

The most widely misused motion is “lay on the table.”

The purpose of the motion “lay on the table” is to enable an assembly or board to temporarily lay aside a pending question in order to address something of immediate urgency. Many organizations use this method to kill matters they do not wish to discuss or to keep the minority from having a voice on the matter at hand.

Robert’s Rules of Order, newly revised, 10th edition states the following regarding the issue of “lay on the table”:

*By adopting the motion to “Lay on the Table,” a majority has the power to halt consideration of a question immediately without debate. Such action violates the rights of the minority and individual members if it is for any other purpose than the one stated in the first sentence of this section. * In ordinary assemblies, the motion to “Lay on the Table” is out of order if the evident intent is to kill or avoid dealing with a measure. If a time for resuming consideration is specified in making the motion, it can be admitted only as a motion to “Postpone,” in which case it is debatable. (page 202)*

**The motion to “Lay on the Table” enables the assembly to lay the pending question aside temporarily when something else of immediate urgency has arisen in such a way that:*

- *there is no set time for taking the matter up again;*
- *but its consideration can be resumed at the will of a majority and in preference to any new questions that may then be competing with it for consideration.*

(pages 201-202)

The use of the “Lay on the Table” is rarely needed in ordinary assemblies or boards and is therefore rarely in order. If a matter needs to be delayed, the proper motion is to “Postpone to a Certain Time.” This motion must be adopted by a majority vote and include a specific time when the matter will be re-addressed. An example of the motion is:

*I move to postpone the motion to the next meeting.
(Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised, In Brief, p. 53)*

If it is the intent to get rid of a motion without a direct vote on it, the proper motion is “Postpone Indefinitely.” This motion requires a majority vote. If the majority vote is not achieved, the main question remains open to debate.

When dealing with sensitive matters remember it is always improper to “Lay on the Table” to kill the matter. It is never proper to try to kill a matter in order to rob members of their right to debate on an issue.