



# What Makes Your Board Members Tick?

You need to know the answer if you want to build a committed board.

By Erika Oliver

Your organization's mission is your passion, so you assume people serve on your board because they share that passion. That may be true, but it's not the only reason.

Everyone has personal reasons for joining a board. There may be a community or mission-driven reason, but there's also a personal agenda. Personal agendas are assumed to be selfish, so people tend to keep this information to themselves. Personal agendas are, in fact, healthy and normal.

If board members are engaging in activities that don't fulfill their personal missions, they're on a one-way street—giving with no receiving—that won't end well. Only when people are living their personal missions are they able to be in a relationship, and relationship involves give and take.

Create an open environment for your board members to share their personal agendas.

What could a board member want from your organization? Professional development, networking, friendship, leadership, and recognition are all possibilities. Create an open environment for your board members to share their personal agendas. Once you know what they need, you can give it—whether it's extra time for socializing or the chance to take some classes. In return, you'll receive dedicated volunteers.

Nonprofit organizations are in the business of serving social needs, so meeting your board members' needs is something you know how to do. Cultivate their trust by following through on requests, listening well, and creating team development opportunities for the board. Once board members have shared their desires, the group will rally to meet those needs, and you'll be surprised by the increased motivation, energy, and connection. ■

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## Top Reasons People Serve on Nonprofit Boards

- to use talents they don't have a chance to use elsewhere
- to make new friends and contacts
- to be recognized and appreciated for what they contribute
- to increase feelings of self-esteem, prestige, and self-expression
- to develop job-related and interpersonal skills
- for a sense of belonging
- to serve in a leadership role
- to improve their community
- to enjoy talking with like-minded people
- to learn new things
- to make this a better world
- to learn more about their community and the nonprofit sector
- to gain experience they can use in other areas of the job market
- to be associated with a prestigious organization
- to help make concrete progress on an issue they care about
- for the fun of it

How many of these needs do you make an effort to fill? Can you think of new ways to harness these motives in recruiting and retaining board members?



## Recommended Reading

You can find a wealth of resources on motivating your board at [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members). A sampling:

- **Board Leadership by Design** (Vol. 11, No. 2)
- **How to Build Board Spirit** (Vol. 12, No. 6)
- **Board Member Self-Assessment** (Vol. 15, No. 6)
- **Building a Board with a Passion for Mission** (Vol. 21, No. 2)
- **How to Keep Your Board Happy and Productive** (Vol. 13, No. 2)

Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Board Governance ([www.snpo.org/lino](http://www.snpo.org/lino)).