

## CHAPTER SIX

### OFFICERS & AGENTS

#### **Section 6.01      Generally**

Since a corporation is an artificial being, it must act through natural persons – its officers, agents or employees. *Doe v. Oregon Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists*, 199 Or App 319, 328, 111 P3d 791 (2005); *State v. Oregon City Elks Lodge No. 1189, BPO Elks*, 17 Or App 124, 520 P2d 900 (1974); *State v. Gourley*, 209 Or 363, 305 P2d 396 (1956), *rehearing denied*, 209 Or 363, 306 P2d 1117 (1957); *Guthridge v. Pen-Mod, Inc.*, 239 A2d 709 (Del Supr 1967); *Opportunity Christian Church v. Washington Water Power Co.*, 136 Wash 2d 116, 238 P2d 641 (1925).

A corporation is managed by its board of directors. ORS 60.301(2). But the board does not implement policy. The job of implementing corporate policy belongs to corporate officers, employees and agents.

Being a creation of the law - an artificial person – it can only act by agents who are its limbs or instrumentalities to effect the purpose for which it was organized, and to act for it, their act being the act of the corporation, exactly as the act of an individual in his act. *Killingsworth v. Portland Trust Co.*, 18 Or 351, 355, 23 P 66, 68 (1890).

Another Oregon case expressed this concept as follows:

Since corporations can only act through their officers and agents, they have power to appoint agents with full authority to act for the corporation, and as a general rule all acts with the powers of a corporation may be performed by agents of its own selection. *Sherman, Clay & Co. v. Buffum & Pendleton*, 91 Or 352, 358, 179 P 241, 243 (1919).

Officers are usually first appointed at the corporation's organizational meeting, at which time the bylaws usually also adopted. ORS 60.057. Generally, a corporation's bylaws describe the title and duties of its officers. ORS 60.371 and 60.374. Generally, the bylaws spell out the express authority for each of the corporation's officers.

## Section 6.01

### **A. Officers & agents distinguished – historical view.**

Historically, officers have been distinguished from mere corporate "agents."

There is a distinction between officers and agents of a corporation. An officer is elected by the directors or stockholders to the office created by the charter, while an agency is usually created by the officers and the agents are appointed by the same authority. The powers and duties are not necessarily the same. An officer of a corporation may be its agent, while an agent need not be an officer. The officers, as such, are the corporation, while the agent is a mere employee or servant of the corporation. *King v. Citizens Bank of DeKalb*, 88 Ga App 40, 45, 76 SE2d 86, 90 (1953).

Unlike mere agents, officers act and speak for the corporation in furthering its express objectives; officers are representatives of the corporation. *Halbert v. Berlinger*, 127 Cal App 2d 6, 273 P2d 274 (1954). One court has said:

There are various distinctions between corporate officers and employees. For example, an officer holds an office and performs duties created and prescribed by charter or by-law, and the officer is elected either by action of the stockholders or the board of directors at a salary or for compensation fixed by them or by the charter or by-laws.

On the other hand an employee usually occupies no office; he is generally employed not by action of the stockholders or directors but by the managing officer of the corporation, who also determines the compensation to be paid.

The officers of a corporation occupy a quasi-fiduciary relation to the stockholders and the corporation while employees do not. Employees are usually subordinate to and act under control of corporate officers, while the officers exercise the power of management under the policies or directives of the board of directors. *Flight Equipment & Engineering Corporation v. Shelton*, 103 So2d 615, 623 (Fla 1958).

Officers are "agents" of the corporation; most often, employees and other agents are mere "subagents."

In recent years, there has been a national trend toward de-emphasizing officers and toward blurring the distinction between officers and agents.

### **B. Today – less distinction between officers & other agents.**

Historically, all corporations had a president and secretary and many corporations had other designated officers, such as a chairman of the board, a treasurer, and a vice president. Today, the Revised Model Business Corporation Act § 8.40 no longer requires the appointment of any particular officer, although the existence of at least one officer, with some designation, appears contemplated.

The drafters of the Oregon Act apparently were hesitant to so boldly break with the past. Consequently, ORS 60.371(1) provides for both a president and secretary. Both positions may simultaneously be held by the same person. ORS 60.371(4). A officer, designated the "secretary," is responsible for preparing minutes of directors and shareholder meetings and for authenticating corporate records. ORS 60.371(3).

**NOTE:** An OSB Business Law Section Task Force which considered

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changes to bring the Oregon Act more in tune with the latest revisions of the Model Act initially recommended eliminating the requirement that corporations have a “president”, but the Secretary of State’s office indicated a reluctance to modify their computer program which called for both a president and secretary. The Task Force went along and Oregon continues to require both a president and a secretary.

Currently, an Oregon corporation must have at least three officers: a president, a secretary and a chairperson. ORS 60.371(1) & 60.209. Public corporation must also have one or more election inspectors. ORS 60.223.

ORS 60.371(1) permits a corporation to appoint other officers in addition to a president and secretary. Such officers may either be designated in the corporation's bylaws or in a board resolution. *Id.*

Designating some agents as "officers" is useful to the corporation. Such a designation facilitates the delegation of authority and aids the corporation in carrying out its business. For instance, the bylaws generally set out a broad range of acts authorized to be carried out by particular officers. Thus, a person designated "treasurer" each year may proceed to maintain corporate accounting records, pay expenses in the ordinary course, and do the other tasks authorized in the bylaws, rather than awaiting specific board authorization for the range of duties that he/she would normally perform.

Likewise, persons dealing with the corporation sometimes need to feel confident the person with whom they are dealing has authority to bind the corporation. Implicit knowledge that a particular officer is generally granted broad authority – coupled with case law that the designation of a person as an "officer" may cloak that person with a degree of apparent authority – facilitates dealings with third parties.

For purposes of service of a lawsuit, a bank teller is not an “officer” since that person was not designated an “officer” in the bank’s bylaws. *Christian v. Umpqua Bank*, Case No: 3:16-cv-01938-BR (D Or Feb 2, 2017).

### **C. Principles of agency apply to officers.**

The principles of agency generally apply to officers. *Rae v. Heilig Theatre Co.*, 94 Or 408, 185 P 909 (1919); *Paynesville Farmers Union Oil Co. v. Ever Ready Oil Co., Inc.*, 379 NW2d 186, 188 (Minn App 1985); *Buxton v. Diversified Resources Corporation*, 634 F2d 1313 (10<sup>th</sup> Cir 1980)(interpreting Utah law); *Sons of Norway v. Boomer*, 10 Wash App 618, 519 P2d 28 (1974).

### **D. Miscellaneous.**

While directors are "*elected*" by the shareholders, ORS 60.307(3), officers are "*appointed*" by the directors or by another officer. ORS 60.371(1). While certain

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procedures must be followed in order to remove a director from office, ORS 60.324, officers may be removed at any time with or without cause. ORS 60.381(2).

The standard of care an officer owes to the corporation is substantially the same as the standard of care owed by a director. *Compare*: ORS 60.357 and 60.377(1). See Section 6.10 herein.

## Section 6.02 Appointment

A corporation has the officers: (i) described in its bylaws; (ii) appointed by the board of directors in accordance with the bylaws; or (iii) appointed by another officer in accordance with the bylaws. ORS 60.371(1); *Booker v. First Federal Savings and Loan Association*, 215 Ga 277, 110 SE2d 360 (1959). Thus, directors may vote to appoint a particular person to be an officer or, alternatively, the bylaws may designate a person as officer. For instance, the board chairman could be designated "president" and any person holding the position of board chairman would automatically become president without further board action.

In keeping with the general trend toward de-emphasizing the importance of officers and toward treating them the same as other corporate agents, the Revised Model Act provides that officers are "appointed" rather than "elected." RMBCA § 8.40(a). ORS 60.371 adopts this terminology.

An Oregon corporation must have at least three officers: a president, a secretary and a chairperson. ORS 60.371(1) & 60.209. If the corporation's shares are publicly traded, it must also have one or more election inspectors. ORS 60.223.

The Oregon Act only describes only two specific duties for the secretary – none at all are specified for the president. The secretary is responsible for preparing director and shareholder meeting minutes and for authenticating records. ORS 60.371(3).

Since 2003, ORS 60.209 has provided that an Oregon corporation must have a "chairperson" who must preside at each meeting of the shareholders. If the bylaws do not provide for a chairperson, the board must appoint one to conduct the shareholder meeting. ORS 60.209 goes on to set out a number of duties for the chairperson at shareholder meetings. See Section 7.04 of this book.

Since 2003, ORS 60.223 has required that all Oregon corporations with publicly traded shares to appoint one or more "inspectors" for voting at shareholder meetings. Non-public corporations are permitted to appoint election inspectors – but are not required to do so.

A person may hold two or more offices simultaneously. ORS 60.371(4).

If authorized by the bylaws or by the board, one officer can appoint another officer. ORS 60.371(2). For instance, if authorized, the secretary can appoint an

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assistant secretary. If authorized, apparently the assistant treasurer can appoint the president.

Historically, the position of "Chairman of the Board" has no legally defined role. *Weeks v. Pratt*, 43 F2d 53 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir 1930). In some corporations, the "chairperson" is a director chosen by the board from among its members, all of whom were elected by the shareholders. In other corporations, the chairperson is an executive officer appointed by the board for an indeterminate period and is not a director at all. In the second instance, the chairperson is not eligible to vote at director meetings. *Whitley v. Whitley Construction Co.*, 121 Ga App 696, 175 SE2d 128 (1970).

Since 2003, ORS 60.209 has provided that an Oregon corporation must have a "chairperson" who must preside at each meeting of the shareholders. If the bylaws do not provide for a chairperson, the board must appoint one to conduct the shareholder meeting. ORS 60.209 goes on to set out a number of duties for the Chairman at shareholder meetings. See Section 7.04 of this book.

Unless the articles or bylaws provide otherwise, a simple majority of the board of directors may appoint an officer. *Scott v. Anderson Newspapers, Inc.*, 477 NE2d 553, 565 (Ind App 1985).

### Section 6.03 Term & Vacancies

Officers are appointed by the board of directors and serve at the board's pleasure. An officer may be removed with or without cause at any time by the board or by an authorized officer. ORS 60.381(2). If the bylaws designate a method of appointment other than appointment by the board (e.g., the board chairperson is designated as president), presumably that officer would hold office only as long as he/she meets the requirements for the position.

There is no requirement that an officer must take an oath upon assuming office.

#### A. Term.

Officers may serve indefinitely. No term of office is prescribed by statute. Unless the bylaws provide otherwise, a person appointed as an officer stays an officer until death, resignation, or removal or until a successor is appointed and assumes office. *Doehler v. Lansdon*, 135 Or 687, 291 P 392, 298 P 200 (1931); *Lucky Queen Mining Co. v. Abraham*, 26 Or 282, 38 P 65 (1894).

While there is no requirement that officers be appointed for any specified term, bylaws sometimes provide that the officers will hold office until the next annual meeting of the directors (generally designated to immediately follow the annual shareholder meeting) and until their successors are appointed and take office. In the

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event that such an appointment does not occur, the old officers would likely continue in office, although the precise wording of the bylaws will necessarily affect the outcome of this issue. See *Dowdle v. Central Brick Co.*, 206 Ind 242, 189 NE 145 (1934).

Holdover officers are *de facto* officers – absent language in the bylaws dictating a contrary result. *Doehler v. Lansdon*, 135 Or 687, 291 P 392, 298 P 200 (1931); *Grothe v. Herschbach*, 153 Ind App 224, 286 NE2d 868 (1972). They may at least be *de facto* officers with respect to third parties who deal with them believing them to be corporate agents. *Georgia Casualty and Surety Co. v. Seaboard Surety Co.*, 210 F Supp 644 (ND Ga 1962). This holdover doctrine does not apply to officers who are removed from office. *Jacksonville Terminal Co. v. Florida East Coast Railway Co.*, 363 F2d 216 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir 1966).

### **B. Removal.**

The board of directors may remove an officer with or without cause. ORS 60.381(2). This is consistent with earlier case law applying the business judgment rule to such decisions.

Which business judgment was correct is not for us to decide. The subsequent history of the company implies that defendants' position was not frivolous, but for all we know, the company might have been even more successful with plaintiff at its head. Happily, courts need not make business decisions. (citations omitted) *Kiess v. Eason*, 442 F2d 712, 720 n 14 (7<sup>th</sup> Cir 1971).

An officers can remove another officer either if (i) the removing officer was the person who appointed the officer to be removed; or (ii) if the bylaw or the board of directors authorize the removal. ORS 60.381(2). The bylaws or the board may limit this power

An officer's appointment does not in itself create a contract right. ORS 60.384(1); *City Group, Inc. v. Ehlers*, 198 Ga App 709, 402 SE2d 787 (1991); *Morton v. E-Z Rake, Inc.*, 397 NE2d 609 (Ind App 1979). According to the Official Comments to the Revised Model Act § 8.44, removal would not prejudice the officer's right to lost wages, and resignation would not bar an action by the corporation against the officer for breach of contract. See *Barber v. Southern Service Corporation*, 182 Ga 124, 185 SE 93 (1936).

If the person appointed as an officer and the corporation together enter into a contract for a specified period, the removal of that person from office does not affect either party's contract rights vis-a-vis the other. ORS 60.384(2). Officers may not avoid removal by entering into contracts which grant them office for a particular term. *Thielsen v. Blake, Moffitt & Towne*, 142 Or 59, 17 P2d 560 (1933).

**NOTE:** If the Portland Trailblazers hire a person as "manager" and enter into a three year contract with him, the Trailblazers can replace the manager at

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any time. But the Blazers will still need to pay this person for the full three years of his contract.

### **C. Resignation.**

Traditionally, most states have followed the view that an officer's resignation is effective upon delivery of the resignation notice to the board. *Anderson v. K.G. Moore, Inc.*, 6 Mass App 386, 376 NE2d 1238 (1978); *Bell v. Texas Employers' Ins. Ass'n.*, 43 SW2d 290 (Tex Civ App 1931). Oregon was among a minority of states which held an officer's resignation became effective upon acceptance by the board. *Barde v. Portland News Publishing Co.*, 145 Or 376, 26 P2d 787, 28 P2d 216 (1934). See also *Young v. James*, 34 Del Ch 287, 103 A2d 299 (1954).

By adopting the Oregon Business Corporation Act, Oregon has adopted the majority view. ORS 60.381(1) provides that an officer's resignation becomes effective when the resignation's notification becomes effective, unless a later time is specified. When notification becomes effective is determined by ORS 60.034(7), which makes notices under the Act effective upon the earlier of: (i) when received; (ii) 5 days after it is mailed; (iii) the date shown on its return receipt; (iv) when deemed received pursuant to ORS 60.381(6) related to electronic transmissions; or (v) when the notice is delivered orally.

**NOTE:** 2003 changes to ORS 60.381 changed references to the resignation "date" to "time". Thus, a resignation could now state – "I resign effective at the start of the June 1 board meeting" – and the officer would continue to be an officer on June 1 up until the start of the board meeting. Under the old statute, a resignation which provided that it was effective on a specified date was ambiguous as to the specific time on that day that the resignation went into effect.

Bylaws adopted before January 1, 2003 may still contain language tied to the "date" of the resignation, rather than to the time of the resignation.

Substantial changes related to notice went into effect on January 1, 2018 so bylaws should be reviewed to conform to the new statute or opt out where appropriate.

## **Section 6.04 Duties**

ORS 60.371(3) specifically provides that the "secretary shall have the responsibility for preparing minutes of the directors' and shareholders' meetings and for authenticating records of the corporation." Despite this language, prior case law suggests the secretary may delegate these duties to others, such as the corporation's attorney. *Teiser v. Swirsky*, 137 Or 595, 2 P2d 920, 4 P2d 322 (1931).

Since 2003, ORS 60.209 has provided that an Oregon corporation must have

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a “chairperson” who must preside at each shareholder meeting. If the bylaws do not provide for a chairperson, the board must appoint one to conduct the shareholder meeting. ORS 60.209 goes on to set out a number of duties for the chairperson at shareholder meetings. See Section 7.04 of this book.

Since 2003, ORS 60.223 has required that all Oregon corporations with publicly traded shares to appoint one or more “inspectors” for voting at shareholder meetings. Non-public corporations are permitted to appoint election inspectors, but are not required to do so.

Other than duties of the secretary set out in ORS 60.371(3), duties of the chairperson set out in ORS 60.209 and duties of the election inspectors set out in ORS 60.223, the Oregon Act does not specify any other specific duties for officers. ORS 60.374 provides:

Each officer has the authority and shall perform the duties set forth in the bylaws or, to the extent consistent with the bylaws, the duties prescribed by the board of directors or by direction of an officer authorized by the board of directors to prescribe the duties of other officers.

At one time, the president was designated as the person to preside at director meetings, to act as inspector of corporate elections and to certify elected directors. *Luse v. Isthmus Transit Railway Co.*, 6 Or 125 (1876). But this is no longer true.

In fact, the Oregon statutes have never set out very many specific duties for the president to perform. The legislature has been more inclined to defer to the board and to have specific duties be set out in the corporation's bylaws or in board resolutions.

An office does not carry with it inherent duties and authority. Even the officer bestowed with the title “president” has little inherent power beyond that power specifically conferred upon the president by the corporation.

The naked act of investing the individual with the office of president gives him very little power to act for the corporation. He has no power to bind it in material matters, except as he may be authorized by law, or by the board of directors. (citations omitted) *Cushman v. Cloverland Coal & Mining Co.*, 170 Ind 402, 84 NE 759, 76 (1908).

One Washington case held that the president has no power to call a meeting of the shareholders, unless the bylaws or a board resolution bestowed such power on the president. *State Bank of Wilbur v. Wilbur Mission Church*, 44 Wash 2d 80, 265 P2d 821 (1954). In another decision, the Washington Court of Appeals held:

aside from duties as presiding officer at meetings, a corporate president has no more authority, by virtue of that office, than any other director. Additional authority, if any, must be conferred by the charter, bylaws, director resolution, or implied from express powers granted, custom and usage, or the nature of the company's business. In particular, the president has no power to mortgage or pledge corporate property, or to borrow money and pledge corporate credit, unless expressly authorized, or unless such authority may be implied from a course of conduct or from powers expressly



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given. (citations omitted) *Pierce v. Astoria Fish Factors, Inc.*, 31 Wash App 214, 217-8, 640 P2d 40, 43 (1982).

The bylaws can, and usually do, specify duties to be undertaken by the corporation's officers. Likewise, officers may be authorized to act by board resolutions.

Absent authority granted them by a statute, the bylaws, or a board resolution, officers have little inherent power and may not control or manage the business or property of the corporation. *Musulin v. Woodtek, Inc.*, 260 Or 576, 491 P2d 1173 (1971).

A corporation's president and vice president have no inherent power to execute notes or negotiable paper. *Musulin v. Woodtek, Inc.*, 260 Or 576, 491 P2d 1173 (1971); *Du-Bois Matlack Lumber Co. v. Davis Lumber Co.*, 149 Or 571, 42 P2d 152 (1935). Officers are not authorized to sell major corporate assets outside of the ordinary course of business. *Luse v. Isthmus Transit Railway Co.*, 6 Or 125 (1876). Officers have no inherent power to give gifts of corporate assets to their friends. *Henderson v. Tillamook Hotel Co.*, 76 Or 379, 148 P 57, *modified*, 149 P 473 (1915). The president does not possess inherent authority to bind the corporation or to control its property. *Harding v. Oregon-Idaho Co.*, 57 Or 34, 110 P 412 (1910).

Today, bylaws frequently contain language granting broad authority to officers. Today, courts are more likely to interpret these powers broadly and find an officer's power is implied, apparent or inherent. See Section 6.07 of this book.

### Section 6.05 Authority, Generally

Although management of a corporation's affairs is vested in its board of directors, authority to implement board decisions is usually delegated to the corporation's officers and other agents. In fact, since it is not a natural person, a corporation can only act through its officers, employees and other agents. *State v. Oregon City Elks Lodge No. 1189, BPO Elks*, 17 Or App 124, 520 P2d 900 (1974); *Olson v. Deschutes County*, 204 Or App 7, 25 n 11, 127 P3d 655 (2006); *State v. Gourley*, 209 Or 363, 305 P2d 396 (1956), *rehearing denied*, 209 Or 363, 306 P2d 1117 (1957); *Guthridge v. Pen-Mod, Inc.*, 239 A2d 709 (Del Supr 1967).

Officers, employees and agents only possess such authority to act for the corporation as is expressly conferred on them or which may be implied from the authority expressly conferred on them.

The board of directors is the governing body of a corporation, and as such is vested with the management of its ordinary corporate affairs, such as the corporation itself is authorized to perform under the rights and powers delegated by its charter. The officers appointed by the directors are clothed with only such powers and authority as are expressly conferred upon them by the charter or the by-laws, or as may be implied by usage and acquiescence. *Ware v. Rankin*, 97 Ga App 837, 839-40, 104

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SE2d 555, 559 (1958).

Officers are agents for their corporate principals. The principles of agency generally apply to officers (and other corporate agents) to their corporate principals. *Synectic Ventures I, LLC v. EVI Corp.*, 241 Or App 550, 251 P3d 216 (2011); *reversed on other grounds*, 352 Or 62, 294 P3d 478 (2012); *Kotera v. Daioh International USA Corp.*, 179 Or App 253, 40 P3d 506 (2002); *Rae v. Heilig Theatre Co.*, 94 Or 408, 185 P 909 (1919); *Buxton v. Diversified Resources Corp.*, 634 F2d 1313 (10<sup>th</sup> Cir 1980)(interpreting Utah law); *Deers, Inc. v. DeRuyter*, 9 Wash App 240, 511 P2d 1379 (1973); *Williams v. Queen Fisheries, Inc.*, 2 Wash App 691, 469 P2d 583 (1970). *But see Jacksonville American Pub. Co. v. Jacksonville Paper Co.*, 143 Fla 835, 197 So 672, 677 (1940) ("A corporation cannot be compared in all matters to a principal acting through his agent or partner acting through his co-partner, because a corporation is a fictional being, a creation of law, with neither will, purpose nor animation.")

[T]he ordinary rules governing the scope of an agent's authority apply to the agents and officers of a corporation just as they do to the agents of a private individual." *Gilbert v. Sharkey*, 80 Or 323, 327, 156 P 789, *rehearing denied*, 80 Or 323, 157 P 146 (1916).

Under general principles of agency, an officer or other agent: (i) may be granted specific authority to undertake a specific task; or (ii) may be granted authority which may be inferred by the nature of the specific authority granted, by business customs, or by past practices of the corporation.

Even if an officer's act is not authorized, the corporation may ratify that act and become bound by it.

Even when an officer has no actual authority, the corporation may be bound by the officer's act if the officer had apparent authority.

We begin with a review of some basic principles of agency law. Generally speaking, an agent can bind a principal only when that agent acts with actual or apparent authority. Actual authority may be express or implied. When a principal explicitly authorizes the agent to perform certain acts, the agent has express authority. However, most actual authority is implied: a principal implicitly permits the agent to do those things that are "reasonably necessary" for carrying out the agent's express authority. In contrast, a principal also may be bound by actions taken that are "completely outside" of the agent's actual authority, if the principal allows the agent to appear to have the authority to bind the principal. Such a circumstance is called "apparent authority."

For a principal to be bound by an agent's action, the principal must take some affirmative step, either to grant the agent authority or to create the appearance of authority. An agent's actions, standing alone and without some action by the principal, cannot create authority to bind the principal. Thus, apparent authority to do any particular act can be created only by some conduct of the principal which, when reasonably interpreted, causes a third party to believe that the principal consents to have the apparent agent act for him on that matter. Additionally, the third party must "rely on that belief" when dealing with the agent. (citations omitted) *Taylor v.*

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*Ramsay-Gerding Construction Co.*, 345 Or 403, 409-10, 196 P3d 532 (2008).

If a third party asserts that an officer had authority to act for the corporation, the third party has burden of proof to prove authority. *B & D Investment v. Petticord*, 48 Or App 345, 617 P2d (1980); *Bagot v. Inter-Mountain Milling Inc.*, 100 Or 127, 196 P 824 (1921); *Waukon Auto Supply v. Farmers & Merchants Savings Bank*, 440 NW2d 844, 847 (Iowa 1989).

But there are exceptions to this general rule. For instance, ORS 73.0402(1) creates the presumption that an agent's signature on a negotiable instrument is authorized if the name of the corporation is followed by the name and office of person signing. *Bowers v. Winitzki*, 83 Or App 169, 730 P2d 1253 (1986); *Major Products Co., Inc. v. Northwest Harvest Products, Inc.*, 96 Wash App 405, 979 P2d 905 (1999). Likewise, if an officer uses the corporate seal in executing a document, this use creates a rebuttable presumption that the officer had authority to sign on behalf of the corporation. *Hamilton v. Hamilton Mammoth Mines*, 110 Or 546, 223 P 926 (1924).

### Section 6.06 Express Authority

A corporation can act only through its officers, employees and other agents. "A corporation can act only through its agents, and when its agents act within the scope of their authority, their actions are the actions of the corporation itself." *Mauch v. Kissling*, 56 Wash App 312, 316, 783 P2d 601, 604 (1989).

Corporations act exclusively by agents. The officers, principal, and subordinate are but agents, created and granted all their powers by the board of directors. In respect to being commissioned to act for the principal, the agent of the corporation, of whatever station or rank, is governed by the same general rules and principles of the law as the agent of an individual. (citations omitted) *Cushman v. Cloverland Coal & Mining Co.*, 170 Ind 402, 84 NE 759, 760 (1908).

Actual authority may be express or implied. *Synectic Ventures I, LLC v. EVI Corp.*, 241 Or App 550, 251 P3d 216 (2011), *reversed on other grounds*, 352 Or 62, 294 P3d 478 (2012); *Taylor v. Werner Enterprises, Inc.*, 329 Or 461, 468, 988 P2d 384 (1999); *Deers, Inc. v. DeRuyter*, 9 Wash App 240, 242, 511 P2d 1379, 1380 (1973). "Express authority . . . is that authority which the principal confers upon the agent in express terms." *Wiggins v. Barrett & Associates, Inc.*, 295 Or 679, 686, 669 P2d 1132, 1138 (1983). "Thus, actual agency is based on a delegation of actual authority." *Kotera v. Daioh International USA Corp.*, 179 Or App 253, 271, 40 P3d 506 (2002).

There are a number of ways that a corporation can expressly authorize an officer or other agent to undertake a particular task or a broad range of tasks.

Authorization may be granted through a corporation's bylaws or through a

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resolution adopted by the corporation's board. *Peek v. Skelley Lumber Co.*, 59 Or 374, 117 P 413 (1911); *State Bank of Wilbur v. Wilbur Mission Church*, 44 Wash 2d 80, 265 P2d 821 (1954). For a limited liability company, it may be established through the Operating Agreement, although that authority must be very specific where the agent's act constitutes a conflict of interest. *Synectic Ventures I, LLC v. EVI Corp.*, 353 Or 62, 294 P3d 478 (2012). Authority may be established by a course of dealing or usage in which the board or shareholders have acquiesced. *Real Estate Loan Fund Oreg. Ltd. v. Hevner*, 76 Or App 349, 709 P2d 727 (1985); *Howland v. Iron Fireman Manufacturing Co.*, 188 Or 230, 213 P2d 177, 215 P2d 380 (1950). Authority may be established by what is "ordinary" in reference to the nature of the business and the manner in which other businesses conduct their affairs. *Management Technologies, Inc. v. Morris*, 961 F Supp 640, 647 (SDNY 1997).

While it is usually preferred to have the board's authorizations reflected formally in a corporate resolution "that method is not the exclusive one for establishing the existence either of authority or of inherent agency power" to make loans and pledge corporate assets therefor. Thus, for example, a director's or officer's authority to act for the corporation also can be established by a course of dealings or usage in which the directors or stockholders have acquiesced. Normally, the question of whether authority to act exists by reason of usage or course of business dealings is a question of fact to be resolved by the factfinder. We find no reason to depart from this principle in this case. (citations omitted) *Rossville Bank v. Southeast Federal Savings Bank*, 192 Ga App 384, 386, 385 SE2d 9, 11 (1989).

Both testimony of eye-witnesses and circumstantial evidence are admissible on the issue of whether or not the board authorized an officer or other agent to act on behalf of the corporation. *United States v. Everett Monte Cristo Hotel, Inc.*, 524 F2d 127 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1975).

proof of the authority of an officer to act for the corporation "need not be made in the form of a resolution of the board of directors, duly entered upon the records of the corporation conferring the authority upon the president, but that the act of the directors may be shown by an oral vote, and may be otherwise proved by parol, and often equally well by circumstantial evidence."

In short, the excerpts from the by-laws and records of the directors' meeting confer upon the president the power to do an act of the kind in question. (citations omitted) *Markham v. Loveland*, 69 Or 451, 454, 138 P 483, 484 (1914).

The language in the bylaws and in a resolution must be read carefully. For instance, one court held that a resolution stating that the president may sign all "authorized" notes did not give him the power to sign a specific note never approved by the board of directors. *Phillips v. Colfax Co., Inc.*, 195 Or 285, 243 P2d 276, 245 P2d 898 (1952). Another court held that a board resolution authorizing the president and secretary to sign in the name of the corporation as surety to a certain bond in a specified sum did not authorize these officers to execute a bond providing for

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liquidated damages. *Roberts v. Washington Water-Power Co.*, 19 Wash 392, 53 P 664 (1898).

### Section 6.07 Implied, Inherent & Apparent Authority

Actual authority may be express or implied, but “most actual authority is implied: a principal implicitly permits the agent to do those things that are ‘reasonably necessary’ for carrying out the agent’s express authority.” *Taylor v. Werner Enterprises, Inc.*, 329 Or 461, 468, 988 P2d 384 (1999); *Deers, Inc. v. DeRuyter*, 9 Wash App 240, 242, 511 P2d 1379, 1380 (1973). Even if a corporate agent lacks express authority, the agent may bind the corporation if the agent has implied, inherent or apparent authority.

**NOTE:** Implied authority and inherent authority are closely related concepts and many courts use these two terms interchangeably.

Implied/inherent authority arises out of a agent’s position with the corporation; apparent authority arises out of words or deeds by the principal which causes a third party to believe the agent has authority, even though the agent does actually not have such authority.

Apparent authority is to be distinguished from implied authority. Implied authority is such as the principal actually intends his agent to have, although that intention is to be discerned only from the nature of the task or from the acts and conduct of the principal from which the grant of power may be inferred even though not expressed. If implied authority exists there is no need to consider whether the principal has held out the agent as having certain authority. The principal will be bound to a third person by the act of the agent within his implied authority even if the third person was unaware at the time of the act that the agent’s authority was only implied.

On the other hand, a principal may be held bound to a third person for an act of the agent completely outside the agent’s implied (express) authority if the principal has clothed the agent with apparent authority to act for the principal in that particular. In other words, the principal permits the agent to appear to have the authority to bind the principal. *Wiggins v. Barrett & Associates, Inc.*, 295 Or 679, 687, 669 P2d 1132, 1139 (1983).

Language in a resolution can negate the implied authority of an agent. *Deers, Inc. v. DeRuyter*, 9 Wash App 240, 511 P2d 1379 (1973).

An agent is personally liable to a third party when the agent misrepresents that the agent has authority – when the agent does not. *Deers, Inc. v. DeRuyter*, 9 Wash App 240, 511 P2d 1379 (1973).

An agent representing authority which exceeds his actual authority is personally responsible and liable to the party to whom he makes such an unauthorized representation if the other party justifiably relies upon the representation. *Gelndale Realty, Inc. v. Johnson*, 6 Wash App 752, 755, 495 P2d 1375, 1377 (1972).

Whether or not an agent is acting within the scope of his/her authority is usually a question of fact – one for a jury to decide. *Start v. Shell Oil Co.*, 202 Or 99,

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260 P2d 468, 273 P2d 225 (1954); *Koepping v. Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon*, 120 F3d 998, 1004 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1997); *Mauch v. Kissling*, 56 Wash App 312, 783 P2d 601 (1989).

### A. **Implied/inherent authority.**

"Actual authority may be express or implied.... Implied authority is actual authority, circumstantially proven, which the principal is deemed to have actually intended the agent to possess." (citations & internal quotations omitted) *Deers, Inc. v. DeRuyter*, 9 Wash App 240, 242, 511 P2d 1379, 1380 (1973). See also *Taylor v. Ramsay-Gerding Construction Co.*, 345 Or 403, 409-10, 196 P3d 532 (2008).

Likewise, "a power given to an agent to perform a particular service carries with it the authority to do whatever is usual and necessary to carry into effect the principal power." *Larson v. Bear*, 38 Wash 2d 485, 490, 230 P2d 610, 613 (1951). An agent's express authority carries with it the implied authority "to do such other things as are reasonably necessary for carrying out the given task." *Wiggins v. Barrett & Associates, Inc.*, 295 Or 679, 686, 669 P2d 1132, 1138 (1983). See also *Taylor v. Werner Enterprises, Inc.*, 329 Or 461, 468, 988 P2d 384 (1999).

It is elementary that express authority given an agent to do certain things carries with it the implied authority to do all other things reasonably incident to and necessary for carrying out the objectives of the agency. *Beeson v. Hegstad*, 199 Or 325, 330, 261 P2d 381, 383 (1953).

A corporation is liable for acts of its agents – even acts not expressly authorized – if the agent's authority can be implied from the authority expressly conferred.

The authority of an attorney to act as agent for a corporation may be express or implied. Express authority may be provided in the charter, the by-laws of the corporation, in a resolution of the board of directors not inconsistent with the by-laws, or other written authority such as a memorandum or letter. Implied authority depends on the actual relationship of the corporation and the agent, and not what others may believe about that relationship. Implied authority of an agent binds a corporation only if the agent is performing an act that is appropriate in the ordinary course of a corporation's business; it includes incidental authority necessary, usual, and proper to effectuate the main authority expressly conferred. Implied authority may also arise from a course of conduct showing that the corporation has repeatedly ratified acts of the same kind. (citations omitted) *Indiana Department of Public Welfare v. Chair Lance Service, Inc.*, 523 NE2d 1373, 1377 (Ind 1988).

A agent's authority is also implied when the corporation knows an agent habitually transacts certain kinds of business on its behalf.

Since corporations can only act through their officers and agents, they have power to appoint agents with full authority to act for the corporation, and as a general rule all acts within the powers of a corporation may be performed by agents of its own selection. Express authority by resolution directing officers and agents to represent the corporation in the execution of contracts is not indispensable to the exercise of that power. Their authority may be implied from their conduct and the acquiescence of the corporation. A person who knows that the agent of a corporation habitually transacts certain kinds of business for such corporation under circumstances which

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necessarily show knowledge on the part of those charged with the conduct of the corporate business has the right to assume that such agent is acting within the scope of his authority. (citations omitted) *Sherman, Clay & Co. v. Buffum & Pendleton*, 91 Or 352, 358, 179 P 241, 243 (1919).

See also *Hessler, Inc. v. Farrell*, 226 A2d 708 (Del 1967).

### **B. Implied/inherent authority of general manager & other agents.**

Officers and other agents only have the authority expressly granted to them by the corporation, and such other authority as can be implied from the authority expressly granted.

Courts have frequently held that the person designated as the corporation's "general manager" has the implied authority to undertake a broad range of activities on behalf of the corporation.

The power of the general manager, acting within the strict scope or the apparent scope of the corporate business about which and over which his employment extends, is practically unlimited as to the details of the business. In the internal management of the corporate business he has been held to have the right to exercise authority in the following instances: To employ clerks, servants and laborers and fix their compensation; \* \* to employ a superintendent of a mine; and to employ a foreman in a paper-mill. \* \* *Doolittle v. Pacific Coast Safe & Vault Works*, 79 Or 498, 505-6, 154 P 753, 755 (1916)(quoting from 2 Thompson, Corporations § 1580).

See also *Mortensen v. Dayton Sand & Gravel Co.*, 143 Or 273, 22 P2d 320 (1933); *Thayer v. Nehalem Mill Co.*, 31 Or 437, 51 P 202 (1897); *Kitzmiller v. Pacific Coast & Norway Packing Co.*, 90 Wash 357, 362, 156 P 17, 19 (1916).

Oregon courts have held there is a "presumption" that a general manager had authority to reduce the rent due on corporate property. *Sherman, Clay & Co. v. Buffum & Pendleton*, 91 Or 352, 361, 179 P 241, 243 (1919). More recently, the Ninth Circuit held that under Oregon law, a general manager has the inherent authority to enter into employment contracts on behalf of the corporation.

Appointment of an employee to a management position is conduct that suggests that the agent has the authority to make management decisions, including the creation of employment contracts. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, a general manager has the power to enter into employment contracts. (citations omitted) *Koepping v. Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon*, 120 F3d 998, 1004 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1997).

The terms "officer" and "general manager" are not synonymous. A person can be one and not be the other.

The president, vice president, secretary or treasurer may in effect be the general manager of the whole business or a specific part of it without regard to whether he is expressly designated as manager or whether his managerial work is recognized as a separate office or employment. In such case, his powers are not measured by the powers of a president, vice president, secretary or treasurer, but by the powers of a general manager of all or a part of the business. It is not necessary, in order that one may have the powers of a general manager, that he be denominated as such or that such an office or position exists; but it is sufficient that the corporation permits him to conduct and manage the business without objection. So it is not necessary

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that any resolution should be passed appointing a general manager in order to bind the corporation by the act of an officer, who is in fact permitted or authorized to manage the business. (citations omitted) *Lane v. National Insurance Agency*, 148 Or 589, 598, 37 P2d 365, 368 (1934).

Some courts have held that the inherent authority of a general manager is broader than that of a president.

The office of general manager is of broader import than that of president, and implies authority in one invested with it to do such acts as are necessary in the usual and ordinary course of the business carried on by the corporation. (citations omitted) *Wainwright v. P. H. & F. M. Roots Co.*, 176 Ind 682, 97 NE 8, 9-10 (1912).

Yet courts are increasingly willing to find the president has some degree of inherent authority to act in connection with the corporation's day-to-day ordinary affairs.

The rule so often stated that the president has very little or no authority merely by virtue of his office, that he has no powers other than those delegated him by the board of directors or otherwise expressly conferred upon him, that he has no more authority than any other director, etc., as already set forth above, is gradually being supplanted by the more reasonable view that he has certain more or less limited power, merely by virtue of his office, or at least there is a presumption that such authority exists, in case of the ordinary routine business of the corporation. *Jacksonville American Pub. Co. v. Jacksonville Paper Co.*, 143 Fla 835, 197 So 672, 678 (1940).

Even where courts have been disinclined to infer that a corporation's president had inherent authority to act as general manager of the corporation's business, a course of conduct may lead the court to conclude the officer has been delegated the authority of general manager as well. *Lane v. National Insurance Agency*, 148 Or 589, 37 P2d 365 (1934); *Cooper v. G.E. Construction Co.*, 116 Ga App 690, 158 SE2d 305, 308 (1967).

There are numerous cases which question whether the title conferred on an officer carries with it the inherent authority to undertake certain actions.

The secretary of a corporation, merely as such, is a ministerial officer, without authority to transact the business of the corporation upon his volition and judgment. Similarly, a treasurer has no authority to bind a corporation in dealings with third persons unless expressly or impliedly authorized to do so. (citations omitted) *Ideal Foods, Inc. v. Action Leasing Corporation*, 413 So2d 416, 417 (Fla 5th DCA 1982).

Another court has said:

As a usual thing the secretary of a corporation is a mere ministerial officer whose authority does not extend to the transaction of the ordinary affairs of the corporation upon his independent volition and judgment. But one who is secretary may also have far more extensive functions than those ordinarily incident to his office. He may be clothed with the authority of a general manager, and his open and public exercise of the functions of such position is notice that he has such authority. (citations and internal quotation marks omitted) *Van Denburgh v. Tungsten Reef Mines Co.*, 20 Cal App 2d 463, 67 P2d 360, 361 (1937).

Both the title bestowed and the customary authority of similarly-titled agents



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in the business community are important in determining whether there was authority.

Fentron did not title Foster as its general manager, but instead titled him a "manager of manufacturing services". There is no evidence in the record that one titled "manager of manufacturing services" is customarily or generally understood in the business community to have the authority to sell, and we are unwilling to assume that the title is so understood. Therefore, the fact that Fentron employed and titled Foster as it did is not, by itself, sufficient to support a finding of apparent authority. *Smith v. Hansen, Hansen & Johnson*, 63 Wash App 355, 367, 818 P2d 1127, 1134 (1991).

Whether or not an employee was acting within the scope of his/her authority will be a question of fact for the jury to decide. *Start v. Shell Oil Co.*, 202 Or 99, 260 P2d 468, 273 P2d 225 (1954); *Koeping v. Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon*, 120 F3d 998, 1004 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1997); *Mauch v. Kissling*, 56 Wash App 312, 783 P2d 601 (1989); *Murray v. Corson Corp.*, 55 Wash 2d 733, 350 P2d 468 (1960).

### **C. Apparent authority**

An agent has "apparent authority" to bind a corporate principal when the corporate principal does something by word or deed to cause a third party to reasonably believe that the agent has authority to act, even though the agent lacks such authority. "Apparent authority arises when the principal has clothed the agent with apparent authority to act for the principal in that particular. In other words, the principal permits the agent to appear to have the authority to bind the principal." (internal quotation marks deleted) *Morse Bros., Inc. v. Kemp Construction, Inc.*, 147 Or App 217, 222, 935 P2d 464 (1997).

We begin with a brief discussion of Oregon law relating to the doctrine of apparent authority. This court recently summarized the legal principles applicable to a determination of when " a putative principal can be held responsible for the acts of another on an apparent agency theory" in *Eads v. Borman*, 351 Or. 729, 277 P.3d 503 (2012):

" Classically, an agency relationship 'results from the manifestation of consent by one person to another that the other shall act on behalf and subject to his control, and consent by the other so to act.' *Vaughn v. First Transit, Inc.*, 346 Or. 128, 135, 206 P.3d 181 (2009) (emphasis in *Vaughn* omitted) \* \* \*. The agency relationship can arise either from actual consent (express or implied) or from the appearance of such consent. See generally *Taylor v. Ramsay-Gerding Construction Co.*, 345 Or. 403, 410, 196 P.3d 532 (2008) (so discussing). In either circumstance, the principal is bound by or otherwise responsible for the actual or apparent agent's acts only if the acts are within the scope of what the agent is actually or apparently authorized to do. *Id.* ; see also *Beeson v. Hegstad*, 199 Or. 325, 330, 261 P.2d 381 (1953) (one cannot hold principal liable for an act that does not fall within the scope of agent's real or apparent authority).

" \* \* \*. Under this court's settled cases, '[a]pparent authority to do any particular act can be created only by some conduct of the principal which, when reasonably interpreted, causes a third party to believe that the principal consents to have the apparent agent act for him on that matter.' *Jones v. Nunley*, 274 Or. 591, 595, 547 P.2d 616 (1976). There accordingly are two keys to the analysis: (1) the principal's representations; and (2) a third party's reasonable reliance on those

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representations."

*Id.* at 735-37 (internal quotation marks omitted).

This court also observed in *Eads* that the test in Oregon to determine when a principal is bound by an actor under an apparent authority theory is consistent with the rule stated in the Restatement (Third) of Agency section 2.03 (2006):

"'Apparent authority is the power held by an agent or other actor to affect a principal's legal relations with third parties when a third party reasonably believes the actor has authority to act on behalf of the principal and that belief is traceable to the principal's manifestations.'" 351 Or. at 737 n 5 (quoting Restatement (Third) § 2.03). That test is applicable both " to determine when a principal is bound by actors who appear to be agents but are not, as well as actors who act beyond the scope of their actual authority." *Id.* (citing Restatement (Third) § 2.03 comment a).

Regarding the first element of the apparent authority test--a putative principal's representation that an agent is authorized to act on its behalf--an agent's actions, standing alone, will not give rise to apparent authority. *Id.* at 737 (citing *Taylor*, 345 Or. at 410). Instead, the principal " must take some affirmative step in creating the appearance of authority, one that the principal either intended to cause or 'should realize' likely would cause a third party to believe that the putative agent has authority to act on the principal's behalf." *Id.* (ultimately quoting Restatement (Second) of Agency § 27 comment a (1958)). The principal's words, conduct, or other representation [375 P.3d 527] need not be made directly to or witnessed directly by the third party for the principal to be liable under a theory of apparent authority; rather, the representation of authority need only be traceable to the principal. *Id.*; see *Taylor*, 345 Or. at 411 (indirect information attributed to principal's conduct " can be used to support apparent agency, as long as that information can be traced back to the principal" ); see also Restatement (Third) § 1.03 comment b (although " the presence of actual authority depends upon whether the principal has made a manifestation to the agent," by contrast, " a manifestation sufficient to establish apparent authority may, but need not necessarily be, directed toward an identified person as its audience" ).

Further, when a principal cloaks an agent with actual authority to perform certain tasks, that actual authority may create the appearance of authority to perform other, related tasks. *Taylor*, 345 Or. at 411; see *Badger*, 311 Or. at 26 (sales representatives' actual authority to sell approved securities lent weight to sales representatives' apparent authority to sell unregistered securities). Additionally, when a principal appoints an agent to a position that carries " generally recognized duties," a principal may create apparent authority to perform those duties. *Badger*, 311 Or. at 24-25 n 9 (quoting Restatement (Second) § 27 comment a).

Regarding the second element of the apparent authority test--the third party's reasonable reliance--the third party must in fact rely on the principal's representation in dealing with the apparent agent, and that reliance must be objectively reasonable. *Eads*, 351 Or. at 737 (citing *Jones*, 274 Or. at 595-96; *Badger*, 311 Or. at 26). In assessing the reasonableness of the third party's reliance, a court must consider what is customary and usual for certain positions or within certain professions. *Eads*, 351 Or. at 737 n 5 (" Apparent authority also includes concepts of 'usual authority' and 'customary authority' in determining whether 'a substantial basis for a third party's belief' exists that the person with whom the third party dealt was acting as an agent for a principal in a particular circumstance." ) (quoting Restatement (Third) § 2.03 comment b).

*Harkness v. Platten*, 359 Or 715, 723-25, 375 P3d 521 (2016).

Apparent authority is a rule of agency law by which a principal may become

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liable for the acts of an agent even if those acts are outside the scope of the agent's actual authority. The principal will be liable if, by words or conduct, it has led third parties reasonably to believe that the agent has authority or if the principal consents to the and if the third party actually believes that the agent is authorized to act as the agent acts. *Filter v. City of Vernonia*, 64 Or App 559, 563, 669 P2d 350, 352 (1983).

See also *Summit Props., Inc. v. New Tech. Elec. Contrs., Inc.*, 2004 US Dist LEXIS 13053 (D Or 2004); *Kantor v. Boise Cascade Corp.*, 75 Or App 698, 708 P2d 356 (1985).

To demonstrate apparent authority, the proponent must establish that: (1) the principal made some representation that a reasonable person would perceive to acknowledge or affirm the authority of the purported agent to act on the principal's behalf; (2) the proponent relied on that representation in dealing with the agent; and (3) the proponent materially changed position in reliance on the principal's representation. With respect to the first element, it is important to note that apparent authority does not arise from the subjective understanding of the person dealing with the purported agent, nor from the appearance created by the purported agent himself; instead, apparent authority only exists where the principal creates the appearance of an agency relationship. (Citations & internal quotations omitted) *Shaheen Business and Investment Group, Inc. v. Chahien*, 355 F Supp2d 483, 504 (DDC 2005).

Another court has said:

In cases when it appears that a corporation has vested an officer or officers with apparent authority to transact certain business affairs, the corporation will be estopped to deny the authority of its chosen representatives and to repudiate their acts.

In *Ballantine, Private Corporations* (1927) 347, § 110, the rule is stated as follows:

A corporation is subject to the same extent as a natural person to the general principle that one who holds out another, or allows him to appear as having authority to act, as his agent with respect to his business generally, or with respect to a particular matter, is estopped, as against persons dealing with him in good faith, to deny that his apparent authority is real. If a corporation, therefore, or its directors, either intentionally or negligently, clothe a particular officer or agent with an apparent authority to act for it in a particular business or transaction, and persons deal with him in good faith, it will be bound to the same extent precisely as if such apparent authority were real. In such a case, the corporation cannot set up secret instructions or rules limiting the apparent authority of its agent.

*Superior Portland Cement, Inc. v. Pacific Coast Cement Co.*, 33 Wash 2d 169, 213, 205 P2d 597, 620-1 (1949).

"Apparent authority is an exception to the general rule that the torts of independent contractors are not imputed to their 'employer.'" *Luciano v. Am. Gen. Life Ins. Co.*, 2006 US Dist LEXIS 12615 (D Or 2006) (citing *Jennison v. Providence St. Vincent Med. Center*, 174 Or App 219, 229, 25 P3d 358 (2001)).

The elements of apparent authority in Oregon are:

On the other hand, a principal may be held bound to a third person for an act of the agent completely outside the agent's implied (or express) authority if the principal

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has clothed the agent with apparent authority to act for the principal in that particular. In other words, the principal permits the agent to appear to have the authority to bind the principal. We have stated the elements necessary to establish apparent authority in *Jones v. Nunley*, 274 Or 591, 595, 547 P2d 616 (1976):

Apparent authority to do any particular act can be created only by some conduct of the principal which, when reasonably interpreted, causes a third party to believe that the principal consents to have the apparent agent act for him on that matter. The third party must also rely on that belief.

*Wiggins v. Barrett & Associates, Inc.*, 295 Or 679, 687-8, 669 P2d 1132 (1983).

See also *Columbia Cascade Co. v. City of Fernandina Beach*, 286 Or App 729, 400 P3d 1001 (2017); *Harkness v. Platten*, 359 Or 715, 723-25, 375 P3d 521 (2016).

**Estoppel.** Apparent authority is closely related to, but not quite the same as, the doctrine of estoppel.

Apparent authority is grounded in estoppel. Its three primary elements are: (1) representation by the principal, (2) reliance upon that representation by a third person, and (3) a change of position by the third person in reliance upon such representation. (citations omitted) *Ideal Foods, Inc. v. Action Leasing Corporation*, 413 So2d 416, 418 (Fla 5th DCA 1982).

Oregon continues to recognize some differences between apparent authority and estoppel, but for most applications, "[t]here is really no practical difference between application of one doctrine or another to hold a principal liable for the promise of the agent." *Wiggins v. Barrett & Associates, Inc.*, 295 Or 679, 689, 669 P2d 1132, 1140 (1983). See also *Hill's, Inc. v. William B. Kessler, Inc.*, 41 Wash 2d 42, 246 P2d 1099 (1952); *Superior Portland Cement, Inc. v. Pacific Coast Cement Co.*, 33 Wash 2d 169, 205 P2d 597 (1949); *Debentures Inc. v. Zech*, 192 Wash 339, 73 P2d 1314 (1937).

One difference between the two theories may be that if an agent has apparent authority to sign a contract on behalf of the principal, both the principal and the third party may sue to enforce the contract; under the doctrine of estoppel, only the third party may enforce the contract. *Wiggins v. Barrett & Associates, Inc.*, 295 Or 679, 689, n 3, 669 P2d 1132, 1140 (1983).

**Action by principal required.** Apparent authority is premised on the conduct or acquiescence of the corporate principal in misleading an innocent third party. *Checkley v. Boyd*, 198 Or App 110, 107 P3d 651 (2005). The principal must hold out – act or fail to act – in such a way as to cause the third party to believe the principal has authorized the agent to act. *Taylor v. Ramsay-Gerding Construction Co.*, 345 Or 403, 409-10, 196 P3d 532 (2008); *Kotera v. Daioh International USA Corp.*, 179 Or App 253, 271-2, 40 P3d 506 (2002). See also *Sizer v. New England Life Ins. Co.*, 871 F Supp2d 1071 (D Or 2012).

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**Statements by agent.** The agent's own extrajudicial declarations concerning the extent of his/her authority are insufficient to prove agency, although an agent's testimony at trial on this topic is competent. *Holt v. City of Salem*, 192 Or 200, 234 P2d 564 (1951); *Jones v. Marshall-Wells Co.*, 104 Or 388, 208 P 768 (1922).

Corporate liability based on the apparent authority of its agents is premised upon the principal's knowledge or acquiescence in the conduct of its agents which has led third parties to rely upon their actions. It is a well-established rule that the apparent or ostensible authority of an agent can be inferred only from acts and conduct of the principal. The authority of an agent is not "apparent" merely because it looks so to the person with whom he deals. (citations omitted) *Kiniski v. Archway Motel, Inc.*, 21 Wash App 555, 563, 586 P2d 503, 508 (1978).

On the other hand, the agent's testimony in court is admissible to prove the extent of the agent's authority. *Wakefield, Fries & Co. v. Sherman, Clay & Co.*, 141 Or 270, 17 P2d 319 (1932); *Ramsey v. Wellington Co.*, 114 Or 355, 235 P 297 (1925); *Hartford v. Faw*, 166 Wash 335, 7 P2d 4 (1932).

While it is true that agency cannot be proved by the testimony of third parties as to the declarations of the agent made to them, the situation here is not that. Here the agent is testifying directly as to his authority, and we have heretofore held that such testimony is as admissible coming from the agent on the stand, as the contrary evidence would be from the principal as a witness. (citations omitted) *Beeler v. Pacific Fruit & Produce Co.*, 133 Wash 116, 118, 233 P 4, 4-5 (1925).

**EXAMPLE:** Despite assurances by a corporate employee at the time of sale that the employee had actual authority to sell corporate property, without more evidence that the corporation had bestowed such authority on its employee, the purchaser will likely not prevail on an action to enforce the purported contract with the corporation.

On the other hand, the employee's testimony at trial that the corporation's general manager had said to the employee "please sell this property" would be enough to put the employee's authority before the jury – although on an "express authority" theory, rather than an apparent authority theory.

"Manifestations to the third party can be made by the principal in person or through anyone else, including the agent, who has the principal's actual authority to make them - e.g., an advertisement in the newspaper, provided it is placed by the principal or an agent with actual authority." *Smith v. Hansen, Hansen & Johnson*, 63 Wash App 355, 364, 818 P2d 1127, 1133 (1991).

**Knowledge of third party.** In order for a corporate principal to be liable, the principal must communicate, directly or indirectly, with the third party in a manner sufficient to instill a reasonable belief of the agent's authority. *Smith v. Hansen, Hansen & Johnson*, 63 Wash App 355, 818 P2d 1127 (1991); *Pepkowski v. Life of Indiana Insurance Co.*, 535 NE2d 1164 (Ind 1989). Such a belief is not "reasonable"

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if the third party had such "knowledge of facts as would reasonably require him to inquire as to the authority" of the agent. *Deers, Inc. v. DeRuyter*, 9 Wash App 240, 245, 511 P2d 1379, 1382 (1973). See also *First Interstate Bank of Oregon, N.A. v. Bergendahl*, 80 Or App 479, 723 P2d 1005 (1986); *Bank of Oregon v. Hiway Products, Inc.*, 41 Or App 223, 598 P2d 318 (1979).

Apparent or ostensible authority can be inferred only from the acts and conduct of the asserted principal. Facts and circumstances are sufficient to establish apparent authority only when a person exercising ordinary prudence, acting in good faith and conversant with business practices and customs, would be misled thereby, and such person has given due regard to such other circumstances as would cause a person of ordinary prudence to make further inquiry. *J & J Food Centers, Inc. v. Selig*, 76 Wash 2d 304, 309, 456 P2d 691, 694 (1969).

In order to prevail on a theory of apparent authority, a third party must have a good faith belief that the agent had authority to bind the principal. *Koepping v. Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon*, 120 F3d 998, 1004 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1997); *Edart Truck Rental Corp. v. B. Swirsky & Co., Inc.*, 23 Conn App 137, 579 A2d 133 (1990); *Gables Racing Assoc., Inc. v. Persky*, 148 Fla 627, 6 So2d 257 (1942).

The subjective belief of the third party is not enough – an objective test of apparent authority is required. *Bill McCurley Chevrolet, Inc. v. Rutz*, 61 Wash App 53, 808 P2d 1167 (1991); *Fair Price Moving Co., Inc. v. Sixto Pacleb*, 42 Wash App 813, 714 P2d 321 (1986).

There can be no apparent authority if a third party has actual knowledge the agent lacks authority or if a third party has knowledge which puts the third party on inquiry as to the agent's actual authority. *Minniti v. Cascade Employers Association*, 280 Or 319, 570 P2d 1171 (1977); *Bessler v. Derby*, 80 Or 513, 157 P 791 (1916); *City Electric v. Dean Evans Chrysler-Plymouth*, 672 P2d 89 (Utah 1983).

Apparent authority and its effect vanish \* \* in the presence of the actual knowledge of the third party as to the real scope of the agent's authority, or when the former has knowledge of facts which would put him upon inquiry as to the actual warrant of the agent. *Bank of Oregon v. Hiway Products, Inc.*, 41 Or App 223, 227, 598 P2d 318, 320 (1979)(quoting from *Portland v. American Surety Co.*, 79 Or 38, 43-44, 153 P 786, 154 P 121 (1916)).

Either a principal's oral communications or physical acts may form the basis for a third party to believe an agent has apparent authority.

Unlike express and implied authority, apparent authority is created by the outward appearance a corporation has given the agent authority to act. To determine whether an agent acted with apparent authority, we ask whether the third person reasonably believed, because of some manifestation from the agent's principal, the agent possessed the authority to act. For the third person to reasonably believe the agent possessed the authority, the principal need not communicate with the third person directly. Placing the agent in a position to perform acts or to make representations is sufficient to clothe the agent with apparent authority. (citations omitted) *Blair Laboratories, Inc. v. Globes*, 599 NE2d 233, 236 (Ind App 1992).

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**Miscellaneous.** “[W]hen a principal cloaks an agent with actual authority to perform certain tasks, that actual authority may create the appearance of authority to perform other, related tasks.” *Harkness v. Platten*, 359 Or 715, 725, 375 P3d 521 (2016). If a corporation appoints a person as its agent, a third party may assume – absent information to the contrary – the agency is a general one, not subject to special restrictions. *Real Estate Loan Fund Oregon Ltd. v. Hevner*, 76 Or App 349, 709 P2d 727 (1985). Thus, when a corporation appoints a person as a salesperson, third parties dealing with that salesperson may assume the salesperson has authority to make representations as to the product sold, absent information to the contrary. *Start v. Shell Oil Co.*, 202 Or 99, 260 P2d 468, 273 P2d 225 (1954). When a corporation appoints a “managing agent,” that agent “is presumed to do those acts which managing agents normally do, unless the principal has by some action given notice to third parties of the limitations on the agent’s authority.” *Filter v. City of Vernonia*, 64 Or App 559, 563, 669 P2d 350, 352 (1983). When a principal cloaks an agent with actual authority to perform certain tasks, that actual authority may create the appearance of authority to perform other, related tasks.

On the other hand, merely giving an agent a rubber stamp to endorse checks for deposit does not confer apparent authority to endorse checks and personally receive payment. *Gresham State Bank v. O & K Construction Co.*, 231 Or 106, 370 P2d 726, 372 P2d 187 (1962).

Apparent authority may give rise either to contract liability or to tort liability. *Real Estate Loan Fund Oregon Ltd. v. Hevner*, 76 Or App 349, 709 P2d 727 (1985)(contract); *Thayer v. Oregon Federation of Square Dance Clubs*, 258 Or 302, 482 P2d 717 (1971)(tort).

Whether an agent had apparent authority is an issue usually left for determination by the trier of fact. *Id.*; *Koepping v. Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon*, 120 F3d 998, 1004 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1997); *Start v. Shell Oil Co.*, 202 Or 99, 260 P2d 468, 273 P2d 225 (1954).

## Section 6.08 Ratification

Even when a corporation does not authorize an officer’s act before performance, the corporation may later ratify the officer’s act and become bound thereby. *Howe v. Washington Land Yacht Harbor, Inc.*, 77 Wash 2d 73, 459 P2d 798 (1969); *Betz v. Tacoma Drug Co.*, 15 Wash 2d 471, 131 P2d 183 (1942). General principles of agency apply. *Masters v. Walker*, 89 Or 526, 174 P 1164 (1918); *Riss v. Angel*, 131 Wash 2d 612, 934 P2d 669 (1997); *Luria v. Bank of Coral Gables*, 106 Fla 175, 142 So 901, rehearing denied, 106 Fla 175, 143 So 598 (1932); *Seymour Improvements Co. v. Viking Sprinkler Co.*, 87 Ind App 179, 161 NE 389 (1928);

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### RESTATEMENT OF AGENCY (SECOND) §§ 82-104.

Ratification by a principal of a previously unauthorized contract by an agent requires evidence that the principal, with knowledge of the material facts, intended to ratify the contract. *Minniti v. Cascade Employers Assn.*, 280 Or. 319, 332, 570 P.2d 1171 (1977); *Alldrin v. Lucas*, 260 Or. 373, 381, 490 P.2d 141 (1971). Ratification occurs when a principal either manifests assent to be bound or engages in conduct indicative of consent by the principal. Restatement (Third) of Agency § 4.01 (2006). "For example, knowing acceptance of the benefit of a transaction ratifies the act of entering into the transaction. This is so even though the person also manifests dissent to becoming bound by the act's legal consequences." *Id.* at § 4.01 comment d; see also *id.* at § 4.01 comment g.

*Lemley v. Lemley*, 221 Or App 172, 188 P3d 468, 473 (2008).

"Ratification is the affirmance of an unauthorized act professedly done on the principal's account." *Larkin v. Appleton*, 274 Or 671, 676, 548 P2d 499, 502 (1976).

There are four elements to ratification:

Ratification requires (1) the existence of a principal; (2) an act done by a purported agent; (3) knowledge of the material facts by the principal; and (4) an intent by the principal to ratify the act. *Robertson v. Jessup*, 96 Or App 349, 352, 773 P2d 385, 387 (1989).

See also *Wyndham Vacation Fairfield Resorts, Inc. v. Architects Hawaii Ltd.*, 703 F Supp2d 1051 (D Haw 2010).

Ratification may be either express or implied. *Summit Props., Inc. v. New Tech. Elec. Contrs., Inc.*, 2004 US Dist LEXIS 13053 (D Or 2004); *Pargano v. Gray*, 126 Or App 670, 870 P2d 837 (1993); *Robertson v. Jessup*, 96 Or App 349, 352, 773 P2d 385, 387 (1989). The doctrine of estoppel may also apply. *Kneeland v. Shroyer*, 214 Or 67, 328 P2d 753 (1958); *Spokane Concrete Products, Inc. v. U. S. Bank of Washington*, 126 Wash 2d 269, 892 P2d 98 (1995).

Ratification is usually a question for the jury. *Masters v. Walker*, 89 Or 526, 174 P 1164 (1918); *Smith v. Dalton*, 58 Wash App 876, 795 P2d 706 (1990).

General principles of agency apply with respect to ratification by a corporation of an officer's act. *Luria v. Bank of Coral Gables*, 106 Fla 175, 142 So 901, rehearing denied, 106 Fla 175, 143 So 598 (1932); *Seymour Improvements Co. v. Viking Sprinkler Co.*, 87 Ind App 179, 161 NE 389 (1928); RESTATEMENT OF AGENCY (SECOND) §§ 82-104.

#### **A. Express ratification.**

A corporation's board of directors may expressly ratify an unauthorized act after the fact. "[T]he law is clear regarding the fact that the actions of a corporate officer acting without authority may be ratified by the Board of Directors after the fact." *In re Valles Mechanical Industries, Inc.*, 20 BR 355, 356 ((ND Ga 1982).

To expressly ratify an unauthorized act, the board must have full knowledge of the facts relevant to the act ratified. *American Timber & Trading Co. v.*



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*Niedermeyer*, 276 Or 1135, 558 P2d 1211 (1977); *Riss v. Angel*, 131 Wash 2d 612, 636, 934 P2d 669, 683 (1997). "Ratification means that one affirms that which he had a right to repudiate." *Poweroil Manufacturing Co. v. Carstensen*, 69 Wash 2d 673, 678, 419 P2d 793, 796 (1966).

A corporation is usually charged with the knowledge of its officers and agents. *Phillips v. Colfax Co., Inc.*, 195 Or 285, 243 P2d 276, *rehearing denied*, 195 Or 285, 245 P2d 898 (1952); *Equico Lessors, Inc. v. Tow*, 34 Wash App 333, 661 P2d 597 (1983). But there are exceptions.

The law imputes to the principal, and charges him with, all notice or knowledge relating to the subject-matter of the agency with the agent acquires or obtains while acting as such agent and within the scope of his authority, or, according to the weight of authority, which he may previously have acquired, and which he then had in mind, or which he had acquired so recently as to reasonably warrant the assumption that he still retained it. Provided, however, that such notice or knowledge will not be imputed: (1) Where it is such as it is the agent's duty not to disclose; (2) Where the agent's relations to the subject-matter are so adverse as to practically destroy the relation of agency; and, (3) Where the person claiming the benefit of notice, or those whom he represents, colluded with the agent to cheat or defraud the principal. (citations omitted) *American Fidelity & Casualty Co. v. Backstrom*, 47 Wash 2d 77, 82, 287 P2d 124, 127 (1955).

Thus, a corporation may not be charged with the knowledge of an officer whose acts were unauthorized or outside the scope of the agency. *Bank of Oregon v. Hiway Products, Inc.*, 41 Or App 223, 598 P2d 318 (1979); *Crawford v. Albany Ice Co.*, 36 Or 535, 60 P 14 (1900); *Roderick Timber Co. v. Willapa Harbor Cedar Products, Inc.*, 29 Wash App 311, 627 P2d 1352 (1981). "Knowledge acquired by corporate officers while acting for themselves and not for the corporation cannot be imputed to the corporation." *C. & H. Contractors, Inc. v. McKee*, 177 So2d 851, 854 (Fla App 1965).

In one case, directors ratified a contract without knowing of an attorney fee provision and, therefore, while the contract was deemed ratified, that attorney fee provision was held not to be binding on the corporation. *Pacific Rolling Mill v. Dayton, Sheridan & Grande Ronde Railway Co.*, 5 F 852 (D Or 1881).

### **B. Implied ratification.**

A corporation may ratify an agent's act without doing so expressly. Ratification may be implied from the corporation's conduct. "By retaining and using the benefit obtained, the corporation ratifies the contract." *Spokane Concrete Products, Inc. v. U. S. Bank of Washington*, 126 Wash 2d 269, 278, 892 P2d 98, 103 (1995).

An implied ratification can arise if the corporate principal, with full knowledge of the material facts (1) receives, accepts, and retains benefits from the contract, (2) remains silent, acquiesces, and fails to repudiate or disaffirm the contract, or (3) otherwise exhibits conduct demonstrating an adoption and recognition of the contract as binding. The basic inquiry to determine whether an implied ratification has occurred is whether the facts demonstrate an intent to affirm, to approve, and to act in furtherance of the contract. (citations omitted) *Barnes v. Treece*, 15 Wash App

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437, 443-4, 549 P2d 1152, 1157 (1976).

See also *Pargano v. Gray*, 126 Or App 670, 870 P2d 837 (1993); *Summit Props., Inc. v. New Tech. Elec. Contrs., Inc.*, 2004 US Dist LEXIS 13053 (D Or 2004); *Connecticut Car Rental v. Prime One Capital*, 247 F Supp2d 158, 166 (D Conn 2003); *Smith v. Hansen, Hansen & Johnson*, 63 Wash App 355, 818 P2d 1127 (1991).

The Oregon Supreme Court has said:

The rule in this state upon this subject is that, if a principal, when fully notified thereof, neglects promptly to disavow an act or contract of his agent in excess of his authority, such silence will usually be interpreted as an implied ratification, and particularly so if the failure speedily to repudiate such contract or agreement might impose upon the other party loss or injury. *Kneeland v. Shroyer*, 214 Or 67, 93, 328 P2d 753, 765 (1958).

Implied ratification may take many forms. It can occur when a corporation retains the benefits of an unauthorized act. *Bank of Oregon v. Hiway Products, Inc.*, 41 Or App 223, 598 P2d 318 (1979); *Finnegan v. Pacific Vinegar Co.*, 26 Or 152, 37 P 457 (1894); *Connecticut Car Rental v. Prime One Capital*, 247 F Supp2d 158 (D Conn 2003) *Pierce v. Astoria Fish Factors, Inc.*, 31 Wash App 214, 640 P2d 40 (1982). It can occur when a corporation acquiesces in an unauthorized act. *Rudeen v. Lilly*, 196 F2d 300 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1952). It can occur when some other conduct by a corporation demonstrates affirmance. *Stroud v. Beck*, 49 Wash App 279, 742 P2d 735 (1987)(principal assumed obligation and accepted tax benefits).

Like express ratification, implied ratification requires the corporation to have full knowledge of the facts surrounding its agent's unauthorized act.

Whenever a principal accepts the benefits of his agent's unauthorized acts *with knowledge of all the material facts*, he ratified the same. Silent acquiescence *with full knowledge of the material facts* may amount to a ratification if continued for an unreasonable length of time. *Alldrin v. Lucas*, 260 Or 373, 382, 490 P2d 141, 145 (1971)(quoting from *Cranston v. West Coast Life Ins. Co.*, 72 Or 116, 130, 142 P 762 (1914)).

Another court held:

For a principal to be charged with the unauthorized act of its agent by ratification, it must act with full knowledge of the facts or accept benefits of the act or intentionally assume the obligation imposed without inquiry. *Swiss Baco Skyline Logging, Inc. v. Haliewicz*, 18 Wash App 21, 32, 567 P2d 1141, 1148 (1977).

If a corporation accepts the benefits of an unauthorized act, the corporation's ratification can be implied.

When a corporation, with full knowledge of the facts, accepts and retains the benefits of an unauthorized contract, it will be bound thereby. (citations omitted) *Kittleson v. Tennant Agency, Inc.* 242 Or 610, 614, 411 P2d 94, 96 (1966).

On the other hand, a corporation is not liable even though it accepts the

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benefits of the transaction, if the corporation changes its position before becoming aware of all relevant facts. *Osborne v. Hays*, 284 Or 133, 585 P2d 674 (1978); *Larkin v. Appleton*, 274 Or 671, 548 P2d 499 (1976).

If a corporation ratifies part of a transaction – for instance by accepting the benefits – it is generally deemed to have ratified all of the transaction. *Phillips v. Colfax Co., Inc.*, 195 Or 285, 243 P2d 276, 245 P2d 898 (1952); *Dillard v. Olalla Mining Co.*, 52 Or 126, 94 P 966, *modified*, 96 P 678 (1908); *Tobias v. Towle*, 179 Wash 101, 35 P2d 1114, *adhered to*, 179 Wash 101, 41 P2d 1119 (1934); *Leschen & Sons Rope Co. v. Case Shingle & Lumber Co.*, 152 Wash 37, 276 P 892 (1929). *But see Pacific Rolling Mill v. Dayton, Sheridan & Grande Ronde Railway Co.*, 5 F 852 (D Or 1881)(when directors ratified a contract without knowing of an attorney fee provision, contract was deemed ratified except for attorney fee provision).

Implied ratification and equitable estoppel are related – but distinguishable – principles. *Kneeland v. Shroyer*, 214 Or 67, 328 P2d 753(1958).

Ratification, moreover, differs from estoppel, though they are often very closely associated. Estoppel requires that the party alleging it shall have done something or omitted to do something, in reliance upon the other party's conduct, by which he will now be prejudiced if the facts are shown to be different from those upon which he relied. Ratification requires no such change of condition or prejudice: if the principal ratifies, the other party may simply avail himself of it. As soon as ratification takes place, the act stands as an authorized one, and not merely as one whose effect the principal may be estopped to deny. If there be ratification, there is no occasion to resort to estoppel. There may, however, be cases in which one may be estopped to deny that he has ratified.

The difference in effect may be striking: ratification is retroactive, estoppel operates upon that done after the act and in reliance upon it; ratification makes the whole act good from the beginning, while estoppel may only extend to so much as can be shown to be affected by the estopping conduct. *Woodworth v. School District No. 2*, 92 Wash 456, 463, 159 P 757, 760 (1916)(quoting 1 Mechem, Agency (2d ed) § 349).

Like ratification, estoppel bars the corporation from asserting a defense if the corporation has accepted the benefits of the act in question.

So long as a contractual agreement is not contrary to public policy or the terms of a statute, a corporation that has received directly or indirectly the benefits of a contract, including a contract of guaranty, generally is estopped from asserting the defense of ultra vires. *Spokane Concrete Products, Inc. v. U. S. Bank of Washington*, 126 Wash 2d 269, 277, 892 P2d 98, 103 (1995).

Although the mere passage of time does not usually establish ratification, failure to repudiate the after full knowledge of the facts can infer an election to ratify. *Michel v. ICN Pharmaceuticals*, 274 Or 795, 549 P2d 519 (1976); *Rayonier, Inc. v. Polson*, 400 F2d 909, 915 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1968). Even if much time has elapsed, however, the act is not deemed ratified if the board of directors quickly acts to disavow the unauthorized act once discovery has occurred. *Hansen v. Oregon Humane Society*,

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142 Or 59, 17 P2d 560 (1933); *Hall v. Catherine Creek Development Co.*, 78 Or 585, 153 P 97 (1916); *Farmers' Market v. Austin*, 118 Wash 103, 203 P 42 (1921).

### **C. Ratification by acquiescence.**

"The rule in this state upon this subject is that, if a principal, when fully notified thereof, neglects promptly to disavow an act or contract of his agent in excess of his authority, such silence will usually be interpreted as an implied ratification, and particularly so if the failure speedily to repudiate such conduct or agreement might impose upon the other party loss or injury." *Kneeland v. Shroyer*, 214 Or 67, 93, 328 P2d 753 (1958). See also *James v. Bridge Capital Corp.*, Case No. 08-cv-397-BR (D Or Jan 27, 2011).

"Ratification can be inferred from the principal's silence if the circumstances are such that, according to the ordinary experience and habits of men, one would naturally be expected to speak if he did not consent." (citation & internal quotation marks omitted) *Smith v. Hansen, Hansen & Johnson*, 63 Wash App 355, 369, 818 P2d 1127, 1135 (1991).

The rule is elementary that when an agent, in contracting for his principal, exceeds his authority, the principal, upon being fully informed of the facts, must, within a reasonable time, disavow or disaffirm the act of his agent, especially in cases where his silence might operate to the prejudice of innocent parties, or he will be held to have ratified and affirmed such unauthorized act, and such ratification will be equivalent to a precedent authority.

This rule is as applicable to corporations as individuals. (citations omitted) *Reid v. Alaska Packing Co.*, 47 Or 215, 220, 83 P 139, 141 (1905).

See also *Glaser v. Slate Construction Co.*, 196 Or 625, 251 P2d 441 (1952); *Farmers' Market v. Austin*, 118 Wash 103, 203 P 42 (1921).

Although the mere passage of time does not usually establish ratification, failure to repudiate the after full knowledge of the facts can infer an election to ratify. *Michel v. ICN Pharmaceuticals*, 274 Or 795, 549 P2d 519 (1976); *Rayonier, Inc. v. Polson*, 400 F2d 909, 915 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1968). Even if much time has elapsed, however, the act is not deemed ratified if the board of directors quickly acts to disavow the unauthorized act once discovery has occurred. *Farmers' Market v. Austin*, 118 Wash 103, 203 P 42 (1921).

Ratification by acquiescence is usually a jury question. *Williams v. Pilgrim Turkey Packers*, 264 Or 36, 503 P2d 710 (1972).

### **D. Ratification by the shareholders.**

In most cases, it is the board which acts to ratify an unauthorized act. However, the shareholders may also ratify an unauthorized act. This occurs most often when the unauthorized act involves self-dealing by an officer who is also a director. See ORS 60.361(1)(b)

Shareholder ratification can occur only after the shareholders gain full

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knowledge of the facts.

The most decisive answer to plaintiff's contention which seems to have been overlooked by all counsel is the rule to the effect that the stockholders of a corporation can always acquiesce or ratify any action of the Board of Trustees provided they have full knowledge concerning it. *Robinson v. Linfield College*, 42 F Supp 147, 156 (ED Wa 1941), *affirmed*, 136 F2d 805 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1943).

Usually, shareholders ratify an unauthorized act by adopting a resolution expressly ratifying the act. *Id.* But shareholder ratification may also be implied by other shareholder actions or inactions. *The Egeria*, 294 F 791 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1924); *West Side Irr. Co. v. United States*, 246 F 212 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1917).

### **E. Relation back.**

As a general rule, ratification relates back to the original transaction. *High v. Davis*, 283 Or 315, 584 P2d 725 (1978); *Emmett v. Astoria Marine Iron Works*, 97 Or 632, 192 P 1113 (1920); *Masters v. Walker*, 89 Or 526, 174 P 1164 (1918); *Riss v. Angel*, 131 Wash 2d 612, 934 P2d 669 (1997).

Ratification is the affirmance by a person of a prior unauthorized act, whereby the act is given effect as if originally authorized by him. (citations omitted) *Rayonier, Inc. v. Polson*, 400 F2d 909, 915 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1968).

There is an exception. Ratification will not relate back if the rights of an intervening party are affected. *General S.S. Corp. v. Astoria Overseas Corp.*, 294 F 861 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1924); *Masters v. Walker*, 89 Or 526, 174 P 1164 (1918). Even if much time has elapsed, an act is not deemed ratified if the board of directors acts quickly to disavow the unauthorized act once discovery has occurred. *Farmers' Market v. Austin*, 118 Wash 103, 203 P 42 (1921).

## **Section 6.09 Absence of Authority**

### **A. Generally.**

Absent authority granted by a statute, the bylaws or by a board resolution, officers have little inherent power to control or manage the business or property of the corporation. *Harding v. Oregon-Idaho Co.*, 57 Or 34, 110 P 412 (1910); *Ideal Foods, Inc. v. Action Leasing Corporation*, 413 So2d 416 (Fla 5th DCA 1982).

Early cases viewed the inherent authority of officers quite narrowly. For instance, one court held that officers were not authorized to sell major assets outside of the ordinary course of business, *Luse v. Isthmus Transit Railway Co.*, 6 Or 125 (1876); another held that officers had no authority to give gifts of corporate assets to their friends. *Henderson v. Tillamook Hotel Co.*, 76 Or 379, 148 P 57, *modified*, 149 P 473 (1915).

“Under ORS 63.140(2)(a), an LLC is not bound by the act of its manager if the manager lacked authority and if the other party knew or should have known that the

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authority was lacking.” *Synectic Ventures I, LLC v. EVI Corp.*, 353 Or 62, 84, 294 P3d 478 (2012).

### **B. Example – no inherent authority to execute notes.**

Most courts have held officers lack inherent authority to execute notes and other negotiable instruments on behalf of the corporation.

It is elementary law that the president and secretary of a corporation, as such, have no power to bind the corporation by the execution of promissory notes or other contracts, but such authority "must be derived from some bylaw of the corporation, or some special order, or must be implied by some acquiescence or ratification on the part of the corporation, whose powers, under our law, are exercised by the directors." (citations omitted) *Crawford v. Albany Ice Co.*, 36 Or 535, 537, 60 P 14, 15 (1900).

See also *Du Bois-Matlack Lumber Co. v. Henry D. Davis Lumber Co.*, 149 Or 571, 42 P2d 152 (1935).

Even in modern times, courts are reluctant to infer authority for officers to sign notes for their corporate principals.

The president and vice president of a corporation have no power derived from their offices alone to execute promissory notes for the corporation, and a party dealing with a corporate vice president may not assume from his title alone, that he has such authority. *Musulín v. Woodtek, Inc.*, 260 Or 576, 583, 491 P2d 1173, 1177 (1971).

One exception to this rule may be where the officers who sign the note or mortgage also constitute a majority of the directors or shareholders. See *Baines v. Coos Bay Navigation Co.*, 45 Or 307, 77 P 400 (1904); *First National Bank of Burns v. Frazier*, 143 Or 662, 19 P2d 1091, 22 P2d 325 (1933). But see *Crawford v. Albany Ice Co.*, 36 Or 535, 60 P 14 (1900).

### **C. Discretionary authority.**

In some older cases, courts held that the board could only delegate ministerial – not discretionary – duties to officers. *Patterson v. Portland Smelting Works*, 35 Or 96, 56 P 407 (1899). The more modern view is that directors may delegate substantial discretion to officers and other agents. The board may not, however, delegate those duties which lay at the heart of their management of the corporation, such as their duty to use their own best judgment on management matters. *Morgan v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co.*, 402 A2d 1211 (Del Super 1979).

Under general principles of agency, agents may delegate ministerial duties to subagents but, absent authority, may not delegate discretionary authority. *Clark v. Shea*, 130 Or 195, 279 P 539 (1929). In modern times, courts have less rigorously applied this rule to corporate agents.

As a general rule an agent can delegate to someone else the ministerial tasks which his principal has assigned to him, but not those which require the exercise of judgment or discretion. The rule is less strictly applied when the principal is a corporation. But, nevertheless, a corporate officer normally "has no authority to delegate special powers conferred on him, and which involve the exercise of

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judgment or discretion, unless he is expressly authorized to do so, or unless the circumstances are such that the authority is necessarily implied." (citations omitted) *Evanston Bank v. Conticommodity Services, Inc.*, 623 F Supp 1014, 10313 (ND Ill 1985).

See also *Miller v. United Pacific Casualty Insurance Co.*, 187 Wash 629, 60 P2d 714 (1936); *Citizens' Nat. Bank of Fernandia v. Florida Tie & Lumber Co.*, 81 Fla 889, 89 So 139 (1921); FLECTHER CYC CORP § 503 (Perm Ed).

### Section 6.10 Standard of Care

Officers with discretionary authority have the same standard of care toward the corporation as do directors. Like ORS 60.357 which sets out the standard of care for directors, ORS 60.377(1) requires an officer with discretionary authority to discharge his/her duties:

- (a) In good faith;
- (b) With the care an ordinarily prudent person in a like position would exercise under similar circumstances; and
- (c) In a manner the officer reasonably believes to be in the best interests of the corporation.

In discharging their duties, officers – like directors – may reasonably rely on information prepared by other officers, employees, professionals, and experts. Unlike directors, officers may not reasonably rely on board committees. *Compare*: ORS 60.357(2) and 60.377(2). See Section 5.12 of this book.

The standard of care for officers of a benefit company is set forth in ORS 60.764.

### Section 6.11 Officers as Fiduciaries

Much of the case law related to an officer's duty to the corporation and its shareholders involves a person who is both an officer and a director. Partially as a consequence, courts have generally imposed the same duty of good faith, loyalty and trust on both officers and directors. *Williams v. Pilgrim Turkey Packers, Inc.*, 264 Or 36, 503 P2d 710 (1972); *Sherman v. Baker*, 2 Wash App 845, 472 P2d 589 (1970); *Kane v. Klos*, 50 Wash 2d 778, 314 P2d 672 (1957). See FLETCHER CYC CORP §§ 989-1009 (Perm Ed).

Yet even when a person is an officer only – and not a director – that person will generally owe a fiduciary duty to the corporation. *Jamison v. Coldwell*, 25 Or 199, 35 P 245 (1894); *Sherman v. Baker*, 2 Wash App 845, 472 P2d 589 (1970).

The same rules regarding conflicts of interest and usurpation of corporate opportunities usually apply to officers and directors. See *generally* Sections 5.16 and 5.17 of this book.

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General principles of agency also apply to officers, including the fiduciary duties owed by an agent to the agent's principal.

### Section 6.12 Compensation

Today, officer compensation is set by the board of directors. In reviewing a decision by the board to pay officers, courts will apply the business judgment rule and will not overturn the informed judgment of the board unless it is grossly unjust to the corporation and its shareholders.

When an officer is also a director, the usual rules regarding conflicts of interest apply. On a vote setting compensation for an officer/director, that officer/director should abstain. But even if the officer/director does not abstain, the test will be one of fairness to the corporation.

#### A. Early view.

At the turn of the last century, courts looked with disfavor at officer compensation. While courts would generally enforce contracts for compensation – absent an express agreement – courts held that officers were not entitled to compensation merely for being an officer. *Denman v. Richardson*, 292 F 19, 22-3 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir 1923); *Home Mixture Guano Co. v. Tillman*, 125 Ga 172, 53 SE 1019 (1906).

It is a well settled rule that officers of a corporation are not entitled to recover, draw or retain compensation for their service unless authorized by the board of directors or the stockholders. *Flight Equipment & Engineering Corporation v. Shelton*, 103 So2d 615 (Fla 1958).

Gradually, courts began to draw a distinction between an officer's services as an "officer" and the officer's services which went beyond those of an officer. Since courts had earlier held the specific duties of a president to be quite narrow, *Luse v. Isthmus Transit Railway Co.*, 6 Or 125 (1876), courts had a basis from which they could hold that a person – who just happens to be an officer – had the right to compensation on a *quantum meruit* theory for services which are outside his/her duties as an officer. *Baines v. Coos Bay Navigation Co.*, 41 Or 135, 68 P 397 (1902).

[T]his court has recognized and applied [the rule that an officer of a corporation cannot recover compensation for the performance of the duties incident to his office, unless authorized by the board of directors or by the by-laws of the company, yet, if the services performed lie outside or apart from those imposed upon him by virtue of his office and rendered at the request or with the acquiescence of the corporation, recovery could be had upon a quantum meruit. (citations omitted) *Barrenstecher v. The Hof Brau*, 67 Or 194, 197, 135 P 518, 518 (1913).

But even under this view, without an express authorization of compensation, an officer could still only recover for duties outside his/her official duties as an officer. *Kenner v. Whitelock*, 152 Ind 635, 53 NE 232 (1899).



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Two general principles emerge from authoritative decisions upon the subject, to wit: (1) That an officer of a corporation cannot recover for services rendered in the course and scope of his official duties unless there has been an express contract authorizing compensation prior to the rendition of the services. (2) That an officer of a corporation may recover under certain circumstances the reasonable value of necessary services rendered entirely outside of the line and scope of his duties as such officer. *North Carolina Agricultural Credit Corporation v. Boushall*, 193 NC 605, 137 SE 721, 723 (1927).

Another court said:

By the overwhelming weight of authority, the doctrine that the directors and other managing officers of a corporation are not entitled to compensation, in the absence of express provision or agreement therefor, does not apply to unusual or extraordinary services, -- that is, services which do not properly pertain to their office, and are rendered by them outside of their regular duties. If such services are rendered by a director or other officer at the request of the corporation or the board of directors, with the understanding that they are to be paid for, the law will imply a promise, in the absence of any special agreement, to pay what they are reasonably worth. *Blom v. Blom Codfish Co.*, 71 Wash 41, 127 P 596, 599 (1912).

Express authorization of officer compensation usually took the form of board resolution, a provision in the bylaws, or both. *Wonderful Group Mining Co. v. Rand*, 111 Wash 557, 191 P 631 (1920).

Historically, a retroactive board resolution granting compensation for services already performed was considered to be void. *Wood v. Lost Lake Manufacturing Co.*, 23 Or 20, 23 P 848 (1890); *Doe v. Northwest Coal & Transportation Co.*, 78 F 62 (D Or 1896); *Hurt v. Cotton States Fertilizer Co.*, 159 F2d 52, 58 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir 1947). "The salaries fixed are not too large, but the resolutions fixing them can, as a matter of course, have operation only in the future." *Crichton v. Webb Press Co.*, 113 La 167, 36 So 926, 932 (1904). See also *Retroactive Compensation to Director - Officers*, 25 IND L J 212 (1950).

One case held that if the bylaws prohibited compensation for "any services performed" by officers and the officer knew of such language, then the officer could not even recover for extraordinary services. *Enders v. Northwestern Trust Co.*, 125 Or 673, 268 P 49 (1928).

### **B. Modern view.**

By the 1930's, courts begun accepting the concept of officer compensation. For example, in *Rugger v. Mt. Hood Electric Co.*, 143 Or 193, 20 P2d 412, 21 P2d 1100 (1933), the court set aside a board resolution granting the officers compensation for past services not, as in older cases, because such compensation was prohibited but, rather, as a result of a technical defect in the board of director vote. The court held, however, that officers still had a valid claim for compensation for the reasonable value of their services.

In *American Timber & Trading Co. v. Niedermeyer*, 276 Or 1135, 558 P2d 1211 (1977), a corporation's bylaws provided that officers' salaries were to be set by

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the board. Instead, the president set his own salary without board action. Nevertheless, the court prevented the corporation from recovering the president's salary, finding that the salary was reasonable and that the board had acquiesced with full knowledge the payments were being made.

In modern times, even retroactive votes to compensate officers have been upheld. For instance, in *Blish v. Thompson Automatic Arms Corporation*, 64 A2d 581 (Del 1948), the Delaware Supreme Court held that directors may retroactively increase an officer's salary if the amount awarded is not unreasonable in light of the services rendered. See also *Zupick v. Goizueta*, 698 A2d 384 (Del Ch 1997); *Western Properties, Inc. v. Barksdale*, 65 Wash 2d 612, 399 P2d 16 (1965).

More recently, courts have held that they will not substitute their judgment for the judgment of the board with respect to officer compensation. *Lowry v. Lowry*, 590 NE2d 612 (Ind App 1992); *Royal Crown Companies, Inc. v. McMahon*, 183 Ga App 543, 359 SE2d 379 (1987)(approving a "golden parachute" for an executive officer).

Most courts now apply the business judgment rule to compensation and will uphold the board's determination, unless the compensation is grossly excessive.

Because of this great deference, courts do not invalidate executive compensation systems under the business judgment rule unless they constitute corporate waste. Corporate waste exists when the payment is afforded without "adequate" consideration. Under the business judgment rule, adequacy of consideration is left to the sound discretion of the directors, and courts do not invalidate compensation plans so long as the compensation the executive receives bears a reasonable relationship to the services rendered. A compensation plan passes this "reasonable relationship" test if the payment insures that the benefit provided by the services rendered will inure to the corporation.

Necessarily, the reasonable relationship analysis requires a court to conduct three inquiries. First, the court must determine whether the corporation benefited from the services rendered. If the corporation received no benefits in exchange, the payments insured nothing, and the compensation system is corporate waste. Second, a court should examine whether the compensation was so unreasonably disproportionate to the benefits created by the exchange that a reasonable person would think the corporation did not receive a *quid pro quo*. If no *quid pro quo* resulted, no true benefit could inure to the corporation, for the payments would constitute corporate gifts, and, therefore, would offset any benefit received in exchange. Finally, a court must conclude that the services rendered triggered the payments. If some other event triggers payment, the payment cannot reasonably assure anything. (footnotes and citations omitted) *International Insurance Co. v. Johns*, 874 F2d 1447, 1461-2 (11<sup>th</sup> Cir 1989).

Yet, sometimes a court will still intervene when it concludes the compensation is excessive.

Although appellant was estopped from questioning the validity of the voting of salaries, no estoppel arose as to the excessive amounts voted and paid, the general rule being that directors may not vote excessive salaries to officers of the corporation; and courts of equity have the power to inquire into the reasonableness of the salaries voted to its officers by the directors of a corporation, considering the nature and extent of the services, and, if found to be excessive, they may grant adequate relief. *Von Herberg v. Von Herberg*, 6 Wash 2d 100, 117, 106 P2d 737,

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744 (1940).

It is safe to say that the law now recognizes that officers usually have a right to compensation for their services to the corporation. In general though, such compensation should still be approved by the corporation's board. *Nordin v. Kaldenbaugh*, 7 Ariz App 9, 435 P2d 740 (1968). Particularly when setting the salary of an officer who is also a director, the director's fiduciary duties apply and the board must act in good faith. *Id.*; *Corbin v. Corbin*, 429 F Supp 276, 281 (MD Ga 1977).

The directors may delegate to certain officers the authority to set the compensation of inferior officers or agents. *Cox v. First Nat. Bank of Brea*, 10 Cal App 2d 302, 52 P2d 524 (1935).

**NOTE:** With the possible exception of persons who hold corporate office without performing any significant services, an officer can expect to have his/her claims for reasonable compensation upheld by the court. Caution may dictate including language in a board resolution granting compensation for past services (e.g., a bonus) that the compensation is aimed at encouraging future performance by that employee, or other similarly situated employees. Yet, courts will almost certainly uphold such board action even absent such language.

Grossly excessive compensation is still subject to challenge, but in challenging compensation as excessive, the challenging shareholder will have the burden of proving that the compensation is "unjust, oppressive, or fraudulent," *Krukemeier v. Krukemeier Mach. & Tool*, 551 NE2d 885, 888 (Ind App 1990), that it is "unreasonable or unfair." *Cole Real Estate Corp. v. Peoples Bank and Trust Co.*, 160 Ind App 88, 310 NE2d 275, 279 (1974), or that it is "clearly excessive and wasteful as against the minority." *Coleman v. Plantation Golf Club, Inc.*, 212 So 2d 806, 808 (Fla App 1968).

### **C. Compensation if officer breaches fiduciary duty.**

An officer may not be entitled to reasonable compensation if the officer has breached his/her fiduciary duty to the corporation. In such cases, courts have the power to require the return of the compensation paid during the period of the breach.

The remedy of restoration of compensation is an equitable principle and its applicability is dependent upon the individual facts of each case. The general rule, however, is that a corporate officer who engages in activities which constitute either a breach of his duty of loyalty or a wilful [sic] breach of his contract of employment is not entitled to any compensation for services rendered during that period of time even though part of those services may have been properly performed. (citations omitted) *American Timber & Trading Co. v. Niedermeyer*, 276 Or 1135, 1155, 558 P2d 1211, 1223 (1977).

See also *Omnigen Research, LLC v. Wang*, Case No. 6:16-cv-268-MC (D Or Nov 16, 2017); *Wall Systems, Inc. v. Pompa*, 324 Conn 718, 154 A3d 989 (2017);

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*Rockefeller v. Grabow*, 136 Idaho 637, 39 P3d 577 (2001).

The decision of whether or not to order such restitution ultimately rests within the discretion of the trial court. *Williams v. Queen Fisheries, Inc.*, 2 Wash App 691, 469 P2d 583 (1970).

In *Taylor v. Berkheimers, Inc.*, 48 Or App 901, 618 P2d 452 (1980), the Court of Appeals held that the trial court did not abuse its discretion in awarding compensation to an employee who had breached his fiduciary duty to the corporation after finding that the employee had received no personal gain from a breach which was well-intentioned. The court reduced the employee's compensation, however, by an amount equal to the corporation's loss due to the employee's breach. See also *Marnon v. Vaughan Motor C., Inc.*, 184 Or 103, 194 P2d 992 (1948).

Compensation should be denied "only when the breach [of trust] has been serious." *Strickland v. Arnold Thomas Seed*, 277 Or 165, 182, 560 P2d 597, 606 (1977).