

Boardroom Bearings

Navigating to Board Excellence



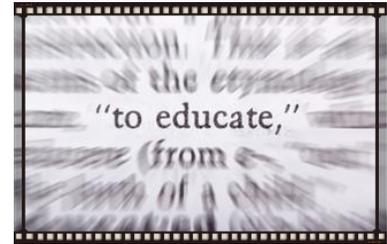
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Board Development Step 6: EDUCATE

Board service shouldn't be BORING!

A strong program of board education beats the blahs of board service.

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge wrote, "Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we were never able to do."



Why bother with board education?

Yes, people are asked to serve on boards in part because of the knowledge they bring. But chances are, most board members do not have sufficient knowledge about the field in which the nonprofit operates or an adequate understanding of their fiduciary responsibilities.

For an organization to stay competitive and for a board to make well-informed decisions, board education is essential.

What do board members need to know?

To learn the answer to that question, just ask board members to suggest topics that would help them and the board do a better job. Ask for ideas in meeting evaluations, on board self-assessments, and in exit interviews when board members step down.

The options for increasing board knowledge are extensive. To inspire board members to identify their learning needs, try offering a menu of choices that might include: legislation and regulation that affect the organization; changing demographics in the service area or service population; mission-related challenges; what the competition is doing; how to read the financial statements; trends in fund-raising; liability issues; the ins and outs of evaluation; and so forth.

What are some methods to use in board education?

Nearly every board meeting should have an educational component. To keep things lively, use a variety of methods and vary the time devoted to different topics. Ideas include:

- * Send a thought-provoking article in the board packet and discuss it at the meeting.

In This Issue

[Why bother with board education? What do they need to know?](#)

[Use a variety of methods](#)

[Linked in's tool for finding potential board members](#)

[Planning for leadership emergencies](#)

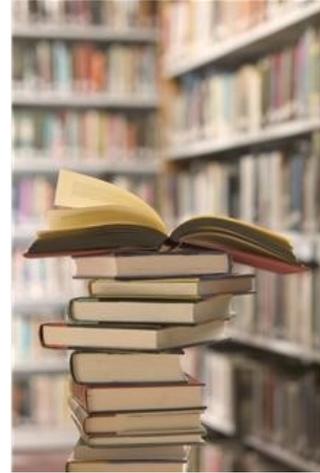
[New infographic](#)

[Question of the Month](#)

[Interview postponed](#)

[Re-cap](#)

- * Ask a service-recipient to tell their story.
- * Go on a field trip.
- * Ask a consultant to make a short presentation on an issue of concern to the organization.
- * Send one or more board members to a workshop or conference and ask for a report on what they learned.
- * Invite a local leader (legislator, educator, therapist, business person, etc.) to talk about social or civic issues.
- * Use a set of news stories to focus a conversation on a particular issue such as board oversight, fund-raising, economic issues, etc.
- * Schedule a retreat so the board can do a deep dive on a particular topic.
- * Invite a funder to talk about factors used to evaluate proposals or changes in the funding climate.
- * Ask an educational researcher to present new findings related to the organization's mission area.
- * Plan a discussion on one aspect of the board's operations such as increasing board diversity or improving board meetings.



Linked in can help you find potential board members

Have you heard that Linked in has developed a tool to help nonprofits find volunteers and board members? You can go to their system and search for individuals in your city/area who have qualifications and experience that you are looking for.



To learn about one nonprofit CEO's experience with Linked in's new service, read this [interview](#): "Linked in as a resource for finding potential board members" (articles on this page are listed alphabetically).

And here are two informative postings on Linked in:
<http://nonprofit.linkedin.com/find-board-members.html>
<http://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20140214064229-162708-great-potential-board-members-are-looking-for-your-organization>

The direct URL to Linked in's board member service is
<http://nonprofit.linkedin.com/find-board-members.html>

Planning for leadership emergencies

Here is a fine [article](#) from *Nonprofit Quarterly* that will inspire executives and boards to get moving on succession planning.



New infographic on nonprofit restructuring and collaboration

This new [infographic](#) presents three images that would be useful in board conversations:

1. Collaboration best practices from the funder's perspective and from the nonprofit's perspective
2. How funders are supporting nonprofit collaboration
3. Why nonprofits are collaborating.



Question of the Month

Q: How can we improve board meetings?

A: A regular reader of *Boardroom Bearings* recently asked for ideas on how to improve her board meetings. Of course, there are millions of sources for tips. Almost 45 million, actually, in a Google search for "how to improve nonprofit board meetings."

Before single-handedly launching an initiative on improving board meetings, the board chair and the executive director/CEO need to be in agreement that the subject is important.

Then, in addition to collecting best practices from some of the resources found in the Google search, a really logical place to start the discussion is by asking the board members for their ideas. Their buy-in will influence the success of any change initiative.

Use one of the following methods for soliciting board members' ideas, depending on the existing boardroom dynamics:

- An open discussion followed by specific agreement on which suggestions to implement
- A confidential questionnaire followed by a report of results at the next meeting, discussion, and agreement on which suggestions to implement.

Interview with Mike Hennessy postponed

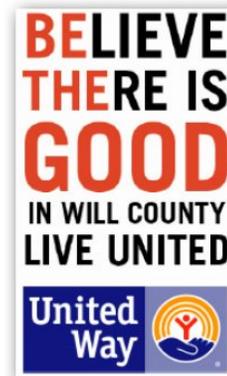
Most subscribers to this newsletter need no introduction to Mike Hennessy. For those readers who are not in the southwest suburbs of Chicago, Mike is President and CEO of the United Way of Will County.

I thought it would be thought-provoking for any nonprofit leader to hear a United Way CEO's observations about governance, so I scheduled an interview with Mike. I planned to ask, for example:

- * To what extent do governance practices affect whether an organization receives a funding allocation?
- * What governance practices does United Way's Programs and Allocations Committee look at most closely?
- * What governance practices **MUST** be in place in order for the United Way to make a funding allocation?

The interview with Mike was scheduled, then re-scheduled, and finally had to be moved to a later date. Mike is laser-focused these days on the Will County Campaign - as he should be. United Way funding is essential for the many programs that benefit people throughout the county; of course we all want the campaign to succeed!

As of now, you can look for the interview in next month's issue of *Boardroom Bearings*. And if you haven't donated to your local United Way, please consider doing so.



Re-cap

Since choosing board members has powerful implications for the future effectiveness of the board and the success of the organization, we are running a 9-part series on building an effective board of directors. Topics so far have been IDENTIFY, CULTIVATE, RECRUIT, ORIENT and INVOLVE. [Previous newsletters may be accessed here.](#)

Boardroom Bearings...

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...is published monthly. To subscribe your organization's board chair, board members, CEO, or other staff, please forward the newsletter with a suggestion that they subscribe.



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