

New Year's Resolutions for Board Members

January 2010

It's that time again—for turning over a new leaf, for reexamining our work and lives, for refocusing on what we really want, and for refreshing our commitment to good works.

Here are some great New Year's resolutions for nonprofit board members. If you do these, you'll set an example and be a "spark plug" for your organization—and you'll also help make the world a better place through your favorite nonprofit.

1. **Get more engaged.** Your nonprofit needs you to pay attention to your job as a nonprofit board member. Nonprofits don't need disengaged bosses. (And yes, you are the boss—you're the legal fiduciary guardian of your nonprofit. The staff—through the CEO—reports to you.) Your favorite nonprofit needs YOU to lead, to question, and to act!
2. **Have a bias toward action.** DO something. Your nonprofit needs more than talk out of you. Don't be one of those board members who thinks his or her only job is to come to meetings and pontificate a bit. Look for real actions you can take to help the cause. Ask the staff what they need you TO DO this month, this quarter, this year.
3. **Think big.** You're not going to change the world, save the environment, feed the hungry, change your community, by thinking small. And there is great power in a big, wildly exciting vision! You attract people—and resources—to your cause. Energy is everything when you are trying to create change.
4. **Be optimistic, no matter what.** Ban the handwringing and naysaying. Negativity is self-defeating and deadening. It wipes out energy and passion. It deadens momentum. Be the board member who has the point of view of abundance rather than scarcity. You'll influence the rest!
5. **Go back to your vision over and over and over.** It will keep you excited, focused, passionate, and results oriented. If you feel jaded or bored, ask yourself why you really care about this cause and this organization. You'll fan the flames of your passion and your energy. You'll feel deep personal satisfaction when you see the results your organization is creating in people's lives.
6. **Be the catalyst; be the provocateur.** Challenge, challenge, challenge the status quo. Remember Jack Welch's quote: "If the change is happening on the outside faster than it is on the inside, the end is near."

Well, guess what—that goes for nonprofits too. Too many nonprofits plan for the future based firmly on the past. Be willing to ask, "Why are we doing this?" If needed, point out the elephant in the room that everyone is too polite to mention. Be willing to examine your nonprofit's business model if needed.

7. **Make your own proud, personal gift to support your organization.** AND encourage the other board members to give. If you don't put your money where your mouth is, you have absolutely no credibility. Set an example. Don't be afraid

- to bring up the subject of board gifts in board meetings. Be willing to talk to other board members about their annual commitments.
8. **Support the staff.** Ask them what they need from you. Ask them how you can support them. The staff is carrying the weight of enormous responsibility on their shoulders. Pay them competitive salaries. Don't let them overwork in the name of the cause. Return their phone calls. Respond to their e-mails. Tell them what a great job they are doing. A self-confident staff will perform at a high level.
 9. **Introduce 10 of your friends to your cause.** See if you can get them on your organization's bandwagon. You're not asking them for money. Instead you're trying to get them to join the cause. Have a porch party and invite your friends to meet your CEO, or take a group on a tour out in the field to show them the good work your organization is doing.
 10. **Be a sneezer and spread your organization's viral news wherever you go.** Ideas are like viruses—they are contagious, spreading from person to person. You want to create an epidemic of good buzz about your organization all around.

All your friends, family and business associates need to know about your passionate involvement in your cause. Say, "Did you know that ... ?" or "Can you imagine that xxxx is happening in our community?" Before you know it, they'll be engaged and on your bandwagon!

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Gail Perry, January 2010
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