

Issue 14  
January 2009

Southern Early Childhood Association



SOUTHERN EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION

# Leadership Letter

## Conference 2009

### Leadership Highlights:

#### Wednesday, January 28th:

- 3– 6:30 PM Leadership Summit Hilton Hotel, East Ballroom  
6:45– 9 PM Leadership Reception and Dinner Hilton Hotel  
Mezzanine and Dunes Ballroom

#### Thursday, January 29th:

- 5-6 PM Local Affiliate Leadership Meeting, Palisades B  
Hilton Conference Center

#### Saturday, January 31st:

- 9:45-10:30 AM SECA Business Meeting  
Hilton Hotel, Hilton Ballroom

### Sessions of Interest:

#### Friday

- 9-10 AM: The Successful Leader  
12:45-1:45 PM The Kaleidoscopic Leader  
2-3 PM Leadership and Advocacy in Early Childhood Education

#### Saturday

- 10-11 Growing the Next Generation of Leaders  
The Braid to Benefit Children  
11:15-12:15 Making the Most of Staff Meetings  
Strategies for Mentors  
12:24-1:45 Essential Components for Successful Fundraising

#### Inside this issue:

Conference 2009	1
The Board Builds Its Sense of Self: Bodybuilding	2
Resource Recommendation	3
Board Meetings By Phone: Legal? A Good Idea?	3
Board Cafe	4
SECA Information	4
Leadership	4

#### Leadership Commission Members

- Toni Cacace-Beshears, VA
- Judy Carnahan-Webb, TX
- Susan Carrigan, OK
- Cindy Ramagos, LA

# The Board Builds Its Sense of Self: Body Building For Boards

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Jan Masaoka, in her article , published in *Blue Avocado*, December 2008, states the most effective attribute of an effective board is also its most intangible: an independent sense of self. This sense of self is the Board's identity as a BODY rather than a group of individuals who find ways to support the organization.

As individuals, board members act as supporters of the organization, and see themselves as supporters of the executive director as well. They speak to the community on the organization's behalf. In contrast, when acting as a BODY, the Board speaks to the organization on behalf of its constituency. While individual board members are cheerleaders, the board as a whole is the team owner; looking at both the season record and the bottom line, and evaluating the head coach.

Here are Jan's five easy ways to strengthen the board's sense of self:

1. *Hold regular executive sessions. Discussions without staff present allow board members to float ideas and tentative concerns. Making the sessions a standard quarterly event keeps executive directors from being alarmed.*
2. *Have an annual social event for board members only—no staff, no executive director. A take-out dinner at a board member's home perhaps, or other non-required social events go a long way towards helping board members see themselves as an entity outside the boardroom.*
3. *Board Member Briefings: 7x7. Individual board members are seldom given a chance to shine EXCEPT as helpers. It is hard to recognize how their professional knowledge and personal backgrounds can inform strategy and drive accountability to the community, when we only know about their fundraising work of committee ability. The board chair can schedule a seven minute briefing at each meeting by a board member. Seven minutes—no more! Then seven questions and answers (total time 15 minutes) Be strict about time! Examples:*
  - *A person in marketing for a bank can present on two marketing concepts*
  - *A former affiliate member/client can relate his/her personal experience as a member/client.*
  - *A child development specialists can talk about the different schools of thought on child development, and current cutting edge topics.*
  - *A pharmaceutical VP can explain what are the drivers in AIDS drugs development*
4. *Annually conduct an evaluation of the executive director. One venture capitalist says for the non-profit boards she sits on: "The main question in my mind at every meeting is simply: should we fire the CEO or not?" In contrast, a frequent complaint of non-profit executives is that THEY have to prod the board into completing an evaluation. What ever the method, just be sure you do it.*
5. *The executive director should take care to step back at board meetings and not dominate discussions. If you are the board chair, work with your executive to put reports in writing and take staff reports off the agenda unless there is a decision to be made at the meeting related to the report. If you are a board member, read all reports before hand and have a brief chat before and after meetings. If you are the executive: be quiet more often. Restrain your instinctive reaction to explain everything every time. Instead, see your job as "leading the board to lead".*

In short don't be a bunch of really good board members. Be a board that sees itself as more than just 1+1+1+.... When a board has a sense of itself as a body, it will take the time to be sure that it has the information and relationships to act as a body, and be more prepared for holding the organization accountable.

\_\_\_Adapted from <http://www.blueavocado.org/node/250>, retrieved 12/12/2008

# Board Meetings By Phone: Legal? A Good Idea?

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With gas prices and everyone getting busier, more and more board members want to participate in board meetings by phone. The advantage: more people participate. The disadvantage: there is a lot lost in human interaction for both the board member and the board as a whole, when the meetings are not face-to-face. Consider this policy a member can attend by phone only twice per year, and new members can attend by phone only after they have been to three meetings in person. Some boards do not permit participation by phone at all. If you decide to have some people phoning in to meetings, do not just use the speaker phone option on a regular phone. Invest in a dedicated speaker phone with “duplex features” so that the sound can travel both directions simultaneously and everyone can actually hear.

What are the laws on board meetings by conference call? Such matters are regulated by states (not the federal government) so organizations need to talk with their attorney general. The most recent compilation of state laws is from 1999, but it gives you a sense of variance among states: [http://www.muridae.com/nporegulation/documents/teleconf\\_definitions.html](http://www.muridae.com/nporegulation/documents/teleconf_definitions.html).

Eric Mercer’s links take you to the section of each state’s code that describes the rules (remember, the law of the non-profit’s home state applies, not the law where the board member lives). For example, a California excerpt reads: “Participants in a meeting through the use of a conference telephone...constitutes presence in person at that meeting if all members participating in the meeting can hear one another.” The meeting minutes should show, at the start of the meeting, that all persons attending confirmed they could hear everyone else.

— Adapted from <http://www.blue-avocado.org/category/topic/board-café>, retrieved 12/12/08

## Resource Recommendation

*The Fifth Discipline Field book: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*  
*Peter Senge, Richard Ross, Bryan Smith, Charlotte Roberts and Art Kleiner*  
*Doubleday, 2008*



**SOUTHERN EARLY CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

SECA  
PO Box 55930  
Little Rock, AR

Phone: 1-800-305-7322  
Fax: 1-501-227-5297

*Promoting Quality Care and  
Education for Young Children and  
Their Families*

[http://  
southernearlychildhood.org](http://southernearlychildhood.org)

*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.*
- *Increasing public understanding and support for policies and programs which ensure developmentally based services to young children and their families.*
- *Focusing on Southern issues concerning children and families*

## Board Cafe

I searched the Board Café website at: <http://www.compasspoint.org> The following articles are posted and can be downloaded for free for this month:

- Working Board vs. Governing Board
- Evaluation of the Executive Director
- Critical Path for the Board
- What Do I Say to A Donor or Funder?
- Reasons to Have and Reasons Not to Have an Attorney on the Board

## Leadership

The very essence of leadership is that you have to have a vision. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet.—Theodore Hesburg

Remember it is far better to follow well than to lead diffidently.—John G. Vance