



Got a Bored Board?

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They are the complaints we hear most often - "our board doesn't do enough (or much)," "a few members do all of the work," "we can't seem to get them to give." Take a good look at the membership - are they engaged and active, or are they doing the bare minimum, if anything at all? If your Board is bored, here are a few tips to help change things.

There are many reasons for lack of Board engagement, starting with how a member is recruited. Prospective members are often told that they "won't have to do much" as Executive Directors think that a large workload may discourage a good prospect from joining. And yet these same ED's are surprised when the new members don't do much. What did you expect? You told them they didn't need to be involved! Instead, present your prospect with a detailed list of duties and performance expectations. Rarely does someone join a Board knowing what they are supposed to do; it is your job to educate and guide them.

Regarding your extant Board, is its culture conducive to inaction and member boredom? Is it one of engagement and responsibility? Does it encourage fundraising and giving? Do only select few do all of the work? Does it set realistic goals? Think strategically? Defining the Board culture is a good way to determine areas where you can reinvigorate the membership. Here are a few suggestions for creating a productive board culture:

- Recruit those with passion for what you do. Ask how they would like to be involved in the organization's development.
- Connect them to the organization's work through site visits, conversations with staff, board retreats, and telling them compelling stories about your activities and their impact.
- Provide them with opportunities for their involvement outside of the Board Room - and to become acquainted with other members.

- Equip them with the training and resources they need to be a successful Board member. That may include lessons in understanding financial statements and the organizational structure, and it almost always includes how to ask donors for a gift! Consider a mentoring program to acclimate new members.
- Clearly define and communicate duties and expectations. Avoid dull or unimportant tasks - let them help you with the real challenges your institution is facing.
- Celebrate successes and recognize those who have contributed to that effort.
- Have a peer-to-peer accountability mechanism in place to ensure members report on their activities and they are fulfilling their duties or completing tasks they volunteered to do. Challenge those who are not maintaining an appropriate level of participation.
- Establish committees - and set clear objectives for them. Effective committees have focused assignments and important responsibilities that advance the Board's work. The added bonus? A Board member's engagement in your organization is strengthened and deepened through committee work.
- Have a purpose to your board meetings. Would you want to go to a meeting that is long, dull, and doesn't accomplish anything? Consider using consent agendas to move quickly through committee reports and use meetings to focus on more important matters, like strategic issues to advance the organization. It is your obligation to make meetings worth attending, since the Board members are required to be there.