

## LESSONS FOR A BOARD PRESIDENT

In passing the leadership torch at a non-profit organization, I was asked to name the things that effective Board presidents do.

Here's my list:

1. Facilitate and preside over the Board meetings, starting on time, ending on time, keeping the conversation on topic, calling on people who are quiet, trying to engage everyone.
2. Model the behaviors you want to see in others during Board meetings. Be present and attentive. Listen carefully, paraphrase people's positions, and clarify the action steps. Provide positive feedback.
3. Be clear about the role of the Board. The Board needs to make decisions that are appropriate for the Board: i.e. adopt a strategic plan, approve a budget, and decide on other important matters. Treat those matters with the seriousness they deserve. Don't let the Board slip into bureaucratic behaviors (for example, by appointing committees to oversee staff's work).
4. Be direct and straightforward about any conflicts you see or issues before they become elephants in the room.
5. Keep a focus on the organization as a business. Keep focused on generating market-driven revenues, in addition to philanthropic fund-raising. Keep asking "who pays, who benefits" types of questions. Challenge people when they drift into non-business-like thinking.
6. Be actively engaged in planning the Board's agendas. Feel free to elevate things that you think the Board needs more time with. Don't rubber stamp staff's suggested agendas.
7. Be available to the chief executive and staff as a sounding board. Spend time with them separately, talking through matters of importance and thinking through how best to optimize the expertise and talents of Board members. Help them understand the role of the Board.
8. Think about the legacy you want to leave as Board president. Pick one or two goals, such as diversifying the Board or elevating its fund-raising capabilities, and commit yourself publicly to achieving them.
9. Be thoughtful about who you want to succeed you. A Board president has a lot of sway over his or her successor.