

Twelve Steps Towards a More Perfect Board

1. Find, Develop and Strengthen the CEO – The most important person for a nonprofit organization is the Chief Executive Officer. This person may be called by many names such as President, Executive Vice President, Executive Director, or Chief Staff Officer. No matter the title, this is the person who accepts the responsibility of making sure the organization accomplishes its mission and gets the work done.

2. Define and Set the Mission – Brief and to the point, the mission of any organization sets the course and defines what it is. People require a guiding star to inspire and motivate them. Sometimes, the mission is vague or unclear, and people do not know what they are supposed to do, or what direction to head.

3. Integrate a Plan of Action – After a mission has been determined, a plan of action becomes necessary. This plan often borrows military language and uses descriptive words such as strategic and tactical. This should not confuse people and the emphasis should always be “getting from one place to another.”

4. Perform a Structural Analysis - Buildings are constructed from the ground up using a solid foundation and quality materials. Organizations are similar and need to have solid foundations and working components. Careful review reveals structural components such as committees, task forces, departments, agencies and the board itself.

5. Establish a Policy Manual - Policies are those written explanations of what to do and how to do it when situations occur with personnel and operations. Policies are gathered in a manual that can be referenced at any time, and provide guidance for directors, members and staff. Some policies are required by law; others are required by common sense.

6. Complete a Management Audit - There are numerous documents and files required to operate officially and efficiently. This step establishes methods for setting up and maintaining oversight for file and records retention.

7. Evaluate Expectations - Often overlooked, but quite important is the outlining of expectations. Using the Equation of Expectations, it is possible to increase understanding and cooperation between the CEO and Board of Directors.

8. Analyze the Financial Picture – Organizations strive to accomplish their missions while satisfying leaders and members; this truly is their goal. However, this must be done within the financial framework of the organization using available and attainable resources. A comprehensive analysis of the needs of the organization coupled with the revenue sources is helpful in determining the scope and depth of its operations.

9. Begin a Course on Leadership Development – Just as any professional baseball team develops talent through a farm system, an organization must also discover and nurture its future leaders. This can be done through the committee structure in which people are assigned to various positions and then evaluated. The “talent matrix” is also a valuable tool in determining the skills and strengths of the board.

10. Plan Effective Meetings – Face-to-face relationships are beneficial to building a solid and sound board of directors. Meetings are those arenas in which people reveal their personalities and behaviors. It’s where the action is, and a lot can be discovered about the board, the CEO and the organization. Meetings must be timely and run efficiently.

11. Conduct a Board Performance Review – In most organizations, everything is evaluated and scrutinized except the board. The board just continues on, acting as if it was omnipotent and all knowing. Most boards fear self examination, but if done properly, it is no worse than a simple report showing areas of competency and “needs improvement.”

12. Enhance the Organization’s Public Standing – An opportunity to make positive social, economic and environmental impact while benefitting from higher visibility, increased member involvement, increased staff retention and productivity, and better able to accomplish its mission. The effort in this area should be viewed as smart business and integrating the organization’s purpose and mission; it should not be seen as a charitable pursuit.