



The Challenge of Board Recruiting

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One of the most important tasks of the board is to keep its governing body fresh with members who will bring wisdom, synergy, perspective, and a passion for the mission. As terms expire and vacancies are pending, finding the right people is crucial.

Given you are somewhat “strategic” about the mix of those who will serve, it would be wise to list what types of board members should be added to the board when the time arises. Depending upon your philosophy, policies, and practices relating to board development, your list might include “experts” in law, finance, accounting, marketing, fund raising, information technology, leadership, or an area of specialty relating to your mission. In addition to vocational talent, your strategy for board development might also seek to diversify your gender, ethnic, geographical, and denominational representation. Of course, major donors are always welcome if they fit your primary criteria.

If you are unfamiliar with the candidate, you may want a “secondary” board where the individual’s boardsmanship can be tested. This could include Advisory Boards, Campaign Committees, Special Projects, and so on. If you are hesitant, invite the candidate to serve in one of these other capacities for a season first.

Next, do some strategic marketing. Figure out why someone would have a passion for your organization and then translate that into a “features and benefits” monologue that will cause the right person to want to be involved.

There should be a defined process for member selection. It might include a preliminary meeting with the nominating committee as well as doing background checks. The person might next come as a visitor to a board meeting to get acquainted. After the chairman of the nominating committee has gathered feedback from all the board members, the offer could be extended to the interested candidate.

Because all members of the board typically feel some ownership of the recruiting process, no candidate should be invited to a board meeting to “get acquainted” without informing the current board members first.

Now the hard part: Where does one find these prospects for the board? What type of organizations might these people be known to? Might it be a church or a women’s ministry or Hispanic ministry? Do you have friends who might suggest someone they know through their own circles who might be a fit?

A tool and service that is being increasingly applied to board development is the utilization of outside counsel, specifically executive recruiters. Recently I did a search for a Christian university. They were



seeking a woman with either influence or donor potential to join their board. The person eventually chosen was the CEO of a bank and was referred through someone in her church.

Search firms are objective, can uncover new candidates outside your standard networking circles, and can ensure that the “best” candidate comes to the forefront without the bias of relationship or position.

Having said that, there may be many within your circle of influence who could also help. Some people love to seek out board members. Recently in Georgia, I introduced the president of a non-profit to a Christian recruiter to see if the recruiter would have a heart for the mission and commit himself to scout for potential board members. Some professionals, like consultants, CPAs, and lawyers are natural net workers.

One of the places to find prospective members is on the boards of smaller organizations (check out nonprofits at www.guidestar.org or www.ecfa.org). As a person gains experience on a board, they are sometimes ready to move from the small nonprofit board to one that is much larger.

If your organization has access to a donor research person, they could spend a specific part of their time focused on board development research. However, only the nominating committee representative should be making the direct contact.

Board renewal is a continual, on-going process. Done well, it will add new ideas, enthusiasm, insight, and resources to the organization to help it keep growing and stretching.

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