

Don't Miss the "Handoff"

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As we approach the fall and many will focus on football and we understand the importance of making a "handoff" in a game. At this time of year, many nonprofit businesses are in the process of bringing new players (Trustees or Directors) onto the "team." We don't want to miss the handoff to being great Board Member. The education and motivation of nonprofit Board members is a continuous process to build board strength and effective interaction.

Your nonprofit organization is at a critical point in your relationship with the person or persons you have spent so much time cultivating and grooming as new Board Members. It is hoped these people will become effective Policy-Makers, Stewards, Ambassadors and Builders for the organization.

Your next step is the "handoff" orientation. An effective orientation of new board members should be of the highest priority for the Chair of the Board and the CEO/ED. The planning effort should be augmented by other Board members and key staff as needed. This event will create the solid connection that should exist between the new Trustee or Director and the Board and organization. The orientation should be educational, and motivational.

Schedule the orientation when all of the new Board Members can attend. Inform the new members about the time commitment for the orientation. If possible, schedule the meeting several weeks before the new Members are to attend their first regular board meeting. This provides time for the new Board Member to assimilate the information provided at the orientation.

When designing an orientation, the first step is to determine the common ground related to those who are to be oriented. Having used a modified "Moves Management" technique to identify, cultivate and recruit the new members, one can have knowledge of the basic background of each individual and be aware of what materials and information have already been shared with each person. This knowledge will lead the planning team in its consideration of appropriate topics to include in the program.

A Mentor for each new Board Member is the second component for a successful integration of each new Trustee, or Director. The Mentor is to aid the new member with the transition onto the Board and be available to answer questions about policies, procedures and traditions of the organization. The faster a new member understands the organization the faster that individual will be able to contribute to the success of the enterprise. The Mentor should attend the formal Orientation with the new member to begin a solid relationship. In addition, the mentor will be aware of what has been presented.

Mentor the selection and appointment is made by the Board Chair with support and input from the CEO/ED. The first criterion for mentor selection is a solid board member who is invested in the success of the nonprofit. The Mentor must be a person who has served at least one term on the board and possibly in the organizational leadership. The mentor(s) should be asked to participate in the planning and the execution of the orientation.

Before the actual election of the new Trustee, or Director, the individual should have received and signed a copy of the General Responsibilities of a Board member in your organization. This informal contract is the basis for the relationship between the new Board Member and the organization. The general responsibilities outlined can serve as a guide for the Orientation and the Mentorship.

The Orientation Structure:

As stated above, a good guide for the design of the program is the general responsibilities document already signed. The responsibilities fall into four broad categories: Policy-Maker, Steward, ambassador and Builder.

- ❖ **Policy-Maker:** As a member of the governing board it is the responsibility of the member to carefully consider every policy proposed. Policies provide the framework for the operation of the nonprofit such good business practices, limitations on the CEO/ED and staff, and services the organization will provide to its constituents.

Generally the three areas are most important:

Mission: It is the responsibility of the Board to insure the Mission is current, credible compelling, and memorable. The success of the entire organization depends on the clear understanding of the mission. The mission statement should be reviewed annually to insure that the direction of the organization is congruent with its own service objectives, and to avoid mission creep.

Goals flow from the mission and are designed to move the nonprofit toward achieving its mission. Board members should participate actively in the setting of reasonable goals.

Plans are how goals will be achieved. Boards approve goals and support the goals through the allocation of resources to achieve the goals.

- ❖ **Steward:** The Board of a nonprofit business is responsible for the financial health of the organization both morally and legally. The nonprofit board holds the assets and mission “in trust” as representatives of the community that created it and supports it.

Two areas should be emphasized:

Budget: The corporate budget should reflect the plans and programs already approved by the Board and expenditures should support the achievement of operation's plans. Allocations should be in proportion to the weight given to each part of annual plan.

Assets: The safeguarding of the treasure of the nonprofit business is the ultimate responsibility of the Board. Boards must have plans for insuring that current income streams are sufficient to support the operational objective and goals. This means giving their own personal resources to the organization; adopting policies and procedures that safeguard any restricted or endowment funds that support nonprofit; being willing to ask others to support the goals of the nonprofit.

- ❖ *Ambassador:* Each Trustee, or Director, serves as a symbol of the nonprofit organization. In the eyes of the public and the donors to the organization, these persons as seen as persons of influence and stature because of the position held.

A Source of Information in the community: Trustees/Directors are considered to be person who can tell the story of the nonprofit and represent the position and goals of the organization. It is incumbent on the CEO/ED and staff to keep Board Members informed and updated on the milestones achieved. Being informed means, the Board Member can take advantage of opportunities to promote the organization in many venues.

Be a Promoter: Board Members should seek opportunities to represent the organization in meetings and one-n-one. The CEO/ED and staff should assist each Member in the development of a brief "elevator speech" that can serve as door opener to others.

Rumor Corrector: Board Members need to be on the frontline when erroneous or false information is circulating in the community. These individuals are usually in position where they can correct information and make calls upon other centers of influence to provide appropriate and factual data.

Connector: The board is ultimately responsible for the success of the nonprofit. Each Board Member is responsible to bring new talent to the board itself.

- ❖ *Builder:* The first responsibility is to insure there is a structure in place to the goals set by the board. The Board must insure there is a Strategic Plan for the organization and that the plan is being followed.

Giver: The nonprofit ultimately needs financial resources to achieve its goals and move toward its mission. Within their capability, each Board member should give annually, support the capital efforts of the organizations and provide for a final gift through their estate.

Connector: Board members should involve others. Through their connections to the community, the Builder introduces prospective donors to the organization and assists in cultivating prospects. In addition each Board Member should be properly trained to make donor calls to assist the CEO/ED and staff in the development program.

This part of the orientation creates a baseline of expectations. As a Board Member, each person brings specific talent to the organization. Individual Members will not provide the same energy and dedication in varied roles. However, understanding requirements of the above roles will enable the Board Members to mutually support the organization and each other.

Other Specific Topics:

New Board members need to understand the “mechanics” of the Board. Some of this information may have been shared with individual board candidates; however, a baseline for everyone is important:

- Review the Near-Term goals of the organization. Board members need to know the first priorities of the nonprofit
- Review the draft agenda of their first meeting. This provides a context of how the meetings flow.
- Review the format of the financials documents and other reports, answer questions
- Discuss the educational portion of meeting. Board members should be aware that there will be education about the nonprofit continually.
- Review planned Board and Committee meeting schedules for the next twelve months. Individual new members should have been informed about their initial committee assignments by their Mentors in their initial meeting. If possible the Mentor and new board member should serve on the same committee.
- Provide a list of dates, times and locations of all meetings, if known.
- Describe the process for requesting items being placed on the Board Agenda
- Review the Executive Session process and procedure
- Review the Standing Committee structure
- Review and discuss the system for rotating committee assignments among various board members- the purpose is to create a well educated and functioning board
- Provide a list of all board members and appropriate contact information
- Provide a list of senior staff members. New Board members need to understand the organizational protocol for interaction between board and staff. The protocols differ among CEO/ED's. It is important the new Board members do not establish “bad habits” that can disrupt staff work.
- Review the Board Performance monitoring program – this program is series to two meetings in the first year between the CEO/ED and each new Trustee/Director to gauge the comfort of the new Board member and answer questions related to the organization's operation and future.

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