

Session V Readings



Board Leadership
August 2020



ASPEN
IMPACT



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Leadership

“Live your life by a compass
not a clock.”

Stephen Covey

“Listen to anyone with an original idea,
no matter how absurd it may sound at first.
If you put fences around people, you get sheep.
Give people the room they need.”

William McKnight

“I'd rather have
a lot of talent and a little experience than
a lot of experience and a little talent.”

John Wooden

"Talk does not cook rice."

Chinese proverb



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Use Visuals to Aid in Board Recruitment

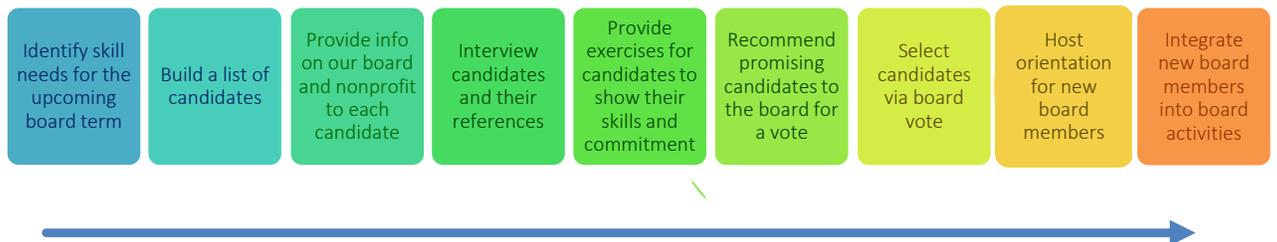
Visuals can help a board hone in on gaps in skills, talents, and perspectives, and then recruit with a clear intent. Sometimes it's easier to envision a future board by drafting and filling in a picture together than by creating a spreadsheet or a long list.

Elevate Our Board



Decide what kinds of skills we want our board members to possess. Color spaces for the spots we have filled and for the spots that are still available.

Share a process flow diagram to keep the recruitment and orientation steps clear and complete in the minds of your board members and candidates:





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Beware of the Bad, Bad Board!

If you detect these things in your board, it's time to take corrective action!

1. Agendas always look the same
2. Starting times creep later and later into the hour
3. Meetings are long, long, looooooong
4. Attendance is low and a quorum becomes a luxury
5. A few people dominate the discussions and decisions
6. Few or unclear decisions result from each meeting
7. The board president doesn't keep the meeting on track
8. Directors stay quiet and contribute little or nothing to the conversation
9. Directors nod their approval – or nod off – instead of thinking critically
10. Directors don't follow through on what they said they would do
11. Directors know little about each other's skills and reasons for being on board
12. Directors spread rumors and whisper secrets
13. Directors meddle in operations
14. Directors share information that is supposed to be confidential
15. Directors use their positions to promote or enrich themselves
16. Directors misrepresent their roles or your organization
17. Directors play with their phones during meetings
18. Directors complain outside of board meetings but never share their concerns with the executive committee or the board as a whole
19. Board membership oozes from one term to another without a reelection
20. New directors join the board through a sloppy or nonexistent vetting process
21. Existing directors quietly fade away instead of completing their terms
22. Outsiders have no idea how to apply for a board position
23. Staff, relatives, and assorted community members meddle in the meetings
24. The same issues come up year after year, and the board never seems to learn
25. No one writes, reads, or reviews the meeting minutes

We will discuss solutions to several of these issues during this and future Excellence Academy sessions. Meanwhile, what are your favorite solutions for these issues?



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Case Study: Rolling Right Along

“Haaarumph!” Harold bellowed through his bushy mustache. He folded his arms and frowned. “We don’t need some young whippersnapper telling us how to do our jobs.”

“But Harold, we need diverse representation,” Patty urged. “We are the *Community* Knitting Innovation Alliance. Our board needs a person of color who speaks for all people of color. And we need someone young who speaks for all the youth. And we need someone who represents the voice of tomorrow, because you sure don’t.”

“Whah? Why you... Barry, remove her at once! We can’t have disrespect here. Why, no one has talked to me like that in the fifty years I’ve been on this board. Haaarrumpph!!!!”

Barry whimpered. He’d only been the board president for two years and he only took the role because no one else wanted it. His wife said it’d look good on his resume, at least. He was having trouble finding enough bullet points to fill the page. “What is the rule for board removal?” he asked himself. He wracked his brain, but he just couldn’t remember, and oh, why didn’t he bring the bylaws to tonight’s meeting?? He was always forgetting. At least he remembered his comb. He looked desperately back at Harold, and then at Glen. Glen always knew what to do.

“Well, in a situation like this...” Glen began. He smoothed back a tuft of hair that had broken rank and dangled down his forehead. “...in a situation like this...well, Patty, dad gum it, why couldn’t you just play along? We can’t have this kind of disrespect, just like Harold said. He’s put in fifty years on this board. You’ve only been here twenty. And now I’m afraid you’ve been here a minute too long. So, um, well, I don’t have to say it, do I?”

“Glen Forthwith Traverson Milquetoast the Fourth, how *dare* you! I will not let you and that walrus over there tell *me* to take a hike. If it weren’t for your father and your grandfather, *you* wouldn’t have even been voted onto this board. If you want me to leave, you’d better hit the gym and come back when you’ve got the muscle to carry me out of here.”

Meanwhile, Clarissa gnawed at her pencil. She had the bylaws on pages eighteen to nineteen in her binder. She knew them by heart, too. The board couldn’t remove Patty without cause. But then, should she really say something? It would be impolite to interject while everyone else was so engrossed. Maybe if she raised her hand...just a little... maybe Barry would let her speak? Then again, no, she should wait until everyone else had a chance to talk. If she commented now, Glen would probably shoot back that she was “acting all high and mighty, like a typical lawyer.” That’s how he responded when she spoke up back in 2015.

Just then Gabe piped up. “Hey there, everyone, I know I’m kinda new here. But say, couldn’t we just all get along? I like what Patty said about diversity. I have a friend who, um, ‘checks the boxes’ in terms of equity and all that, so I can ask him if he wants to be on



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board. He's usually available on Thursday nights. Oh, plus he's a vegetarian, so he won't hurt our pepperoni pizza budget. Whaddya say?"

"Sounds good. We'll take him." Glen beamed. "Equity. Yes, indeed: that'll look fantastic on our grant proposals. Barry, do we need to vote on this?"

"Huh?" Barry had been fiddling with the keys to his Oldsmobile. "Um. Yes, yes, we need to vote. That's in the bylaws, isn't it, Claire?"

"Clarissa," the lawyer corrected him. She wrinkled her nose. "Yes, we need to vote. But shouldn't we intervi--"

"Great!" Glen slapped a hand on the table. "I move to approve – Gabe, what's your friend's name? – anyway, I move to approve Gabe's friend for the board! All in favor?"

"Aye," Harold mumbled. "Aye!" Patty beamed. "Yeah! Cool!" Gabe yelped. "Uh-huh," Barry added. And with that, Gabe's friend was on the board.

Two hours later, the board had agreed on the napkin colors for the staff Thanksgiving party, approved the Executive Director's report on the summer intern's performance, and decided to hold the annual golf fundraiser in September. People were tired of the 'stay at home' routine, so they'd surely pay top dollar to mingle at the Pennsy Putters Country Club. "We could even give a commemorative mask to the winner, and a bottle of hand sanitizer to the runner-up," Harold noted approvingly. "We'll have our Fundraising Committee draw up the details. My friends Thelma and Luis own the club, so they'll give us a deal on game fees. I will put the squeeze on them during my next insurance sales call, heh, heh. There's always a back to scratch in this business."

"Well then," Glen smiled, "if that's all there is, I think we're done here. Barry, wanna call this one a wrap?"

"Okay. All in favor of adjournment?" Five minutes later, Patty headed for the exit, Harold tucked in his shirt, and Gabe finished off that final slice of pizza he had been eyeing on the table. Barry was proud of himself. He'd gotten the meeting done in time for the "Late, Late Night Show" and he could not wait to fire up his cassette player for the drive home.

Discussion

1. Suppose you are a grant officer. You attended this board meeting, and now you have to file a report to your supervisors at the Daisy Endowment. What are the top three concerns you would list about the Alliance's board?
2. Now suppose you are Patty. What would you do build your credibility and influence as a member of this board?



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3. Suppose you are Gabe's friend. How would you feel about this board's approach to diversity? What would you want to know in order to decide whether this board would be a good fit for you?
4. What would you do to "freshen up" and improve this board?

Reflection and Application

1. What lessons from this case study are applicable to your organization?
2. What new courses of action might you take in your organization in the future?
3. What risks might you face? How might you address these risks?
4. Outline the next three steps you will take. List specific ways you will engage your board members as you proceed.