



# For Every Action There is a Reaction

By Bob Harris, CAE

Welcome to the Board. You'll be attending meetings where nearly every call for action will begin with the phrase, "I make a motion..."

A motion is a way to introduce a topic to the meeting. An individual makes a motion, another seconds it. Now it is properly positioned for the Board's consideration.

## Every Motion has an Impact

Isaac Newton said it in his third law: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." Though the premise is directed at physics, it can apply to motions and board meetings.

In their governance roles directors are expected to advance the organization's mission and to make recommendations. However, directors don't always know the impact of their motions.

For example, a seemingly simple motion, "I move we appoint a task force..." requires a series of actions, including resource allocation, appointments, accountability, reporting and closure.

Thus, for every action there is a reaction.

## Filter the Motion

Implement a "filter" to help directors consider the impact of a motion before it is introduced, seconded or passed.

- Mission Statement - Does the motion fit within the purpose of the organization?

- Rules and Procedure - Is it the right place in the agenda? Is the motion clear, properly stated and seconded?
- Strategic Plan - What part of the strategic plan does the recommendation advance?
- Culture - An organization has a culture or values developed over time, especially in a relation with a parent organization. Does the motion fit within the culture?
- Governing Documents - A motion should not conflict with governing documents (bylaws, articles, and policies).
- Resources - A new motion, program or project will require resources, including the time and attention of staff, volunteers, committees and an expenditure of money.
- Liability - Does the motion create risk for the organization or conflict with laws?
- Performance - How will the Board monitor progress and success? A similar filter can be used with committee recommendations to the Board.

*Bob Harris, CAE, provides governance tools and templates at [www.nonprofitcenter.com](http://www.nonprofitcenter.com).*

*Contact Bob at [bob@rchcae.com](mailto:bob@rchcae.com). Every successful motion creates a series of actions; these include resource allocation, appointments, accountability, reporting and closure.*





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