

Recruiting and Keeping GOOD Board Members

This question was posed by a member of our LinkedIn groups. The community has provided some excellent advice that could be useful to all.

Lundell

Executive Director

As founder and ED of a small but growing school for children with Autism, I have recently lost two of my eight board members (separate circumstances). While all were instrumental in getting us open, they didn't seem prepared to handle on-going development. I was frustrated that with a board full of people, I was still doing all the work - they had suggestions but no one led a project or fundraiser. I need to recruit active and involved members who can provide leadership—how can I do better this time?

Comments (10)

Jodi

Executive Director

Do you have a clearly defined list of board member obligations that they sign when they join the board? I have one and use it as a measure of the board performance it allows talking points and progress reports as to performance measured by the list. Hope that helps

Oscar

Director

In case you find it useful: Jerold Panas, [The Fundraising Habits of Supremely Successful Boards](#).

Wealth

We need Board members who are willing to make big gifts—those who will stretch and will make the organization the focus of their philanthropy.

Work

We need Board members who are willing to put in the hours, attend meetings, participate in events, etc.

Wisdom

We need Board members who bring mature judgment to complex matters, who are wise enough to make the right decisions (often on the spot).

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Wallop

We need Board members who have clout, power and leverage, who have influence within their own community and among your constituency – people who can open doors, attract others to the cause and serve as ambassadors.

Linda

CEO

Yes, a board commitment is great. But, did you do any exit interview of your board members? Perhaps, time commitment became too much for volunteers, or did not feel they could contribute due to lack to expertise.

Edie

Executive Director

Ditto to the above, especially the board expectations. In addition, the challenge (and fun) of starting an organization can be more exciting than dealing with the reality of the daily/monthly/yearly challenges of keeping a nonprofit going. This is where board training and a tactical plan leading to a strategic plan is essential. Your vision must translate to the board—they are the ultimate owners of the organization, and must be empowered to act as such. Hard for a founder to do, but necessary.

Kelly

Founder & Executive Director

I too have experienced similar issues with board members. They have been really awesome in the fundraising for our capital campaign, etc., but everything else is a slew of suggestions which is more work on me & none of the board members volunteering to help. This gets frustrating. I could use some example to add into our new board member packet that explains that they should not just advise, but also help in certain areas like marketing & such.

Warren

Executive Director

You are looking at this backwards. If you need volunteers to run programs, projects or fundraising efforts, recruit non-board members who are passionate about that job and the impact success will have on your ability to meet your mission.

Then recruit the volunteers who are successful to join your board.

Heide

Executive Director

Definitely an issue. Two items come to mind. First, you need different people for different stages. Secondly, I have set expectations that unless there is an action person (other than me), a deadline and an action, then it is not on our organizational plate. One example is fundraisers. The board now knows that if they target less than \$15K net, then it is a board project without staff support. I will handle RSVPs, thank yous, and attend, but they have to do all the work. Above or below \$15K, there has to be a committee with a chair, or the project gets tabled. Ideas abound, but with only one staff person we don't have the bandwidth to respond, and I can't take any more on my plate.

Lloyd

President/CEO

I believe a key to recruiting great board members is the Board/CEO partnership. The better that partnership...the easier it is to recruit those board members with the four W's -- Wealth, Work, Wisdom, and Wallop, as was described earlier. Partnership -- commitment to mission, mutual support, trust, communication. Here is a link to read more about the governance partnership

www.governancepartnership.com

Wayne

CEO

Regarding keeping board members, we have incorporated the "Generative Thinking" ideas discussed by Chait et. al. and have brought a new level of energy and involvement to board meetings. Board members are engaged and are able to make meaningful contributions by linking their expertise with our issues.

Michael

Non-Profit Management & Development Executive in transition

Great wisdom here. When we are knee-deep in running our organizations it is hard sometimes to recall and act on the discipline we are taught regarding board management. Connecting board performance assessment and board demographics to strategic recruitment pays off, if we can discipline ourselves and train our nominating committees! Years ago we were asking ourselves "who can we get to serve?" Now the vision is to have a vibrant, influential board that community movers and shakers are waiting to get nominated to!!!

Bridgestar (www.bridgestar.org), an initiative of the Bridgespan Group, provides a nonprofit management job board, content, and tools designed to help nonprofit organizations build strong leadership teams and individuals pursue career paths as nonprofit leaders.

3

