

How to Alienate the Board at Your First Meeting

By Bob Harris, CAE

Want to make a bad impression as the newest member of the board? Learn from these mistakes. The best approach: Prepare for the meetings, arrive on time, and approach the discussion by listening and working to advance the organization's mission.

1. Miss the first two meetings.

When you do show up, tell them you read that the bylaws permits two "unexcused absences" so you thought you'd take them at the start of your term.

2. Arrive 45 minutes after the meeting starts

and ask the chairman, "Would you mind recapping what I missed so I can get up to speed?"

3. Do not read the agenda nor open your board packet

which was delivered 10 days ago by express mail—rather make a big deal of opening it at the board table, commenting on how much there is to read.

4. Show your aggressive nature by commenting on the agenda

and asking, "Why aren't we dealing with more important issues like hunger and the environment?" (Let everyone know you have no idea what's in the organization's strategic plan.)

5. Walk into the board meeting and give a bear hug

to the executive director, asking him (or her) to get you a black coffee with two sugars.

6. Let the board know you have no time for extra work

such as committee service or fund raising.

7. Report that you hear the members complaining

and conclude with, "What are you guys going to do about this?"

8. When the meeting adjourns, be the first out the door

telling anyone who will listen that you don't agree with the decisions of the board.

9. After interrupting several times,

let the chairman know you feel that rules of order are for Girl Scouts and the PTA—and simply impede hearty discussions.

10. Miss the mandatory new board member orientation;

then throughout the year ask questions you would have known from the training or by reading the leadership notebook.

A great board member is a committed team player, eager to learn and participate in the critical role of good governance.

Bob Harris, CAE, offers free nonprofit templates and tips at www.nonprofitcenter.com. He's been called the Martha Stuart of association management for developing and sharing best-practices.