How to Alienate the Board at Your First Meeting

By Bob Harris, CAE

Want to make a bad impression as the newest member of the board? Learn from these mistakes. The best approach: Prepare for the meetings, arrive on time, and approach the discussion by listening and working to advance the organization's mission.

1. **Miss the first two meetings.**
   When you do show up, tell them you read that the bylaws permits two "unexcused absences" so you thought you’d take them at the start of your term.

2. **Arrive 45 minutes after the meeting starts**
   and ask the chairman, "Would you mind recapping what I missed so I can get up to speed?"

3. **Do not read the agenda nor open your board packet**
   which was delivered 10 days ago by express mail—rather make a big deal of opening it at the board table, commenting on how much there is to read.

4. **Show your aggressive nature by commenting on the agenda**
   and asking, "Why aren't we dealing with more important issues like hunger and the environment?" (Let everyone know you have no idea what's in the organization's strategic plan.)

5. **Walk into the board meeting and give a bear hug**
   to the executive director, asking him (or her) to get you a black coffee with two sugars.

6. **Let the board know you have no time for extra work**
   such as committee service or fund raising.

7. **Report that you hear the members complaining**
   and conclude with, "What are you guys going to do about this?"

8. **When the meeting adjourns, be the first out the door**
   telling anyone who will listen that you don’t agree with the decisions of the board.

9. **After interrupting several times,**
   let the chairman know you feel that rules of order are for Girl Scouts and the PTA—and simply impede hearty discussions.

10. **Miss the mandatory new board member orientation;**
    then throughout the year ask questions you would have known from the training or by reading the leadership notebook.

A great board member is a committed team player, eager to learn and participate in the critical role of good governance.

*Bob Harris, CAE, offers free nonprofit templates and tips at www.nonprofitcenter.com. He's been called the Martha Stuart of association management for developing and sharing best-practices.*