



Article: The CEO's Role in Creating a Great Board

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If you find a great nonprofit, you will often find a great board behind it. Workshops and webinars abound to ensure board members understand their roles and responsibilities. We encourage governance committees to have a written description of board member expectations that are discussed with potential board members. This article discusses some of the things that the best nonprofit CEOs do to help ensure they get the great boards they deserve.



The best CEOs:

- ***Establish a personal relationship with each board member.*** Board members, like most of us, tend to work harder to help people we know, trust and like. The more the CEO knows about board members, the more s/he will understand the skills they bring to the board and the things that motivate them. When there's a job to be done, who is the best to ask, and how do you ask them?
- ***Judge how much time a board member wants to spend on the organization and respect the board member's preferences.*** Some board members are "all in" and have plenty of time to give; others may be "all in" but have to work within work or family time constraints. Asking for too much, too often is a sure way to alienate a great board member.
- ***Ask board members to tackle assignments that are meaningful to them and helpful to the organization.*** Most board members want to make a difference. If it's not clear to them that they are adding value, they are likely to focus their attention elsewhere.
- ***Provide good educational information to help board members stay abreast of key industry trends and issues.*** It is not unusual for a board member to join a board without a great depth of industry knowledge, certainly not enough to be effective at setting strategic direction. Books, articles and discussions will help them gain insight and a framework for making good decisions.
- ***Say "thank you"*** more often and in more ways than anyone can count – and thrive over if the board member has ever held the position of board chair.

- ***Find ways to keep past board members interested and engaged after their terms are over.*** By the time a board member rotates off the board, s/he should be one of the organization's biggest advocates. It would be a shame to let a cheerleader like that lose interest. An annual event that brings them back to the organization – along with the friends they made while on the board can be an easy step in that process.

This is an ongoing process that progresses over a board member's entire term. However, the best CEOs know that it starts as soon as the slate of new board member nominations has been approved.