Accountability in Action: Enforcing Board Member Responsibilities

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August 3, 2011
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To participate in today’s webinar, you must
– LOG-IN to SEE the Web portion; and
– DIAL-IN to HEAR the audio portion.
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Accountability: What’s the Big Deal?
• Transparency and accountability should be more than “buzzwords” at your association

• True accountability starts and ends with the Board

• Holding board members accountable may be easier said, than done, but…

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What influences (bad) behavior?
• Perceptual filters
• Cast of "characters"
• Lack of clarity (board roles and board/staff relationship)
• Personal agendas
• Lack of clear rules and accountability mechanisms (unmanaged child syndrome)

It Takes a Village
• Each board member sees the world (and your nonprofit) through their own unique lens.
• Differences are good! When the going gets rough, remind yourself that your mission requires more than:

Perceptual filters
- Fatalist
- Hierarchist
- Individualist
- Egalitarian

Perceptual Filters

- **Egalitarian - fearful and risk averse** – if you can’t prove it’s safe assume it’s dangerous & invoke the precautionary principle (“minimize regrets rather than maximize benefits”).
- **Individualist - optimistic and pragmatic** - if you can’t prove it’s dangerous assume it’s safe
- **Fatalist** – ducks if she sees something about to hit her, otherwise que sera sera.
- **Hierarchist** – additional information is needed to find the right answer.

Cast of Board Characters

(see 20 Dysfunctional Board Member Character Types for the Full Cast)

**Common Board Characters:**

- **The Playwright** – scripts scenarios before the board meeting; expects everyone to follow his instructions.
- **The Queen** – seeks inputs and then makes pronouncements about what shall be done.
- **Machiavelli** – master of the power play.
- **The Director** – knows what’s best for everyone. Finds a way to leave the contributions of dissenters on the cutting room floor.

**More Common Board Characters:**

- **The Expert** – first one to speak up and remind fellow cast members of his expertise.
- **ED Wannabe** – positioning to take over the ED’s job.
- **The Bomber** (special effects expert) – drops a bomb during the board meeting and watches what happens.
- **Big Daddy** – well known with inflated ego; cell phone is certain to ring during every board meeting.
Additional Causes of Bad Behavior

- Lack of clarity (board roles and board/staff relationship)
- Personal agendas
- Lack of clear rules and accountability mechanisms ("unmanaged child syndrome")

Dealing with Problem Directors

- **Position the Chair**
  - Advance notice of chair's role/duties, reminders, coaching
  - Position description for the Chair
  - Not everyone has the skills to be an effective Chair
  - Specialized training for Chairs

Dealing with Problem Directors

- **The agenda is your friend... use it!**
  - Directors should insist on having and following an agenda
  - Learn how to use a consent agenda to speed up meetings
Dealing with Problem Directors

• Use a Board Position Description
  ▪ Distribute it early (before election) and often
  ▪ Refer to it as often as necessary
  ▪ Update it as necessary

Dealing with Problem Directors

• Provide training
  ▪ Don’t assume your board already “knows how”
  ▪ Consider a third party who can deliver an unvarnished message about board duties
  ▪ Board education is an ongoing process not a one time event

Dealing with Problem Directors

• The “Heart to Heart”
  ▪ There is a reason and you need to find it
  ▪ Isolate the Issue
Dealing with Problem Directors

• Use a Board Handbook
  ▪ Generic information on duties and responsibilities of directors
  ▪ Specific information on board procedures
  ▪ Articles, Bylaws and policies

Dealing with Problem Directors

• Remember “right resources”
  ▪ Use the proper “tool” for the job, and
  ▪ Send the appropriate emissary
  ▪ Tap other volunteers – “peer management”

Dealing with Problem Directors

• Empower your Governance Committee
  ▪ Director recruitment and training
  ▪ Enforce policies & procedures
  ▪ Enlist assistance with problem directors
Thank you!

- Join me next month for “Fiscal Oversight, Risk and the Nonprofit Board” – Wednesday, September 7th at 2 pm Eastern
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