

Thoughts on Working with Boards and Volunteer Leaders

1. The most important honor we can give board members is to honor their time. We do this by ensuring that we provide them the tools and information they need to make informed decisions in a timely and concise fashion. All our meetings with board members, individual, small group and full board, should be productive. Show and tell is not a good use of anybody's time.
2. "No surprises": If there is good news or bad news, your board president should hear it from you first. Never reveal new, surprising information to your board president at a meeting or in a public forum.
3. If you disagree with your board president in a public forum you both look bad - but you look worse. Differences with you board president are okay but they should be worked out in a private one-on-one or small group meeting before a board meeting or a public presentation.
4. Thank your board members every time you see them - and mean it. We do this for a living; they do this because they care.
5. "No one ever washed a rented car". People invest in things in which they feel ownership. Board members will feel ownership in your organization if they are truly engaged in making key decisions.
6. If your board spends its time talking about tablecloths, they will raise enough money to buy tablecloths. Elevate your board beyond tablecloths by engaging them in thoughtful discussions about issues of importance e.g. visions and values, strategic directions, serious policy issues.
7. Groups make better decisions than individuals: Allow your board members to roll up their sleeves and dive into thoughtful discussions regarding complex issues. Trust and honor their decisions. No matter what you think, you are not the smartest person in the room.
8. A good professional can share a vision. A great professional shares a vision but also empowers and enables the visions of others.
9. An organization is simply a group of people with shared visions, values and goals. An executive director translates and transforms these visions, values and goals in to directed actions.
10. A great board is not a gift but a reward. Work hard to identify and involve strong board members and then work hard to engage your board members in meaningful work. Your reward will be a board that serves your organization with dedication and distinction. You get the board you deserve.

