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# The HOA Board of Directors: How to Make a Positive Difference

Written by [John T. Kalas](#)

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Even though HOA boards of directors and property managers are responsible for property, the issues that arise most often are likely to be related to people rather than real estate. That makes the job more difficult, and board members have to navigate with a little finesse to succeed. Follow some basic rules and your board and community will work well.

## First Things First: Give Others Due Respect

Care and respect go a long way in our society, and the same applies to the relationships between HOA board members, as well as with the communities they serve. Think of an HOA as a democracy and you'll have a strong foundation. Like any democracy, the community you live in is made up of diverse individuals. We need to approach others with an authentic caring attitude and give them the respect they deserve. That even goes for times when we don't agree, and when respect is not reciprocated.

## Perception is Everything

Anyone who has been on an HOA board of directors knows this fundamental truth about communication: It's not what you say; it's how you say it. Remember, perception drives behavior!

Successful HOA boards are sensitive to the need to act and communicate with care, because perception drives behavior. Having too many extra meetings or taking an action without a meeting, for example, can communicate to the association that the board isn't operating democratically.

## Take the "Four-Way Test"

A good rule of thumb for boards is to heed the "four-way test" approach, developed almost 100 years ago by the founder of Rotary International. The method helps ensure that parameters around a problem are clear, which leads to better decisions and relationships.

When finalizing a decision, ask yourself:

Is it the truth?

Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better relationships?

Will it be beneficial for all concerned?

Looking at a fairly typical issue with many HOAs, you can see how applying the four-way test can save the day—or at least the board's effectiveness.

### *An Example: Internal Dispute*

Board members for an HOA got involved in a bitter dispute over the association's landscaping contract. One board member was upset over a decision that had been made regarding a landscaping company. The board argued and the dissenting member resigned.

How could this have gone differently? What would have happened if instead of arguing, members had a discussion about moving forward with the decision already agreed upon, but with a "let's see how it goes" attitude. Applying the tests of honesty, fairness, relationship-building and universal benefit, the board could take a course of action that everyone could live with: honor the originally chosen landscaping contractor; schedule an open meeting down the road to talk about the company's progress and the landscape appearance; and choose an

alternate vendor so that, should the current vendor do an unsatisfactory job, it can be replaced at the end of its 90-day probationary period.

Ultimately, HOA board members have the privilege of being in a position to make a difference in the quality of life within the community. It's about how they make decisions and a commitment to communicating with mutual respect, honesty, fairness and an authentic and caring attitude.

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John Kalas has served as CEO at Castle Breckenridge Management in San Diego, California for more than twenty years. He became CEO at APS (All Property Services) in 2011. His articles have appeared in professional publications such as Condo Management, Microsoft 2000 and Common Assessment Magazine. Mr. Kalas is CMCA and CCAM certified and holds a Masters of Education from University of Florida and a Ph.D. from United States International University.

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