



Effective Boards

Here's how your board can achieve extraordinary results for your organization.

By Terrence Fernsler

The New Effective Voluntary Board of Directors: What It Is and How It Works

By William R. Conrad, Jr. 247 pages. Softcover. Athens, OH: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, www.ohioswallow.com.

This is a revised edition of William Conrad's 1983 book. He makes such a clear and compelling case of what a board does and how it can operate effectively that this book deserves attention again. Further, so many books investigate the details or specific areas of nonprofit operation that an author who does such a good job of covering basic board functions and the big picture should be read.

Conrad is clear on the role of boards. He doesn't hide the reality that there is often tension on boards. Indeed, such tension should be encouraged, he maintains, since it helps the organization accomplish what it set out to do. The underlying factor for success is the willingness to reach for goals

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as a group, not just to seek personal gratification.

A board, argues Conrad, should be an enabler of renewal in an organization. If the board doesn't provide energy focused toward the future, the organization will drift toward chaos.

Nonprofit boards don't do the same things as corporate boards. They are dramatically different in evaluating their organizations, in their relationship to the executive director and staff, in sharing responsibilities, and in creating the organizational culture. Nonprofit organizations are more about leadership than management. Some business practices are appropriate to adopt, but it's a mistake to blindly adopt business practices.

Nonprofits are likely to be what preserves democracy in our country. As more people attain success,

changes give rise to selective democracy and self-interest. Selective democracy occurs when those who attain success protect their gains at the expense of others. Unenlightened self-interest is characterized by prioritizing materialism over intellectual and spiritual values. Self-gratification dominates, and adversarial relationships replace collaboration.

Boards are fundamental to democracy. Like democracy itself, boards are difficult and complex, but the rewards are more than worth the struggles. If nonprofit boards and staff understand and embrace this fact and work together, they can learn much from Conrad's book, and we will end up with more effective boards, more successful organizations, and a stronger democracy. ■

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Nonprofit *briefs*

Creating Teams that Win

You create a winning team only when you foster that team. That means listening to all team members and using their best ideas to get the entire team to succeed. Here's how you get individuals to contribute to and think in the collective:

- **A good fit works both ways.** Finding an employee who will fit into the organization is important. But you have to be willing to try different approaches that a newcomer may bring. Even if the approach doesn't work in the end, at least you gave it a fair chance — and you have an employee who knows you listen.
- **Reward the team, not the stars.** There are few star employees who can lift an entire team to success. That's why it's important to emphasize and reward team efforts rather than individual efforts. Do you reward people for passing on leads to one another? Do you reward them for pitching in when someone is sick?
- **Groom people to take over your job.** When you hire people from the outside, it can give employees the message, "We hire talent that you don't have." While a great hire will eventually win over the team, some resentment may linger. If you aren't hiring from within, look at how you may have failed to groom people for higher positions. Are you giving employees increasing levels of responsibility? Are they coached to overcome their weaknesses? □

—adapted from The Edmonton Sun