



The Leadership Letter

Turn A Micromanaging Board Around

If your board seems to spend more time debating whether to serve chicken or fish at the annual meeting and less time on strategic planning, you're not alone. Whether it's because they hail from a management background professionally or because they have risen through the ranks of your organization via more hands-on positions (or both), many volunteer leaders have a natural tendency to do what they know best: micromanage.

Perhaps the bigger problem is that when a new board member who may *not* have those micromanaging tendencies (yet) doesn't know what to do, he or she looks to other board members for direction. Pretty soon, a potentially visionary new board member becomes another micromanager, and the board finds itself caught in a vicious cycle.

So how do you break the cycle and move your board members forward? According to Karla Taylor, a communications consultant in Bethesda, MD, the answer is to get training, monitor your progress, and cultivate a culture of strategic thinkers.

Get the Right Training

- Integrate leadership training into your board orientation.
- Train from the bottom up so that when someone who started as a local leader works their way up to your board, they'll have the skills and mindset your board needs already ingrained in them.

- Hire a consultant who can offer broad experience and objectivity.

Monitor Your Progress

- Keep meetings on track by quickly recognizing when the board veers away from its strategic role.
- Implement a monitoring system that is both fun and effective. Ring a cowbell, sound an air horn—whatever works to steer everyone back in the right direction.
- Rotate the job of "designated pest," as Taylor calls it, among everyone except the President and Executive.

Cultivate the Right Culture

- Invite forward-thinking outsiders into Board discussions—for example, an authority on the topic at hand or even a member of your organization.
- Encourage and reassure each other (and yourself) that this new way of thinking will make a difference. Change is not easy.
- Meet outside the box. Hotel boardrooms are hardly conducive to visionary thinking. Find a meeting venue that will inspire board members to think big. Consider a retreat center or local children's museum.

Source: Karla Taylor, "Battling Sick Board Syndrome," *Association Management*, November 2000, <<http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/AMMagArticleDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=4871>>, accessed on March 8, 2012.

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Leadership Commission Members

Joyce P. Jones, Chair, VA

Crystal Campbell, SC

Marti Nicholson, OK

Cindy Ramagos, LA

Katie Shaughnessy-Williams, KY

Four Challenging Board Personalities

Each person that volunteers to serve on a Board of Directors brings to that Board their own unique personality traits and perspectives—some good, some not-so-good. If a board member is causing problems, Shari Frisinger, President of CornerStone Strategies, LLC, recommends that “no matter what personality, the first thing you need to do is try to determine the reasons for the behavior so you can engage them the best way possible.”

Below are four personality types you may encounter on your Board, how to work more effectively with those who fit the profiles, and what to do if you (yes, YOU!) find yourself falling into one of these categories:

The “Yes” Board Member

This board member may do a lot of nodding and smiling, agrees with almost anything, and is so nonassertive that they almost disappear. Most likely, the “Yes” board member just wants to be liked and has been taught that laying low and going with the flow is the best way to achieve that goal.

To better engage a “Yes” board member, encourage dissension, discussion, and wild ideas. Create a board culture in which ideas and innovation are welcomed with open minds.

If you’re the “Yes” board member, make more of an effort to give your true opinion. If you really do agree, that’s fine. If you’re on the fence, say you need to look into the issue before forming an opinion. If you disagree, say so and say why.

The Micromanager

Micromanagers like to be in

control, do not like to delegate, and assume everything as their own responsibility. This may be because their role on the board is especially important to them, because they’re using their control to build low self-confidence, or because they feel a sense of “me against the world” and find comfort in control.

Acknowledge a micromanager’s ideas, but don’t always do what they say. If a micromanager steps on your toes, say, “Thank you for your input, but this is my project, and I’ll take full responsibility for the outcome, no matter what.”

If you find yourself being a micromanager, be sure not to be too stern or authoritarian in your tone. Ask yourself, “Will this matter to me in a day/week/month/year?” If the answer is no, try not to sweat the details.



The Devil’s Advocate

The Devil’s Advocate loves control, thinks he or she is always right, and nitpicks at every detail. Power and prestige are big motivators here. A Devil’s Advocate tends to be in a constant “fight mode,” feeling that their ego, credibility, and/or reputation are at risk.

Working with this personality means acknowledging but not always agreeing. Once you agree, you may find yourself backed into a corner. When you want to discuss your own ideas, be very forthcoming with your thinking and reasoning so you’ll have something concrete to discuss. Always play offense, never defense, with a Devil’s Advocate.

If this profile fits you, ask yourself why you’re acting this way to determine if the issue really is that important to you. If you truly believe you have a good point, explain why.

The Detached Board Member

When a board member is detached, they appear “zoned out” or even miserable and don’t participate in discussions. They may be too afraid to get involved in a discussion, or maybe they’re just preoccupied with a personal, family, or work issue.

If you have a detached board member, ask them directly for their feedback. Say, “What do you think, Mary?” Pull them aside to let them know that their detachment is noticeable and ask how you can help.

If you’ve become detached, first acknowledge the problem. If the cause is a lack of passion for the topic of discussion, make a conscious effort to focus on the meeting. If you find yourself “zoning out” all the time, honestly consider whether or not you wish to remain on the board.

Source: Samantha Whitehorn, “The Many Personalities of Board Members,” *Associations Now*, January 2011, <<http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/ANowDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=57249>>, accessed on March 7, 2012.

Dealing With Board Burnout

Volunteer leaders and board members are typically those who are passionate about and committed to serving a particular cause. Unfortunately, that passion and drive don't make a person invincible, and they may—for a variety of reasons—fall victim to burnout.

Signs of Burnout

- Mission fatigue—loss of passion for the cause.
- Low attendance at meetings.
- Poor participation during meetings.

Causes of Burnout

- Life stages. People in different stages of life have varying amounts of time to devote to volunteer activities.
- Career changes that divert the time and attention of an otherwise active, engaged board member.
- Personality conflicts that may cause board members to withdraw and disengage.
- Leadership transitions that upset the “status quo” can really leave some board members feeling disrupted, disoriented, or even threatened, causing them to

lose interest.

- Unrealistic expectations and demands on board members' time.
- Poor management that causes perpetual board burnout. This is a serious issue that an organization must address.

Preventing Burnout

- Implement term limits. 3 years is a common limit.
- Establish expectations up front so board members enter their positions knowing exactly what they're in for.
- Aim for diversity. Recruit board members with different skills, interests, and personalities.
- Recruit new members. A fresh supply of ideas will keep things interesting.
- Use committees wisely. Committees offer board members the chance to use their talents and pursue their interests while taking some of the tedious detail work out of full-board meetings.
- Implement annual performance reviews and offer members whose personal situations have changed a graceful exit from the board.

- Make board service meaningful for each member. Maximize meeting time and engage each member's interests.

Treating Burnout

- Confront the affected board member(s), graciously explore the cause of the burnout, and determine the proper remedy.
- Revitalize board members if burnout is a board-wide issue. Consider hiring a consultant, holding a retreat, or rethinking your committee structure and assignments.
- Consider an alternate service assignment. If the burnout is incurable but the person is valuable to and still interested in your organization, find another way for them to serve off the board.
- If all else fails, terminate the board member's service on the board according to your organization's bylaws.

Source: X Factor Consulting, LLC, “Combating Board Burnout,” <<http://www.xfactorllc.com/resources/articles/detail.asp?id=59>>, April 21, 2008, accessed on March 8, 2012.



Do You Know About the SECA Board Resources Page?

Find board rosters, meeting minutes, and so much more on the SECA Board Resources Page. Go to http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/seca_board_resources.php to log in. If you serve on a SECA affiliate board and do not have a password, contact your SECA Board Representative or the SECA office at 1-800-305-7322.

New Resources Available on the Board Resources Page:

SECA 2013 Save the Date Ad | President-elect Candidate Bios



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The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is committed to improving the quality of care and education for young children and their families through advocacy and professional development.

The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is a regional organization committed to promoting quality care and education for young children and their families. SECA is committed to providing leadership and support to individuals and groups by:

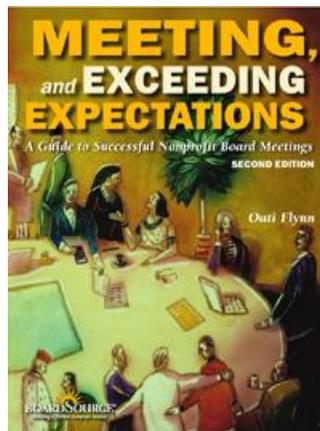
- *Enhancing the quality of young children's lives through early childhood care and education.*
- *Supporting families in their roles of caring for their children.*
- *Fostering the professional growth and status of individuals working with young children and their families.*

Helpful Resources from BoardSource

One challenge volunteer leaders and organizations face is finding reliable, practical resources that hold the information they need in order to serve their organization and their members effectively, efficiently, and ethically.

A great place to turn for such resources is BoardSource. In its mission to advance the public good by building exceptional nonprofit boards and inspiring board service, BoardSource provides an array of resources and services for nonprofits, including membership, online articles, an annual conference, and more.

Some of BoardSource's publications that you may find useful include:



Meeting, and Exceeding Expectations: A Guide to Successful Nonprofit Board Meetings, Second Edition

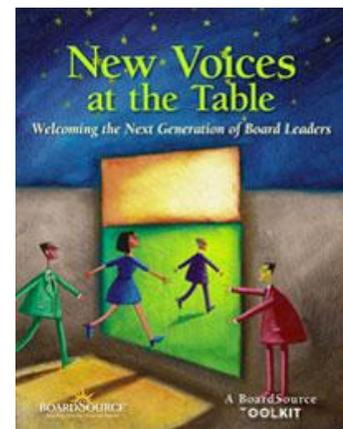
By Outi Flynn

© 2009. 141 pages. Available in print and digital formats.

New Voices at the Table: Welcoming the Next Generation of Board Leaders
(a downloadable toolkit)

By BoardSource

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Go to www.BoardSource.org for more information and resources.