

# Nonprofit Board Leadership

## *Building a Better Board*



### INTRODUCTION

“Who should I have on my board?” It’s a question we’ve been asked countless times. The answer, of course, is “it depends.” It depends on a number of things: the life-cycle of an organization (i.e., start-ups need different board members than established organizations), the amount of fundraising that is required, the organization’s scope and reach, and requirements in the bylaws, just to name a few.

No matter where you are in this journey, the challenge is to create the perfect board mosaic. That is, what are the personality traits and characteristics that you feel are most useful around the board table. This activity comes with a pretty significant disclaimer. We are going to assume characteristics of diversity, equity, and inclusion have already been considered, but our experience tells us that is a bit of a leap. We hope you do understand the value of ensuring your board has a diverse membership by race, gender, experience, sexual orientation, etc. – that’s just not the focus of this worksheet.

**So, what considerations have you given to the personality traits around your board table?**

### YOUR CHALLENGE

*This worksheet works great with groups of people who collectively determine who should serve on a board (i.e., Officer Team, Management Team, Executive Committee of a Board, etc.).*

Using the following list of characteristics, which has been developed from personal experience and related literature, reflect on what you feel are the most important characteristics.

- First, take some time for personal reflection using the space provided. Choose your top six – AND ONLY SIX (6)!
- Next, pair up with a colleague and agree on a shared top six – AND ONLY SIX (6)!
- Finally, get together as a group and attempt to reach consensus.



# CHARACTERISTICS TO CONSIDER

- 1. Passion About the Mission:** May bring a personal connection to the issue. Involved because the work you are doing matters deeply to them. Also willing to speak up and push the CEO and staff.
- 2. Perfect Attendance:** Nothing fancy here. Someone you can always count on to be present—at meetings and other board gatherings—and is always prepared to discuss the topic(s) at hand.
- 3. Donor/Philanthropist:** Follows through on the popular board mantra of “give, get, or get off.” Understands an important part of board service is making financial contributions to the agency and opening doors for others to do the same.
- 4. Always Learning:** Anxious to serve, but not familiar with the cause or direct work of the organization. Wants to know more and constantly asks questions to build their knowledge base.
- 5. Governance Expert:** We all need the services of a parliamentarian every now and then. Provides constant advice and input as to procedures, rules, and governance issues.
- 6. Problem Solver:** Supportive and willing to help when trouble arises. Recognizes the board has a role in problem solving when called upon.
- 7. Able to See and Communicate a Vision:** Not into micromanaging the staff or CEO, rather is willing to keep everyone focused on creating and communicating the “big picture”; understands details are best left to the staff.
- 8. Strategic Implementer:** Prefers being in the weeds. Likes the strategy and day-to-day implementation of programs and projects. Not here to get in the way, but always willing to get involved when called upon.
- 9. Good Listener:** Always up for a phone call or email when you need to run a new idea or challenge by someone. Able to remain objective even when faced with important decisions.
- 10. Analytical Thinker:** Likes to get to the bottom of things. Motivated by curiosity. Willing to ask the hard questions, but equally quick to speak their mind and offer criticism when necessary.
- 11. Financial Wizard:** Willing to serve on the finance committee and help you and the organization manage finances and operate more efficiently.
- 12. Expert Communicator:** We all need help spreading the good news and success of the organization. Can help with crafting messages, increasing visibility, and (as needed) managing the press.
- 13. Well-Connected:** Willing to facilitate partnerships and open the rolodex. Understands the need to bring new partners, donors, and relationships to the table.
- 14. Entrepreneur:** Has a business and growth mindset. A risk-taker, willing to push and try new ideas that have the potential to make an impact – even when not financially viable in the short-term.
- 15. Focused on Accountability:** recognizes it’s not just the CEO responsible for holding the organization accountable. Helps the organization stay focused on accountability metrics to donors, funders, and communities being served.

## PERSONAL THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

Selected Traits	Why is this important to you?	How firm is your position? (Scale of 1-10)
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		