



When you're on a Mission...*everything* Matters.

MISSION MATTERS CONSULTING & COACHING GROUP

The Board Agenda

October 2009

This copy of *The Board Agenda* was created by Christie Lewis, President of Mission Matters Consulting & Coaching Group. We coach boards, board leaders, and chief executives to achieve **higher performance, greater impact, and deeper fulfillment.**

Contact us at Christie@MissionMatters.net for information about board development, retreats, and coaching.

Dear Christie,

Thank you for subscribing to *The Board Agenda*. Our goal is to address topics that are both timely and relevant to you as a nonprofit board member or chief executive. We invite you to let us know your thoughts and ideas for future editions and also to submit your questions for *What's on Your Mind*, just email us at Christie@MissionMatters.net.

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We hope you enjoy reading *The Board Agenda* from Mission Matters Consulting & Coaching Group. Feel free to forward this newsletter on to your colleagues and fellow board members.

Managing the *Relationship System* of the Board

When we agree to serve on a board of directors we're agreeing to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Naturally, that something bigger is the mission of the organization. But there is something more at play that expands beyond each one of us. I'm referring to the *relationship system* of the collective board. When two or more people come together for a common purpose, they are linked by their shared experiences, encounters, and the behaviors that make up the "relationship system."

Each member of the board and the chief executive make the choice to be part of the system and each are influenced by it. Each member of the system has a role they play. Roles usually show up in groups as pairs. For example, you may have someone on the board that is the "initiator" and conversely someone who "holds the boundaries" or you may have a "troublemaker" and a "peacemaker." In systems thinking, the relationship actually needs each of these roles. Each member is in partnership with the larger relationship system where something is trying to happen or change. However, you can imagine where conflict could arise.



Successfully managing conflict is concerned more with self-awareness and self-management than trying to change other's behaviors. In fact, empirical research reveals that 69% of issues that show up in relationships are what is known as "perpetual" or issues that are not going to go away. How you manage the issues is what really makes the difference.

Tips for managing conflict on the Board:

1. **AWARENESS:** In the face of conflict, take the opportunity to rise above the situation and look at yourself within the system. Ask, what is *really* trying to happen here? Who do I want to be in this system? This will position you in a place of resourcefulness and choice.
2. **BE POSITIVE:** Increase the overall positivity in the relationship system - particularly during conflict. An indicator of a healthy relationship is the ratio of positive strokes to negative. A suggested ratio is 5:1. For every one negative comment there are five positive strokes of appreciation, acknowledgement, catching people doing something right instead of something wrong, etc. During a conflict, notice what happens within you. Is there avoidance, aggression, do you dig in your heels? Self-awareness during conflict gives you the power to choose how to respond - and no one who is consciously aware chooses to be a jerk.
3. **SHIFT PERSPECTIVES:** As the chair, invite board members to take on a different role than they normally assume during discussions. Invite someone who has the tendency of always being supportive to be the devil's advocate for discussion purposes. Or assign people to assume the perspective of various stakeholders to the organization during discussions. This helps members see that they are more than their role and they don't always have to play the same familiar role. It also provides for a much richer discussion than what's possible when members root themselves in a position.

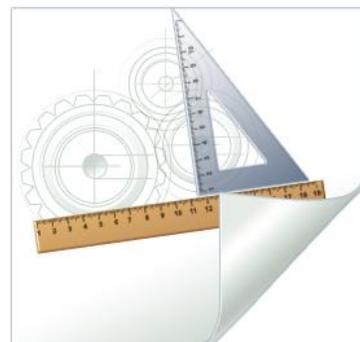
Dealing with conflict within a system requires members to look beyond the foreground of what someone else is doing and focus on holding the group as a relationship system with interdependent members working towards something bigger than themselves.

Good Governance by Design

A high performing and high functioning board does not happen by accident or even by divine intervention. Good governance is an intentional and continuous process of striving towards higher performance and higher fulfillment.

So how do you create the conditions conducive for high performance and high fulfillment on your board?

1. **Adopt a board vision (and live by it).** The organization may or may not have an overarching "pie-in-the-sky" vision but the board needs a compelling vision to align its work with the bigger picture of the organization. An example of a board vision statement, "Provide the highest level of leadership, oversight, and personal and collective accountability in order to accomplish the goals and advance the mission of Nonprofit X."
2. **Commit to a culture of continuous learning and development.** Board training and ongoing development is a process that should be incorporated into every meeting and be a part of the values of the board. The Governance Committee takes the lead in accomplishing this goal.
3. **Construct structures and processes that produce results.** Strong structure and systems help to accomplish the work of the board. No committee, task force, or advisory group should exist without measurable goals they are working towards. Keep everyone focused on the end results knowing that many possible routes exist to get you there.
4. **Assess members' knowledge, skills, abilities, passions (KSAP) then connect them to opportunities to do what they do best.** Your most valuable asset is people. Connect the right person to the right project at the right time and magic can happen. Arguably, most boards are currently only accessing about 20% of their members' capacity. This takes time and effort but I assure you it will be well worth the investment.



Of course, strong board leadership, in the form of a capable board chair, is critical to creating and sustaining a high performing board of directors. An effective board chair can see both the forest and

the trees, ensure that everyone is engaged and participating in accomplishing the work of the board, employ strong facilitation skills, hold colleagues accountable, and be able to inspire and motivate individual members and the collective board. With some coaching and training, board members can develop the skills and leadership style to take your board to even greater heights.

To learn more about Mission Matters' Board Chair Training & Coaching Services email us Information@MissionMatters.net.

Mission Matters Upcoming Trainings

We will be leading the following upcoming trainings and facilitated discussions:

Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington: Arts Huddles

Oct. 20, 2009 9:30 -11:00 am

Location: Harman Center for the Arts

Facilitated discussion to establish priorities and identify critical issues facing thearts community in the Washington DC Metropolitan region. Click [here](#) for more information >

Developing a Strategically Focused Volunteer Program

Nov. 19, 2009 12:00 -1:30 pm

Location: Shirlington Library, Campbell Meeting Room

Facilitated discussion for Volunteer Managers

RSVP: jstyles@volunteeralexandria.org

Putting Emotional Intelligence to WORK for You

Dec. 1, 2009 9:30am-12:30pm

Sponsored by the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network-DC Chapter

Location: Center for Nonprofit Advancement

Additional information will be available, click [here](#) >

Collaboration: The Power of WE

Dec. 10, 2009

Closed Training for Leadership Arlington Class of 2010.

On Board

Jan. 21, 2010 9:00am-5:00pm

Sponsored by Leadership Arlington

Click [here](#) to register >

What's On Your Mind?

Member Question: *We're planning a new board member orientation in December, what should be included?*

Answer: Board orientation is a critical first step in ensuring that you have informed, engaged, and skilled board members sitting around the table. A great deal of dysfunctional board behaviors can be prevented with a thorough and clear orientation session followed by ongoing reinforcement.

I recommend, when possible, to connect board orientation to a board social gathering. This provides the opportunity for new board members to become acquainted with their fellow board members before entering their first board meeting. Members use this time to establish connections which creates greater comfort and understanding in the boardroom between new and veteran members alike. I usually recommend that a board social with spouses/partners be scheduled on a Friday evening and the board orientation be held the following day.

The leadership for the orientation program should come from the governance committee with support from staff. Ideally, the agenda would include the chief executive and several board members. One helpful hint: Ask veteran board members what would have been helpful for them to know earlier on in their board service and include that information in the session. It's important to note that learning and development shouldn't stop at the orientation session - it should be ongoing and part of your board's culture.

Below is a sample overview agenda for a new board member orientation program:

I. Welcome Board	Chair/GC chair
II. About the Environment (Context)	CEO
Who do we serve (state the need)	
Social, economic, political factors affecting our clients	
Factors affecting the way we do business	
Scan of other service providers in the area	
III. About the Organization	CEO and others
Mission, Vision, Values	
History	
Programs, Services, Outcomes	
Finances	
Fundraising	
Strategic Plan	
Structure	
Relationships/Partnerships	
IV. Orientation to Board Work	Governance Committee
What is the Nonprofit Sector	
Nonprofit Legal issues	
Legal obligations and duties of Nonprofit Boards	
Conflict of Interest	
Risk Management/Liability	
Board Responsibilities and Structure	
Board composition and structure	
Board member expectations	
Board operations	
Reading list	
Board calendar	
V. Finances, Liability and Insurance Coverage	Treasurer/Fin. Comm.
VI. Fundraising Plan & Board Members' Roles	Fund Development Chair
VII. Board Handbook Review	
VIII. Questions	All
IX. Tour of Facility	CEO

We hope you enjoy reading The Board Agenda from Mission Matters Consulting & Coaching Group. Feel free to pass this email on to your colleagues, friends, and others whom you think would find value.

Sincerely,

Christie Lewis
Mission Matters Consulting & Coaching Group