

Nineteen Suggestions for Board Chairs and Chief Executives

- 1) Get new board members involved/engaged early...or **kiss** them goodbye.
- 2) There is something extremely rewarding in being part of an effort that really makes a difference. Finding ways for board members to regularly "touch" the programs and the people that you serve will pay off. Regularly ask yourself "At the next board meeting, how can we make vivid what we do as an organization."
- 3) For most boards the primary qualities/skills a chairperson needs are to be an effective organizer and facilitator and leader (rather than being "an expert in the field.")
- 4) The Board Chair and CEO both need to be committed to getting the job done through other people. Their key questions include: What needs to be done?; Who could do that really well?; How can we define exactly what we are asking them to do?; How can we support their efforts?; What follow-up is needed?; and How will we recognize and acknowledge their efforts?
- 5) Send materials for the next board meeting to everyone in advance (ideally a week ahead). It will pay off in two ways. They will be better prepared and so will you! Include what different people or task groups have been charged with and will be reporting on. It will remind them, plus acknowledge them.
- 6) Board meetings should provide an arena for reasonable disagreement and conflict and reasonable resolution of differences. A board that's a bit feisty will do a lot better job than a board that just goes through the motions. And it will be more fun for everyone.
- 7) One of the best ways to get volunteers engaged and committed is to take a problem focused approach where you are continually identifying problems and tasks where their help is needed. Only monitoring programs and approving or disapproving other's proposals is deadening. Having the challenge of a problem that your assistance is needed with is stretching, often exciting and it is energizing. When people experience that they are making a difference, they will look for more ways to contribute.
- 8) Goals cause things to happen if they are agreed upon and clearly written and if they are visible and regularly referred to. The chairperson needs goals; the CEO needs goals; and the board as a whole needs goals. When that happens, organizations get where they want to go instead of where the current happens to take them.
- 9) If you want healthy new growth in your board, you may need to prune out your deadwood. Deadwood can cause healthy wood to decay. Pruning it says to those who remain "This is important work and you are needed and valued." Pruning may not be comfortable work, but it pays off.
- 10) An excellent way to increase board member's involvement and motivation is to be in touch with them between meetings (a phone call, a note, a quick conference about a problem or something they need to know, or checking with them on things they are working on for the organization). Small amounts of time spent in this way produce big dividends.

- 11) Connecting with board members on their turf (office or home) builds relationships in ways that only seeing them at board meetings never can.
- 12) Assess who your high potential board members are and cultivate them especially (as in #10 and #11).
- 13) Ask yourself, "If I were a member of this board of directors:"
 - a. how would I feel about that responsibility?
 - b. would I know what I could contribute and how to go about it, or would I feel unclear about that?
 - c. where would I get my sense of accomplishment and satisfaction? - what would be the most valuable part of this experience for me?"
- 14) When a board member has taken on a task, it is very useful to:
 - a. put in writing what they have agreed to do and by when
 - b. let other board members know what that person has taken on
 - c. put it in the minutes of the meeting and other places where it will be seen
 - d. build in interim reporting steps and time expectations right from the beginning where that is appropriate
- 15) Use short-term task forces to tackle specific problems and jobs. Smaller task groups are usually better than large ones. Assign as few as one board member, or as many as six.
- 16) Involve non-board members on some task forces. They need to be able to contribute to the effectiveness of the task force. This experience can also serve as a useful recruiting influence and will show you what they can contribute.
- 17) Engaging all the board (plus others, if appropriate) in a strategic planning process is a great way to build board participation, loyalty, enthusiasm and commitment. It's also a great way to keep the organization growing in effectiveness. .
- 18) Board retreats and board social events can have a very positive effect on member's commitment.
- 19) Leading and facilitating effective work by board members takes time and attention. It can't be done with a magic wand. The results usually make the investment more than worth it.