

BOARD DEVELOPMENT

Board Boot Camp

A healthy organization starts with a healthy Board – take yours to Boot Camp!

By Julie Iacobelli, Senior Consultant

As summer approaches, many of us are recommitted to getting ourselves in shape. The fitness of an organization's Board of Directors is just as important. Kick your organization's health into gear by committing yourselves to the following workout:

Warm Up: Every good workout starts with a warm up. For your organization, this means taking a serious look at the knots and kinks in your Board's functioning. Conduct an annual Board experience survey. Is your meeting day and time convenient for most members? Do meetings consistently stay within the time allocated? Do Board members feel their time is well-spent by focusing on strategies to achieve their key responsibilities of setting strategic direction, fiscal oversight, and fundraising (yes...this is an opportunity to reinforce this critical job). Do not forget the care and feeding of Board members. Would members like something more creative than a cardboard box of pizza and a soda every month?

Cardio: Get your Board's heartbeat up! An excited Board is a productive Board. Use your committees to accomplish the tasks necessary to achieve strategic direction. If you are not using committees, you should be! Assign each Board committee a staff liaison. (Tip: the chief professional officer does not have to fill this role for each committee...let it go to the staff person most affected by that committee's work.)

Strength Training: The strength of the Board's engagement lies in a fundamental fundraising requirement - building relationships. Donors give because they feel attached to an organization. Your Board members are donors, too. In fact, they are the uber-donors. They not only give of their time, but they also give treasure and talent: hours of work on behalf of your organization...personal financial support...their expertise, when needed. The chief professional officer must develop relationships with every Board member. He/she must dedicate time both to getting to know members as individuals, but also seeing where they can be best used and most engaged to make their Board experience the best (and strongest) it can be.

Stretching Out: No question about it, Board work is hard. You know how wonderful it is when the trainer finally says the workout is over and it is time to stretch out. A Board of Directors needs that relief, too. Consider having one Board social event each year. If your Board is as diverse as it should be, the individuals sitting next to each other every month may not know each other outside the Board meetings. Social activities give members time to get to know each other and build relationships that will benefit them both personally and professionally. In the meantime, celebrate as often as you can! Celebrate organization successes, staff successes, and Board member personal and professional successes. Highlight successes verbally and in print. Like families, Board members and staff not only face the hard times together, but also celebrate the good times.

A healthy organization starts with a healthy Board! Take yours on this boot camp circuit and enjoy the benefits - stronger engagement and greater productivity.

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