



Bringing the Best to the Boardroom

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“At the top, Boards increasingly need a diversity of interests, strategic insight, and closer contact with the member’s universe to deliver meaningful value.”

Who sits at your Board table? The movers and shakers of your profession or industry? Successful, recognized, long-time members? These are the people you need, right? Perhaps, but not as much as you might be inclined to believe.

At the top, Boards increasingly need a diversity of interests, strategic insight, and closer contact with the member’s universe to deliver meaningful value. So where are the visionaries, wild-eyed optimists, and edgy entrepreneurs who have found a new pathway listening to the sounds of a different drummer for your profession?

While many Boards have spent years seeking consensus in place of innovation—disruptive technologies, shifting global economies, emerging competitors, and dissident members are creating enormous pressure for change on those organizations. Where are the innovations, products, and new opportunities? How will you leverage them to benefit your membership?

Identifying and selecting high-potential leaders for your Board offers a unique opportunity to accelerate your progress:

- When it comes to attracting fresh leadership to the Board, there are usually a wide range of sources inside and outside the current crop of committee members, committee chairs and volunteers. Recruiting new talents requires you to look in “non-traditional” spots. Is there someone outside your organization—an industry analyst, writer, or vendor, who’s

unique viewpoint might yield valuable insight? What about someone recently retired or someone changing fields or specialty in your industry? Nurturing wide-ranging perspectives is key to your organization's vitality. Discovering those voices then, becomes one of your responsibilities.

□ Seek out those who haven't raised their hands, yet. Waiting for people to express interest in volunteering is a common mistake. Look for people mentioned prominently in newspapers, business, or professional journals among your members. Look closely at industry innovations and closer still at the people behind them. Building strong Boards demands that you go after the talent you need at the top. Reach out to people who can add value to your work and personally invite them to place their name before the nominating body.

□ Engage new members early in the volunteer dynamic. One of the keys to identifying high-potential volunteers is communicating high expectations. As new members join your organization, remind them of the importance and value of their involvement in leadership activities. Ask them to identify personal interests. Connect interests to work that enhance both personal and professional growth for the volunteer. Proactively helping volunteers manage their leadership activities is a win-win at all levels.

□ Gauge the opportunity to the time available. While busy people always seem to do more, nowhere is it written that every volunteer opportunity must demand months or years of commitment. Sometimes, a project needing a few days of intense effort produces a far better outcome, than something stretched out for months at a time does. Craft options that suit your Board members.

□ Make clear your specific expectations for volunteers. Is a new Board member expected to find new members? Speak on behalf of the association? Contribute or raise money for the organization's foundation? What is required of the position? Oftentimes, nominating groups will "brush over" the workload and responsibilities of the position to entice potential candidates. Doing so diminishes both the values of the work and its importance in the recruit's mind. If your Board does important work, demands long hours or has high expectations, say so without apology. People attracted to hard work will hang on throughout the process. Others will wean themselves along the way.

□ Think big picture. Is your Board reflective of the true diversity of your members? Sometimes without realizing it, Boards come to reflect only the most successful or senior members of the membership because they are

the ones with the time, flexibility, and resources to commit to Board service. Consider making it possible for the smaller member or one whose practice is isolated in a distant locale to participate on your Board.

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Working toward building career interests among college students? Having a seat at the Board table for one or more students will be enlightening for everyone. The difference in perspective is worth a hundred IQ points.

It’s been said, that all discord is simply harmony misunderstood. Creating a diverse, inclusionary, and distinctively talented Board membership—while occasionally challenging—makes all of us better leaders. Rigorous debate widens our horizons and assures that our fellow members; colleagues and peers derive the optimum value from our work and their membership investment. And after all, that’s why you’re here.

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