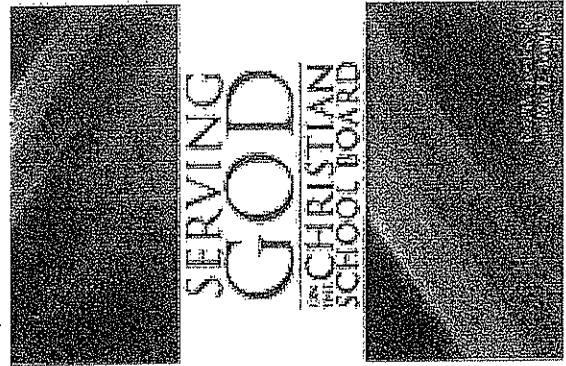


The Marks of a Quality Board

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Peter said in 2 Peter 1:12-13 that it was part of his ministry to remind believers of things they already knew, for this reminder would stir them up.

This chapter reviews many of the key themes addressed in this book by acknowledging the characteristics of a strong Christian school board. The following items are presented in that spirit.

Maturity and Growth of Each Member

The quality of the board equals the sum of the quality of its individual members. The foundations of quality are the board member's spiritual maturity and current growth in Christ, which are prerequisites for all service to God on the board. Board members may be alert and have strength in an area of expertise, but if they fall short in godly maturity and growth, they may do damage to the work of the board.

Members as a Microcosm

Relationships within the board are enhanced when members think of the board as a miniature of the universal body of Christ and realize that God is the head of the board. God has brought the members onto the board, has given them spiritual gifts by virtue of their new birth, and has given them responsibilities to fulfill for Him. Service should be viewed as the spiritual exercise of the body as each individual uses his or her abilities in the service of God and His Christian school.

Christ Promoted

The school's objective is to honor Christ in education. He is the one to be promoted and not the board. To apply a familiar Scripture, Christ must increase, but the board must decrease. Occasionally boards get carried away with their talents and their success, and they give the feeling that they, rather than Christ, have done wonderful things. Any inclinations to promote the board should be recognized and resisted, following the example of John the Baptist.

High Standards of Qualification

It is better to have a smaller board whose members are well qualified than a larger board whose membership includes some poorly qualified persons. Members who are poorly qualified dilute, damage, or even destroy the board. Nominating committees are extremely important, for if they bring only qualified candidates to the voters, it does not matter who is elected. A nominating committee that brings poorly qualified nominees before the voters does the Christian school a disservice. Board members who become disqualified after election must resign, or they must be removed.

Informed on Christian School Philosophy and Objectives

The Christian school is based on a biblical philosophy of life. Its objectives are biblical, not humanistic. The school exists because of its philosophy and objectives, which board members must comprehend to make wise decisions that will enable the school to achieve its purposes. They need a clear vision of the school's educational goals if they are to lead in attaining them. Achieving such a vision requires study, reading, seminars, and discussion to sharpen each board member's focus on what the local Christian school is about.

Ability to Determine God's Leading

As individuals and as a group, board members have to be experienced in knowing how to determine God's leading. They must make numerous decisions about issues on which they have no background or experience. Decisions must not be made automatically. Godly decision making starts with the desire to know God's will.

Unity in Christ

The Bible says that it is good for the Lord's people to dwell together in unity (Psalm 133:1). God gives unity, but His people are responsible for maintaining it. Board members need to show respect, care, and love for each other and for the administrator. Unity on the board is tangible. It can be sensed, felt, by everyone. Disunity is recognized and healed quickly. There is no place for a devil's advocate on the Christian school board.

Freedom of Expression

To deal with serious issues affecting the school, board members must be able to speak freely in their meetings. Two things are prerequisites for openness: a non-judgmental attitude towards one another and a commitment to confidentiality. Board members should not feel that they must hold back from saying what they think about a matter to avoid judgment or the risk of having their ideas passed on. When members hold back, the board does not have the advantage of its own full counsel.

Exercise of Faith

The entire endeavor of the school is a walk of faith. The way of faith is always God's way. His method of showing that the school is not of man but of God. When His will in a matter is discerned, the board must exercise faith and obey it. Faith is believing that what God says is true and then acting on it. Schools grow

through several stages, and there are numerous times, some of them critical, when the board must exercise faith if the school is to be all that God intends it to be. The board should never take the position that God is strong enough to get His people out of Egypt but not strong enough to get them into the Promised Land. That attitude is sin.

Prayer and Praise

Some Christian school boards are cheerful and happy in their work. Others are heavyhearted and sometimes depressed. The difference is not in the problems facing the school but in the heart attitude of the board members. The board ought to be characterized by praise and prayer, depending on God for everything and thanking God for all He is doing (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Willingness to Work

Schools make rigorous demands on members of their boards. The duties are not ceremonial but require long hours of work. A major commitment is involved. Potential members should be asked frankly about their willingness to make heavy time commitments to the Christian school. Some board members purposely do not hold demanding church offices during the years they are serving on the school board because double duty is hard on the members and their families.

Strong Chair

The key to a strong board is the strong example of the chair. Even though members are volunteers, they need to be encouraged and then held to a high level of performance. Continuous exhortation and supervision by the chair is vital. The chair is a strong, visionary leader who is spiritually mature, godly, poised, and fair. In some schools, board chairs have a long tenure; in others, that tenure is deliberately limited in the bylaws. Either way, the chair is a strong leader.

Desire to Do Things Well

The board should hold itself to a high level, doing things right and doing them well. If the board is willing to live with a school that has inadequate personnel and facilities, that school will be mediocre. If the board prays only for grace to tolerate those inadequacies instead of praying for solutions, the school will neither prosper nor progress. The Christian school should be a first-class operation that is respected in the community. There are no shortcuts to developing a quality school.

Establishment of Policies

A strong board understands the difference between establishing board policies and administering the school. The board is responsible for establishing policies, and the administrator is responsible for administering the school within the framework of those policies. Supervision is needed to ensure that the board stays out of the school's administration.

Effective Board Meetings

Both regular meetings and special meetings are important. All members attend, informing the secretary of their impending absence if an emergency arises. Prior to the meeting, each member receives, via mail or email, the agenda, the minutes of the last meeting, and the most recent financial statement. This material should be studied in advance so the board member will be prepared to address each issue. Meetings need to begin punctually. Matters should be handled with prayer and in a businesslike way. Any new policies that are enacted should be entered in a separate board policy book as well as in the minutes of the meeting. The administrator should attend all meetings, usually having a voice but not a vote.

Major Decisions

Certain decisions in the life of the school are major. Therefore, the board should be nearly unanimous in making them. Still, board members must vote honestly, according to what they feel is right, not under a feeling of pressure because a nearly unanimous vote is requested. The problem with requesting a unanimous vote is that board members may feel that if they dissent they appear not to know God's will, and so they go along with the others even though they are not persuaded in their hearts.

No Partiality

Favoritism, or partiality, damages a school. Respect of persons will be detected quickly, and its outcome is always bad. Board members should never ask for special treatment for themselves or their friends. They should never exert even the least pressure on the administrator to be partial in a situation. According to James 2, respect of persons is sin.

Good Judgment

Good judgment is the ability to make correct decisions. In the school it means to understand the biblical teachings that apply and then to make the decision in accordance with them. To express it another way, good judgment from the

world's viewpoint is often not the same as good judgment from God's viewpoint. A board that makes major errors frequently cannot merit the confidence of the school family.

Relationships Within the School

The board must establish and maintain quality relationships with the administrator, teachers, parents, and students. Relationships with people outside the school must also be good. A strong board does not allow poor relationships to persist but is sensitive in dealing with people and situations.

Problems Among People

In Matthew 18, Jesus speaks of problems with people and ways to handle them. To apply this teaching to the school, the people directly involved should resolve any problems at the lowest level. If they are unable to reach a reconciliation, the administrator, and ultimately the school board, may become involved. None of these steps should be circumvented. The whole procedure is to be followed with a gentle spirit. Everyone should do what is right and should have a desire for the healing that accompanies reconciliation.

Faculty and Staff Welfare

The welfare of the faculty and staff demands effort throughout the year, not just at salary time. The board should raise salaries to reasonable levels and should offer benefits that are comprehensive and always improving. Christian school personnel should view their work as a ministry and rarely complain about their salaries as do their counterparts in secular education. The fact that the Christian school personnel do not strike does not mean that they are without financial needs. Their passivity in the area of finance puts responsibility on the board to become aware of their needs, paying them according to the professional services they render. Workers are worthy of their hire.

Encouragement to the Personnel

The faculty and staff are Christians who are serving God at the school, but they are also real people who need encouragement. Highly important to their morale is their attitude toward the school board. An encouraging, appreciative board follows the biblical admonition to bolster one another in the Lord.

Positive Leadership

It is important for the board to give positive leadership. The work does not progress if the leadership conveys an attitude of confusion, disappointment, or

despair. Negativity from the board hinders the entire ministry. It is hard for the administrator, teachers, and parents to rise above the leadership of the board. A quality board faces and resolves negative situations while remaining positive in its approach and attitude.

Competent Administrator

Some say that the most important job of the board is to hire the right administrator. It would be hard to over emphasize that need. Once the person is hired, it is equally important to retain that leader and invest in his or her further professional growth. Strong schools have stable administrators who give their lives to the ministry a day at a time.

Variety Among the Members

Boards benefit from members who have a wider perspective on the school when they represent a variety of occupations, educational backgrounds, and areas of expertise. It is a blessing to observe and reflect on the ways God has been preparing people years before their election or appointment to serve Him on the Christian school board.

Careful Organization

Good organization helps to get all the work done efficiently. Organizational charts are needed. Job descriptions should be written carefully. Charters and by-laws should be in good legal order. All these should be reviewed periodically and revised as warranted. They are not constantly in flux, but they are subjected to review as years pass and the school grows. A policy that was good in prior years may not be best now. Doctrine is not subject to change, but policies, procedures, and plans are.

Changes in Board Positions

It is healthy to have some change in board leadership positions. When the same persons hold the same board offices or chair the same board committees for many consecutive years, they tend to become mechanical or stagnant. Changes in assignment are stimulating and encouraging to the board. Too much change annually can be chaotic, for board members require some time to become oriented to their assignments before they will perform at their best. A good balance of continuity and change is needed.

Board Turnover Not Excessive

It takes time for board members to become seasoned workers. If there is excessive turnover because of dropouts or because members are allowed to serve only short terms, a veteran board cannot be developed. The result is a board that is always young, with a limited ability to see problems in perspective and with limited time to resolve the problems. Quality boards encourage veteran members while bringing in new members as well.

In-Service Training

Members of quality boards are students of Christian school education. They grow in their understanding of their ministry through planned in-service activities, including the following: (1) attending conferences and seminars for Christian school board members, (2) attending workshops led by educational consultants invited to meet with the local board, (3) listening to or watching tapes made specifically for school boards, (4) visiting strong Christian schools to talk with board members and administrators, and (5) reading books and magazines concerning the ministry of the Christian school board.

Strong Board-Administrator Relationship

The board-administrator relationship is the key relationship in the school, for its quality controls the quality of the school. Neither the board nor the administrator should allow anything less than an excellent relationship to occur. That relationship is preserved, nurtured, and encouraged to grow. It is cannot become what it should after much prayer and counsel, the administrator should leave the school, or board members who cannot get along with the administrator should resign. No stalemate and no adversarial positions can be tolerated.

Sound Admissions Policies

Two things are controlled for a Christian school to reach its objectives: the personnel and the students. Although its leaders are Christian and trust God, the school is probably not equipped to handle the educational needs of all children. The school must develop admissions policies that are in harmony with what it is able and called to do. It is honest to admit that the school is unable to meet the needs of all students instead of pretending that prayer and Christian teachers can accomplish everything even though the teachers are untrained to educate children with special needs. The solution is to help the teachers get the training and

to provide the facilities needed to educate children with a broader range of needs, a trend that has increased significantly throughout the country.

Obedience to Governmental Regulations

All relationships with state and federal governments should be clear and open. Particular care is taken with IRS matters and other matters involving money. Care is also needed in all dealings with the state department of education. There is wide variation among states as to how they work with their religious schools.

Financial Stewardship

The following are indication of quality in financial matters: (1) the board achieves and maintains financial stability; (2) budgeting is done accurately and soundly; (3) the budget is carefully controlled; (4) reports are clear, understood by all members, and always submitted on time; (5) the system for purchasing and payment is businesslike; (6) the school negotiates well to get the best prices; (7) the financial books are audited annually by an outside certified accountant; (8) the board does not over extend the school financially; and (9) the board is good at negotiating contracts for building projects.

Strategic Planning

Good Christian schools do not simply happen. They are the result of wise and forward-looking planning. Schools with adjacent land that is still available would be extremely wise to purchase it now or at least get the first option on it for future expansion. Then if the school grows, it will have space. If it does not grow, the land can be sold. Many schools deeply regret that they did not purchase adjoining land when they could have. Their vision was too small, and their strategic plans were inadequate.

Public Relations

The presentation of the school to the public takes planning. Actually the school has to be presented to several publics, including churches, the community, parents, students, pastors, alumni, and the parents of alumni. Various items may be shared with all the school's publics, while others will be presented carefully to one or two of them. In all public relations, the objective is to honor Christ. If He is honored, He will take care of the school.

Problem Solving

A strong school admits that it has problems, and it develops a procedure for identifying and solving them on a regular basis. Problems should be resolved at

the lowest level possible. Since the solution may produce unexpected side effects, it is prudent to adopt solutions on a trial basis and revise them as necessary before making them final. Quality schools devote extra time during the year to problem solving. A board retreat or an administrative retreat is good for this purpose. By their planning and forward thinking, good boards avoid some potential problems or conflicts.

Accreditation

Accreditation is meaningful in the education world. A quality school should strive to attain accreditation if in the process the spiritual integrity of the school can be maintained. If any compromise is required, accreditation becomes undesirable. The administrator and the faculty, with the support of the board, do the greatest amount of work for accreditation. To maintain accreditation, a school must go through a renewal process every five to ten years.

Marginal Decisions Avoided

Over a period of years, a Christian school becomes mediocre if the board frequently has given the benefit of the doubt in marginal decisions. For example, if marginal administrators are retained, if marginal teachers are rehired, or if marginal students are admitted or readmitted, the school will not have the quality it should have. The school exists for the students, and the board must always seek the best for them and not be satisfied with the merely adequate. Over time, the accumulation of soft decisions has a weakening effect on the school.

The Sense of Serving God

The members of a quality Christian school board have a strong sense that they are serving God. They regard board membership as an honor, not for any prestige it offers but for the opportunity to serve. Members should be humble, for they realize that all genuine progress in the school comes from God. They realize that one of them plants and another waters, but it is God alone who gives the increase. At the same time, they understand that their work for the Lord will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ.

Prayer

“Dear Father in heaven, work all that is well pleasing in your sight in and through the Christian school board. We pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be all the honor and glory forever. Amen.”