



Board Member or Bored Member? How Do You Rate?

This self-assessment quiz will bring tears of appreciation to board members' eyes.

BY BRIAN ROBERTSON

Some years ago, it was foolishly believed that to be a good board member all you had to do was: (1) show up for meetings, (2) don't hurt anybody, and (3) go home. If pressed, many nonprofit organizations would settle for two of the three.

Fortunately, we live in a more enlightened age and realize there is far more to being a good board member than these simple directives. In fact, all three requirements could easily be consolidated into one—having a personal bank account the size of Bolivia's treasury.

Since that scenario is not so likely, how do we improve the quality of board members? (I believe we can agree that better breeding programs have been largely unsuccessful). Until someone comes up with a better idea, I'd like to suggest mandatory aptitude testing of all new and existing board members.

Naturally, after coming up with this idea I immediately rushed to the corner print shop and designed some business cards that say, "Consultant." More important, I also developed an expensive, lengthy test which I planned to share at expensive, lengthy seminars around the country. I went so far as to look at the possibility of selling my test via "info-mercials" on late-night cable TV. The idea collapsed when "Amazing Discovery" producers found my test wouldn't remove broccoli from the hood of an expensive automobile (or perhaps it was vice-versa).

So, in the naive but pure motive of making the nonprofit world a better place, I'm including 20 sample questions free of charge. I suggest you make them available at your next board meeting. I'd be there, but I'm still trying to scrape the broccoli off my hood.

1. In regard to the stated goals of my organization:

- a. Perhaps "To do a whole bunch of good stuff with other people's money" is a little vague.
- b. I think goals are bad in that they raise expectations.
- c. We print our goals on each month's agenda as a way to may sure we're on target with each issue discussed.

2. I look at my organization's budget as:

- a. A really cool place to find lottery numbers.
- b. Tangible manifestation of the board's plans.
- c. A cruel reminder of experiences with my family's check-book.

3. How can you tell if you've missed too many board meetings?

- a. When you show up, other board members ask if you're the guest speaker.
- b. You feel incredibly guilty.
- c. You show up and the organization has moved.

4. When I disagree with a policy or practice I:

- a. Make sure I voice my disagreement and have it written into the minutes.
- b. Refrain from saying in a sing-song voice, "You'll be sorry."
- c. Stop banging the gavel on the table when I am reminded I'm not the chairperson.

5. I remember Robert's Rules of Order:

- a. Says you should order the most expensive entree and avoid being the one to pick up the check.
- b. Provides structure to a meeting and protects rights.
- c. Clearly from my high school's Folksingers Club.

6. In my organization, when it comes to implementing policies:

- a. We use a whip and chair, but the gun does use blanks.
- b. We use real bullets, so a whip and chair aren't needed.
- c. We carefully solicit and understand staff input because they work here on a day-to-day basis and have to live with the decisions.

7. In our organization, personnel policy

- a. Is clearly written and well defined, consistent with norms in nonprofits.
- b. Was good enough for my grandfather's hardware store.



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think of ways to secretly
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c. Is so enthusiastically supported by staff we had better check the part about time off.

8. As a board member, my obligations for fundraising

- a. Have cost me most of my friends.
- b. Is one of my main responsibilities.
- c. Is the root canal of board membership.

9. In examining my board, I think

- a. Rarely.
- b. It is representative and there is no small clique that runs the organization.
- c. Each and every single person fully participates to make up for the others who don't.

10. I think of the staff as:

- a. Forms waiting to be molded.
- b. Mold waiting to be formed.
- c. Professionals who have chosen to work in this area and who have personal, professional, and emotional investment in the organization's success.

11. You pick up a ringing telephone and realize a staff member is on the other end of the line. You are legitimately busy. Do you:

- a. Do a killer imitation of your voice mail and hang up after inviting the caller to leave a message at the sound of the dial tone.
- b. Invite the caller to "press 1 for someone who cares."
- c. Express your genuine interest and suggest a time to return the call.

12. Fundraising:

- a. Is misleading because it contains the word "fun."
- b. Is based on believing in the "product" you have to sell.
- c. Has been mentioned too many times in this test.

13. When it comes to long-term planning:

- a. Hey, wait a minute. We didn't bring the Soviet Union to its knees in order to adopt the concept of a Five Year Plan!
- b. I haven't even figured out what's for dinner.
- c. I make certain we have a long-range plan and that each action taken at board meetings can be plugged into that plan.

14. In regard to board training, which best expresses your attitude?

- a. Hey, come on, this isn't brain surgery.
- b. I realize there's no such thing as a gene to determine good board members.
- c. No thanks, but can somebody tell me why the clock on my VCR keeps blinking?

15. If you notice one board member seems to be overloaded with work that could be spread around, do you:

- a. Suggest a committee might be in order and offer assistance.
- b. Snicker at the problem.
- c. So what's the problem?

16. At board meetings, do you:

- a. Participate and ask questions.
- b. Compare your doodles to those of the person sitting next to you.
- c. Think of ways to secretly activate your pager.

17. Minutes of committee meetings are:

- a. As neat as they can be on those little cocktail napkins.
- b. Essential for accountability and good communication with the entire board.
- c. Me? I thought *YOU* were taking minutes.

18. The Executive Committee's main purpose is to:

- a. Handle emergencies when the board can't meet and to consider a problem not appropriate to any other committee.
- b. Fix all that detailed stuff so that board meetings can go by real fast.
- c. Figure out what the Executive Committee's main purpose is.

19. I am careful to see that all committee deliberations are:

- a. Avoided.
- b. Put on separate checks.
- c. Reported to the board.

20. When there's a conflict of ideas at a board meeting, I:

- a. Resent being awakened.
- b. Rejoice that people are fighting to be understood, not to win.
- c. Try to see if I can spell out anything off-color with letters on the chairperson's name tag. ■

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