Ten tips to guide a conversation with new members of the board of directors:

1. **Governance is Not Management** – There is a difference between governance (the board’s role) and management (the staff’s responsibility). Directors are responsible for governance including policy setting, long range vision, protecting assets and fiduciary duties. Unfortunately, some directors may “slip” into management interests, though it is neither their role nor responsibility.

2. **Follow the Roadmap** – The strategic plan is the roadmap. Nearly all efforts of the board and committees should fit inside the plan. Acquaint yourself and check periodically that the board’s work fits within the strategic plan.

3. **Don’t Wait, Participate** – Don’t be timid about participating at board meetings. Preferring to “just observe” for several meetings is disregarding the authority you have as a director. Every director has a duty to deliberate and vote from the start of their term.

4. **Be Accountable** – You will be asked to take on commitments. When you accept an obligation, be accountable. Follow timelines and be responsive when asked for your report or project.

5. **Be a Fiduciary** – Fiduciary comes from a Latin term for trust or faith. Directors are entrusted with a duty to represent the best interests of members, stakeholders and the organization. By accepting a seat on the board one accepts their fiduciary duty.

6. **Wear the Right Hat** – Directors are sometimes selected because they represent a chapter, geographic area or specialty. While such qualifications may have facilitated one’s entre to the board, the director now represents the interests of the board on which they serve --- not the community from where they came.

7. **Tradition of Success** – While not dwelling on the past, we do respect the principles of the organization’s founders and prior leaders. Commit to maintaining the legacy of great leadership for the organization.

8. **Read to Lead** – The best way to prepare for leadership is to read. Directors have access to nearly all documents (with the exception of personnel records). Take time to read the governing documents (bylaws, articles and policies) to be familiar with the rules of governance.
9. **Follow the Money** – Commit to understanding the *big picture* when it comes to finances. Some directors will be distracted by the smallest details – such as a $20 receipt. View the financial resources as a whole and not just line items. Be conversant about the organization’s financial strength and resources.

10. **Envision Success** - As a new director, envision your own success. How will you be described at the end of your term? Be sure your image of success aligns with the organization’s mission and vision.

In conclusion, the board should govern at a high altitude – say 50,000 feet. Let committees and staff handle the details below that level.

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**Note:** Bob Harris, CAE, provides governance and management tips at [www.nonprofitcenter.com](http://www.nonprofitcenter.com). He can be contacted at [bob@rchce.com](mailto:bob@rchce.com).