Volunteers Define Leadership
Bob Harris, CAE

A board is a combination of volunteers dedicated to governing an organization. In the US there are more than 1.5 million nonprofit boards of directors.

From the start the directors must concur on their roles and responsibilities to advance the mission and serve the members. Recognizing that each person brings a unique perspective and experience which must be blended to work as a high performing governing body. Every director has their own perspectives of leadership and the characteristics necessary to produce results.

I asked a group of volunteers being groomed for governing roles to describe their perspectives of board leadership. Of course there are no right or wrong answers, though I might have paused if someone had suggested personal gain or bad behaviors.

Desired Characteristics

• A leader is invisible, deflecting the credit for success.
• Leads by example.
• Leadership is about listening.
• Leadership means being knowledgeable.
• Stays organized.
• Leaders are innovative.
• They provide answers and solutions, not stuck on problems.
• Must be an active participant.
• Leaders facilitate discussions and meetings effectively.
• Balanced approach to leadership; fair.
• Inspire and motivate.
• Being a good listener and observer.
• Leaders are passionate.
• Remain humble.
• Leaders are accessible.
• Be kind but firm.
• Leaders facilitate but not impose.
• Leaders: Open minds and open doors.
• It’s not about you.

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”
John Q Adams
• Being a member of a team.
• Being results driven.

Results Driven

• Facilitate the vision and self-actualization of others.
• Fulfilling social responsibility.
• Guiding people to achieve what they need and want.
• Help others by focusing on resolutions.
• Advance the visions of others.
• Leaders facilitate personal and professional development.
• Organizations provide platforms for leadership.
• Service to others and society.
• Help others achieve their dreams.
• Continually improving the organization.
• Leadership is mentoring.

A leader with the right characteristics will enable the organization to achieve excellence. They understand and respect fiduciary roles to which they have been entrusted by the members and have humility in knowing that the decisions made affect more than themselves.

John Quincy Adams is credited with saying, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

Ask your board how they define leadership and how their work impacts the association now and in the future.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governing tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com