

Improving Board Effectiveness

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Non-profit organizations face many challenges, both on staff, among volunteers, and on the board. Focused and strong leadership from the board can lead to a high-functioning, results-driven organization.



A board of directors - whether small or large - needs cohesion in a variety of ways. On paper, a board shares a common purpose, but each member needs to believe that every other person on the board is an asset to the shared goal, and that the goal is, in fact, shared by all. Often board members fail to recognize how much they have in common with each other, or don't fully see the variety of skills that their fellow board members have, instead focusing on differences and divisions. In this environment, meetings can become full of interpersonal grievances and agenda items overrun by petty disagreements. When this happens, it is often difficult to turn things around to improve the effectiveness and commitment of the board of directors.

Putting energy into aligning the board's vision, not only of the organization, but of itself, can go a long way towards making your board more effective. Taking time for a few simple activities to build cohesion is an excellent investment. Here are three simple exercises to improve your board's commitment and effectiveness to your organization.

Exercise One: Clearing The Air (10 minutes)

This activity is not shared with the entire group; it is an individual activity. Start by having each board member write down on pieces of paper any outstanding "grudges" they have with others in the room. Be specific: who did what and when. Be sure to have them describe what a video camera would see, not an opinion ("She was late to the meeting today" versus "She's disrespectful"). For each grudge, have members:

1. Name their part in creating or perpetuating the situation ("I've never said it's important to me that we start on time").
2. Identify what next step they could take to change the situation in the best interest of the board ("Tell her I'd like to start on time and ask if that's something she can do").
3. Give themselves a timeframe and method to make that step ("I'll ask her by phone tomorrow").

At the end of this exercise, ask board members to put aside this 'baggage' (don't share it with the group) and begin to be open to new ideas.

Exercise Two: Share the Vision (*2 minutes per board member*)

Go around the room and have each member describe the role of a board member and what their vision for the organization is. Take notes on a flip chart for all to see. Set a time limit or have a “timer” as necessary. Be sure to review the commonalities when everyone is done.

Exercise Three: Discovering Our Resources (*30 seconds per member*)

Create a list with the names of all your board members. At your next meeting, distribute a copy to each member and have them anonymously write one skill or attribute each board member brings to the board. Collect the anonymous lists, and outside of the meeting, combine the lists and distribute them so that each member gets a list of all “their” skills and attributes. If you have time, read the lists at a future meeting.

After doing any of these exercises, consider going around the room so each person can say one word about how they feel. Board members often report feeling more confident in the group's abilities, a greater sense of teamwork, and increased sense of being valued.

Improving each member's perception of their board will push them to go the extra mile and truly move your organization forward!

For more information on Board Development, Teambuilding, and related issues, click [here](#). To schedule a training with **do good Consulting**, contact us at dogood@dogoodconsulting.org or 217-778-1687.