



Boardroom Secrets

Ten experts reveal secrets of board success.

BY TERRENCE FERNSLER

Secrets of Successful Boards: The Best From the Non-Profit Pros

Compiled and edited by Carol Weisman. 192 pages. Softcover. F.E. Robbins & Sons Press, St. Louis, Missouri. Available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center, 608-274-9777, www.danenet.org/snpo.

What makes an effective board? In this absorbing book, 10 experts answer that question. Each focuses on a specialty, such as volunteers, law, effective meetings, and structure.

The most important ingredient is passion. With passion, the board will learn its other responsibilities eagerly. To have a passionate board, recruit board members with a well-planned and focused effort based on the mission, Carol Weisman tells us. She gives many excellent tips on recruitment and orientation.

The board is responsible for fund development, but board members must understand that the best development efforts are relational, not transactional. Development is like gardening—most of the time is spent on cultivation. Giving is a learned behavior that needs practice. It is the organization's responsibility to ask, the donor's to give; good fundraisers only create the most suitable conditions.

Many of the essays focus on fundamentals, such as the purpose of having meetings and the most important elements of working together. Boards meet to focus on making critical decisions. Commitment and humor are the glue that holds together all the planning, working, learning, deciding, connecting, speaking, acting, and enjoying. Most of the writers also remind us that we are running a business.

Terrie Temkin and Mike Schroeder describe how to structure your board and plan for its future. Charles Brown describes the factors that lead to fundraising success. Don Kramer, an attorney specializing in nonprofit law, explains the legal liabilities facing boards and how to minimize legal actions against your organization and your board members.

Fern Koch provides a clear perspective on establishing a strong board-CEO relationship. She provides seven steps for boards and CEOs to keep in mind:

1. Promote a power-sharing responsibility.
2. Provide orientation and training for board and CEO.
3. Remember that the board governs.
4. Keep the board informed.
5. Do work in committees.
6. Be sure there are no surprises to either party.
7. Do not micromanage the CEO.

In another excellent chapter, Susan Ellis explains how to make boards more thoughtful to volunteers and how to incorporate a volunteer program into strategic planning. Be sure you know why you want volunteers, then provide them with adequate resources, she urges. Successful strategies will follow.

The book moves smoothly from one topic to the next. Each chapter is brief, making it easy reading. Each stimulates thought about one aspect of a board function and what your board can do to improve on that function. It is a unique, entertaining, and extraordinarily helpful book for organizations that want their board to assess itself and be the best board it can be. ■

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