



Fixing a faulty equation: Underprepared leaders = An underperforming board

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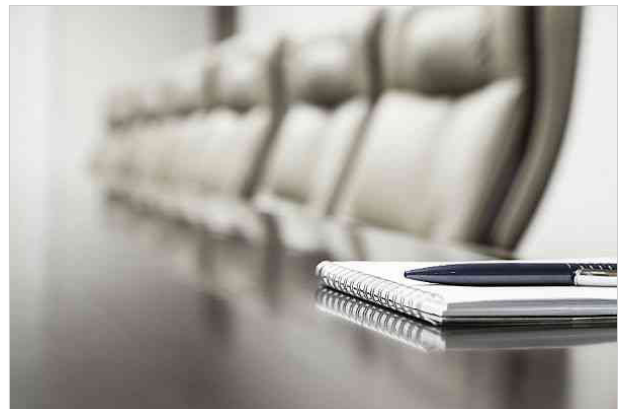
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Is this a frequent scene at the start of board meetings? The meeting is called to order, and suddenly nearly everyone at the table — even the board chair — is feverishly reading the agenda and reports, even though they were distributed days or weeks in advance.

Perhaps you are the rare association management professional who has not experienced the frustration of well meaning but unprepared board members. However, for everyone else, we offer the following to share with your board.



Fiduciary responsibility

Congratulations on being chosen as a member of the board of directors. To paraphrase a line from the movie "The Graduate," "I just want to say one word to you. Are you listening? Just one word," fiduciary!

A fiduciary is what you have become by joining the board. You are entrusted and empowered to protect the organization's assets and act in its best interests. To do so, you need to listen to discussions and counsel carefully, read and ask questions.

In other words, become and stay informed so you can carry out your fiduciary duty. These are legal responsibilities, often referred to as the duties of care, loyalty and obedience.

Attorney Jeffrey Tenenbaum of Venable law firm in Washington, D.C. fleshes this out a bit more: "Board members are required to act reasonably, prudently and in the best interests of the organization, to avoid negligence and fraud, and to avoid conflicts of interest."

Board advice

How do you apply these concepts to service as a board member? Consider this advice for directors to better fulfill their responsibilities, actively participate in board work, and to enjoy the experience of leadership.

- **Make time.** Serving as a volunteer requires a commitment of time and resources; take it seriously.
- **Manage the details.** There will be reports and knowledge essential to carrying out responsibilities. Decide how to manage the information you'll receive from the start to avoid being overwhelmed or disorganized.
- **Know your resources.** Volunteering is a team effort supported by officers, consultants and staff. Introduce yourself and call on them as you prepare for meetings.
- **Arrive fresh.** Avoid running late or bringing distractions from your office or family. Focus on the organization to which you made a time commitment.
- **Use technology.** If reports are provided online or as email attachments, learn to open, read and save them before arriving at the board meeting. Ask about the benefit of online collaboration and document storage.
- **Study the documents.** At the start of your term, become acquainted with the bylaws and policies. Understand the resources (and limitations) so you will be better prepared for discussions.
- **Be inquisitive.** When you receive the meeting notice and agenda, start inquiring about what must be done for a successful meeting.
- **Again, make time.** Review all board reports and other supporting material before the meeting. Print this material for easy reference at the meeting or save to a mobile device for reference. (see "use technology")
- **Learn the rules of order.** These enable boards to get things done in an efficient manner.

- **Pay attention.** Listen to all opinions and options. If you are unable to be an objective participant in discussions, it is perfectly acceptable to excuse yourself. Though it may be difficult, silence or turn off digital distractions.

Most importantly, enjoy the leadership experience while building a network of colleagues and contributing to the advancement of a cause or community.

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About the Author



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