

QUESTION: How can we breath some new life into our Board?

Bored with your Board?

Do you feel stuck in rut with your board? Have you had the same discussions repeatedly at board meetings without any progress? Is the board all talk and no action? It may be time to think about revitalizing your board with new faces, and fresh ideas. Here are some steps to consider when trying to transform your board from a dead weight to a force that can energize your organization:

Take stock.

When in doubt, take time to assess your situation. If you think that you need a newer board, take time to evaluate the reasons why. Just as with an organizational assessment, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the board, gauge its capacity, and identify the skill or resource gaps that are affecting board performance.

Accept that things are going to change—but not overnight.

Often times, non-profit executive directors or board members express the need for change, but are resistant when changes are proposed. It has become a generally accepted management principle that change can be scary, and makes many managers feel exposed, vulnerable and threatened. It is important that the leadership of the organization understands that recruiting new and qualified board members will benefit the organization, and ultimately contribute to the effective management of the organization.

At the other end of the spectrum, some managers think if they make a few changes to the board, things are going to improve overnight. It is important to understand that boards have an energy level, dynamic and culture that will not change overnight. Additionally, true sustainable and systemic change takes time.

Don't let the fear of offending long time supporters get in the way of re-energizing the board.

It is indeed a sticky task to ask someone to step down that has been on the board for a long time, and contributed much to the organization. While the discussion may be difficult, it is important to communicate to long time board members and supporters that new ideas and networks are important to the long term growth of an organization, and that there are other ways to continue to contribute. Some organizations respect the contribution of long time board members by recognizing them as honorary board members, or acknowledge their need to contribute by asking them to serve in an advisory capacity or by chairing a committee.

Approach board recruitment as you would for an open staff position.

People succeed when they have a clear understanding what is expected of them. Just as you would for a staff position, create a “job description” for board members which highlights roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Make sure to highlight any minimum fundraising, committee, and contribution requirements.

Also, make sure to be discerning. I have seen many Executive Directors offer board positions to anyone that shows the slightest interest in the organization. Take the time to search for those who are qualified, willing, and able to commit to the organization.

Form a committee.

Because recruiting board members is such an important task, the responsibility should not rest on one person. Forming a committee helps increase the number of channels for outreach, as well as enhance the decision making process by offering multiple viewpoints.

Look to different sources to conduct outreach.

Referrals from existing board members are a great way to conduct outreach. However, if you want to change the make-up of the board, consider reaching out to areas untapped in your organization's history. Consider reaching out to area graduate schools or local businesses for prospective board members.

These steps, and your own innovative ideas, can help you find fresh faces and new ideas for your organization.