

Boardroom Bearings

Navigating to Board Excellence



February / 10 / 2014

Board Development Step 5: INVOLVE

So far, *Boardroom Bearings* has featured four board development steps: Identify, Cultivate, Recruit, and Orient. Now that you have some new board members, it's time to focus on getting them involved. Of course, getting and keeping EVERYONE involved is the ongoing work of the board chair with support from the chief executive and committee chairs.

Let's get engaged!



Valentine's Day is this week, so it's a good time to talk about getting engaged! It's no surprise that board members, both new and ongoing, want and need to feel connected to the organization and that their contribution matters. When people feel useless, they stop attending meetings. When they stop attending, the organization has lost everything invested in identifying, cultivating, recruiting, and orienting them. Moreover, it's possible that the non-participating board member may be sharing negative impressions of your organization in the community.

In This Issue

Let's get engaged!

Tips on getting a great board chair

Questions for Mike Hennessy

New charity rating site

Question of the month: conflict of interest

Re-cap

Here are some ways to engage everyone on the board:

- **Connect** each person with tasks or activities that not only meet their interests but also the needs of the organization. (From the governance committee, the board chair should know what each individual expected to gain from board service).
- **Focus** board meetings on strategic/important issues, not administrivia. Use consent agendas to handle routine business so there is time for stimulating discussion about implications of decisions to be made. (See the December issue of *Boardroom Bearings* for information about consent agendas or [click here](#).)
- **Provide opportunities for learning** - learning more about the arena in which the organizations works, trends that impact the organization, promising new practices, research, etc.
- **Make sure** everyone has basic skills for board service such as understanding financial statements, fiduciary responsibilities, policies, etc.
- **Monitor participation** to be sure that discussion is not monopolized by just a few.

- **Use committees or task group assignments** to provide opportunities for individuals to contribute their knowledge as well as become more connected to other board members.
- **Evaluate board meetings regularly** and use the information to improve engagement. Ask a few simple questions and report the findings -- questions like "How did we do at this meeting with making sure everyone was heard?" "To what extent did we focus our time on important issues?" and "What should we do to improve our board meetings?"
- **Follow up** when someone is absent from a board or committee meeting. Say, "We missed you at the meeting; is everything OK?" and inform them of actions taken and the date/time for the next meeting.

Possible causes of poor participation include the following:

- The board is too large - individuals are lost in the crowd.
- The board is too small - members burn out with too much work.
- Orientation to board work is weak or non-existent.
- Agendas are poorly planned with too many reports of past work and not enough focus on future work and substantive issues.
- Executive committee meets too often and makes the decisions. No one enjoys serving on a rubber-stamp board.
- Discussion is not well-managed; board meetings are dominated by a few.
- Absence of term limits leads to members with too many years of service and declining interest.

Tips on getting a great board chair



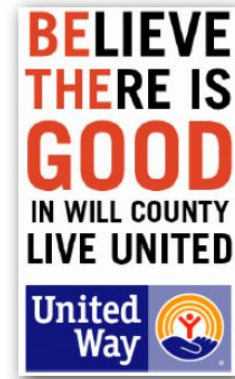
At the end of January, *The Nonprofit Quarterly* published a fine [short article](#) by Simone Joyaux on Board Chairs.

The article lists six jobs that a great board chair does well and explains the difference between the board chair and other board members.

Next Month's Boardroom Bearings

In the March issue, *Boardroom Bearings* will report on an interview with Mike Hennessy, Executive Director of the United Way of Will County.

If you could sit across the table from Mike, what questions would YOU want to ask? Send what's on your mind to kdw@centerpointinstitute.com by February 25, 2014.



New charity rating site is announced

According to the *Huffington Post*, "For the first time, donors can search just one database and find out how all the top watchdogs rate a nonprofit. [Charity Checker](#), a portal that aggregates ratings and reviews from such leading nonprofit watchdogs as CharityNavigator and Guide Star, is the brainchild of the Tampa Bay Times and the Center for Investigative Reporting. After releasing their explosive report on [America's Worst Charities](#) last year, the two organizations realized the need for a more streamlined rating system." (Source: [Huffington Post](#)).



Question of the month

Q: What is conflict of interest?

A: The most obvious potential for a conflict of interest occurs when someone stands to gain a financial benefit due to their insider connections or knowledge. Say, for example, Mary is on the board of a local nonprofit. Her husband is a building contractor. When the board wants to expand the organization's office, Mary's husband gets the contract at an over-priced rate because of bidding details that Mary disclosed to him. When Mary and her husband benefit financially from the deal, there has been a conflict of interest.

Other conflicts of interest may not involve money. What about a person who is a board member for two nonprofits that work in the same field? What about a board member who is also a recipient of the organization's services? Or what about a board member whose relative works for the nonprofit? These are all gray areas that merit consideration.

See these two excellent resources:

[Nonprofit Conflict of Interest: a 3-dimensional view](#) by Jan Masaoka, currently CEO of the California Association of Nonprofits.

BoardSource's Conflict of Interest Policy: a discussion of conflict of interest, including sample wording. Posted on [this page](#) (resources are listed alphabetically).

And here is a [real life example](#) of a conflict of interest that cost a nonprofit a \$77,000 grant. The person in question said he didn't realize that he had a conflict of interest -- demonstrating the importance of a conflict of interest policy and board training on the topic.

Re-cap

Since choosing board members has powerful implications for the future effectiveness of the board and the success of the organization, *Boardroom Bearings* is running a 9-part series on building an effective board of directors. [Previous issues are available here.](#)

Boardroom Bearings...

...is written by Katheryn Wiedman, Ph.D., Centerpoint Institute, a BoardSource Certified Governance Trainer. You may reach her at kdw@centerpointinstitute.com or by calling 815-545-1300.

...is published monthly. To subscribe your organization's board chair, board members, CEO, or staff, please forward the newsletter with a suggestion that they subscribe.



Forward this email

[Forward this email](#)



Try it FREE today.

This email was sent to kdw@centerpointinstitute.com by kdw@centerpointinstitute.com | [Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Centerpoint Institute | 2419 Suffolk Lane | Joliet | IL | 60433