

# Getting Your Board Prospect off the Fence

Avoid board-candidate limbo with these simple steps.

By Karen Eber Davis

**T**oday's the day. You're going to ask a candidate you've vetted and wooed for months to serve on your board. You've planned what to say if the answer is yes or no. But how will you respond if your prospect tells you, "I want to think about it"? How will you graciously allow think-time but avoid holding space open "just in case" while the candidate slowly disappears off your radar screen?

You pursue new candidates for what they can offer your organization. Without their help, your organization will miss out on valuable resources and contributions. A full board lets you maximize your impact. Full boards have one less excuse for waiting to discuss critical agenda items, such as ensuring adequate money to fund the mission.

While you value any candidate's willingness to think over your request, how might you avoid relationship limbo, hoping they'll call and wondering if it's too soon for you to follow up?

## Throw a lasso into the future.

Establish your next step along with your board prospect. The next step is your lasso, a specific date you mark on your calendar.

Let's imagine your prospective board member has thanked you for your offer and asked for time to think it over. You could leave this open-ended. But a better idea is to lasso the future, offering options such as, "After you think about it, would you like me to:

- **call you** next Monday?"
- **e-mail you** Friday?"
- **set up a time now** to have a video chat next week?"

## Don't let prospects leave without a firm date.

If your candidate hedges, toss a lasso around a date. For instance, if they say they'll get back to you, respond, "Great, you'll call me and let me know. Because we all get so busy,

“Establish your next step along with your board prospect.”



I'm making a note in my calendar to call you by next Friday if I haven't heard from you."

When you have a time and action in your planner, you lasso the future.

In rare cases, a candidate may bristle at your insistence. If that happens, say something like this: "I've told my board that I'll recruit new candidates this month. I'd love to have you join our board, but I understand it may not work out. Whatever your decision, I hope we can stay in contact."

If you're unable to lasso the future, make the decision to move on. Jot a note on your calendar indicating the date that you'll start contacting other prospects. **S**

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## Make Your Board the Best It Can Be

Choose the best people to lead your organization, using insights from these articles (NonprofitWorld.org):

**Where Can You Find Good Board Members?** (Vol. 17, No. 5)

**Defining Your Board's Needs** (Vol. 26, No. 1)

**How to Prepare Board Members to Govern Effectively** (Vol. 25, No. 6)

**A Board Member Self-Assessment** (Vol. 15, No. 6)

**Leading the Transformation of Boards** (Vol. 22, No. 2)

**Look Beyond Tradition to Diversify Your Board** (Vol. 22, No. 4)

**How to Assess and Improve Your Board's Performance** (Vol. 24, No. 1)

**Harness the Power of Termed-Out Board Members** (Vol. 37, No. 4)