there?
- Who will conduct the meeting?
- Where and when will it be held?
- How will decisions be reached?

The Purpose of the Meeting

Meetings have three broad purposes:

- Inform/educate
 - Examples: SCA meetings may include reports by officers, posting of event flyers, and introduction of new members
 - Exchange ideas and explore options
- Involves the mutual evaluation or analysis of information
 - Examples include brainstorming, event postmortems, sharing of values through discussion
- Make decisions
 - Most major decisions are made in some meeting or other
 - Examples include setting goals for the group, spending money, establishing budgets, choosing officers and autocrats, etc.

Document all of this by keeping minutes. Financial decisions must be backed up by minutes from the meeting.

The Subject of the Meeting

- Subject—You must know what you want to talk about
- Agenda is a key tool in conducting effective meetings
 - Helps keep the meeting on track
 - Prevents skipping of necessary business
- Composing an agenda forces you to plan the meeting. You must:
 - Determine the subject matter
 - Budget your time
 - Assign priorities to different items of business
 - Note potential trouble spots
 - Collect supporting data, information, documentations, etc.
 - Identify relationships among various business items
- Agendas should always be in writing!
 - List items of business
 - Indicate who is responsible for each item
 - Indicate time to be allocated
- Distribution
 - At minimum, chair and recording secretary should have a copy
 - For regular meetings that follow a familiar, customary format, you need not distribute a copy of the agenda to everyone
 - Everyone needs a copy if the meeting is unique, likely to be long, has many important items, or must be directed toward a specific goal

The Objective of the Meeting *Objectives Must be Realistic!*

“What, specifically, should we have accomplished (decided, done, written, etc.) by the time the meeting ends?”

- Objective(s) reflect
 - The subject matter
 - The broad purpose of the meeting
- Objectives may be simple or complex
 - Example of an easy objective: make sure everyone has heard about the events coming up in the next four weeks
 - Example of a difficult objective: settle a dispute over who gets to be autocrat the next event

Getting the Right People at the Meeting

- Who should attend the meeting?
 - Decision makers
 - People who have necessary information
 - People who will be directly affected by the outcome
 - People whose insights, perspective, comments will add value to the meeting
- Benefits of limited attendance
 - Exchange information and discussion
 - Make decisions
- Wider attendance
 - Offers broader spectrum of ideas and viewpoints
 - Gives more people a say in decisions
 - Relays results faster
- Factors in determining how many should attend:
 - Speed with which decisions must be reached
 - Controversy surrounding the people or issues involved
 - Degree of confidentiality required
 - Level of trust with the group

Scheduling

- Make sure that everyone who needs to be there, can be
- Allocate enough time to address top priority items
- Bear in mind other factors and distractions:
 - For example, you wouldn't schedule a five-hour meeting at 10 a.m. without factoring in a lunch break, nor would you schedule it at 7 p.m. Sunday when everyone has to be at work Monday morning.
 - On the other hand, either of those times could be ideal if you are actively trying to keep the meeting to two hours or less

Choose an Appropriate Location

- Make sure attendees can find the place and park
- Make sure that there is room for everyone, and that seating arrangements are appropriate to the meeting

- Be sensitive to “turf”: If the meeting is likely to become emotional or involve strong disagreements or competition, hold it at a neutral site that is not owned, inhabited by, or strongly associate with any of the contending parties.

The Role of the Chairperson

- Pace the meeting
- See that all high priority business items are addressed
- Facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, opinions, etc.
- Ensure that tempers remain in check
- See that any procedures or rules that have been implemented concerning who may speak, voting, etc., are followed
- Control discussion

Hints on Chairing Normal SCA Meetings

- Use a watch or clock to pace the meeting
- Ask speakers to stand, if your group is large, your room has bad acoustics, or people tend to interrupt
 - People can be heard more easily
 - Discussion is less likely to degenerate into argument or separate conversations
- Don’t have sign-up sheets, donation boxes, etc. going around at the same time
- If a group discussion turns into a two or three way conversation, ask the speakers to continue after the meeting
- Don’t discuss stuff that’s not relevant to the whole group
 - Committees, whether formal, informal, or *ad hoc*, should not meet during the business meeting
- Do call on people; don’t make them shout to be recognized
 - If others interrupt, remind them that someone else has the floor
 - Table discussion if you sense that tempers are flaring
- Add some fun: Introduce new people, have show and tell, congratulate people on their accomplishments

Interpersonal relations and conflict resolution

The grievance procedure

- Not to be confused with modern “grievances” or “Filing a grievance”
- Applies to issues between individuals
- Does NOT apply to officers in the performance of their office
- Simply summarized
 - Talk to the person directly. Could be a miscommunication.

Active listening techniques

- Find out what people mean when they speak—feed back to them what you hear in a neutral manner
- Don’t psychoanalyze—accept what people say about themselves
- Don’t assume you understand what someone else is thinking. Let them tell you
- Remember that they may not want your advice. They may just need you to listen.

Difficult situations

Respect, courtesy, and patience

- Find a neutral position and stick to it
- Focus on goals rather than fault
- The best solutions are those found by the participants
- Suggest alternatives if necessary
- Never assume malice where lack of information could explain the situation
- Focus on needs underlying the messages you hear
- Focus on positive, no one ever deliberately goofs
- If you must criticize, do it privately, never public
- If you must criticize, never criticize someone to another person
- If you are in over your head call for help

Avoiding difficult situations

- Urge people to keep their personal conflicts outside of the SCA
- Avoid giving advice unless asked for it
- Remember that your first duty is to the group. Your friendships come second.
- Treat everyone with respect and courtesy
- Be aware of your political beliefs and stay neutral
- Cultivate openness and honesty
- Keep the decision making processes in the group in the open
- Respect the privacy of others
- Don't engage in or encourage gossip
- Stay informed and control the rumor mill
- Spread good cheer—seek out opportunities to thank and praise others
- Keep your own reactions positive
- Have fun

Award Recommendations

Why Recommend People for Awards?

- Allows the Crown to recognize those folk who put into the SCA as much or more than they get back
- Most people like praise
- It's fun for the royalty to give awards
- Even one or two well-deserved awards can really boost group morale
- Anyone can recommend anybody to Their Majesties, for any award, for any reason
- Awards are up to the Crown to bestow
- Seneschals have a good vantage point from which they can make award recommendations.

Simple Rules for Award Recommendations

- Recommend appropriate awards
 - Match your suggestion to the candidate's deeds, skills and/or level of accomplishment
 - The candidate's time in the SCA, previous awards, and/or time since last award are also considerations
- Type your letter, or write neatly

- Include enough information for Their Majesties to make a decision
- Get your recommendations in well in advance (three weeks or more)
- The On-Line recommendation form is always available!!!

Information the Crown will Need

- The nominee's SCA and (if you know it) Modern name
 - Spell it correctly
 - Give the person's gender if there's any chance of confusion
- Your SCA name and titles, Modern name, address, and telephone number
- Names of additional references, if available
- The award being suggested
- The reason you think the award is deserved
 - Give details of deeds, accomplishments, qualities, and/or skills that prompted the recommendation
 - Be as specific as possible and quantify if you can
 - Sell your candidate
- Persona information, if possible
- Events the nominee will be attending in the near future

Award Etiquette

- Don't use award recommendations as a political tool
- Do seek recognition for all deserving people whether you like them or not
- Don't tell someone they're supposed to be getting an award
- Do congratulate the recipient, whether you think the award was deserved or not
 - Remember, the Crown does not need your permission or approval to give any award!!
- Don't throw a fit if your nominations do not result in awards
- Do try again!

Good Manners Apply not Only to Seneschals, but to Everybody

And Finally

Know your own strengths and weaknesses. Nobody can do it all. If you know that you are weak at reporting, designate a reporting deputy. If you are very good at administration but hate being in front of an audience, designate a chairperson for meetings. Nowhere is it stated that the Seneschal must be the circus ringmaster. Do what you can and delegate the rest. Remember that we are all unpaid volunteers doing the best we can. If a deputy isn't fulfilling the duties of their appointed office do not hesitate to resolve the problem, either by talking with the deputy or replacing them. Letting the situation continue only makes the eventual problem resolution much more difficult.

Most Important!!

If you aren't having fun, you are doing it wrong.

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