

WRESTLING WITH BOARD DILEMMAS

CASE STUDIES
FOR NONPROFIT LEADERS

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BoardSource®

Empowering Boards. Inspiring Leadership.

BoardSource envisions a world where every social sector organization has the leadership it needs to fulfill its mission and advance the public good. Our mission is to inspire and support excellence in nonprofit governance and board and staff leadership.

Established in 1988, BoardSource's work is grounded in the fundamental belief that boards are critical to organizational success. With decades of hands-on experience working with and supporting nonprofit boards, BoardSource is the recognized leader in nonprofit governance and leadership, and a go-to resource for nonprofit board and executive leaders. BoardSource supports a broad and diverse cross-section of social sector organizations with

- leadership initiatives addressing key opportunities and issues within the nonprofit sector
- research and benchmarking of board composition, practices, and performance
- membership and board support programs
- customized diagnostics and performance assessment tools
- a comprehensive library of topic papers, publications, and downloadable infographics, tools, templates and more
- live and virtual education and training
- governance consultants who work directly with nonprofit leaders to design specialized solutions to meet an organization's needs
- a biennial conference that brings together approximately 800 board leaders for two days of learning and sharing

A note to our global readers:

The need for effective board leadership and governance knows no geographic boundaries, and BoardSource is committed to strong social sector board leadership and governance around the globe. While BoardSource uses United States laws and policies as the legal framework for our resources and recommendations, most of our resources do not focus on legal matters but rather on good governance practices, making them relevant to organizations working outside of the United States. We do suggest, however, that you refer to applicable laws in your country regarding financial reporting and other legal and transparency issues.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
SECTION 1: CASE STUDIES	
PART 1. MISUNDERSTANDING RESPONSIBILITIES	4
Case Study 1: Simon Says	5
Case Study 2: Creating a Monster at the Office?	7
Case Study 3: Executive Privilege	10
Case Study 4: Can Oil and Water Mix?	13
Case Study 5: Questioning Authority.....	16
PART 2. CHALLENGES WITH INDIVIDUAL BOARD MEMBERS	18
Case Study 6: Boardroom Confidential.....	19
Case Study 7: Missing in Action.....	21
Case Study 8: Dear Jon.....	23
PART 3. THE CHAIR'S ROLE	25
Case Study 9: The Search Is On	26
Case Study 10: Challenges of Choosing a New Board Chair.....	29
Case Study 11: The Next Big Thing	32
PART 4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE ISSUES.....	34
Case Study 12: Rewarding Good Behavior	35
Case Study 13: The Warning Signs of Burnout.....	37
Case Study 14: Style Over Substance	40
Case Study 15: A Hiccup in Leadership.....	42
PART 5. FOUNDER'S SYNDROME	44
Case Study 16: Replacing a Legend.....	45
Case Study 17: Sharing the Vision	48
Case Study 18: Big Shoes to Fill.....	51
Case Study 19: On the Rocks.....	54
PART 6. BOARD DYNAMICS	56
Case Study 20: Stealing the Spotlight.....	57
Case Study 21: Evolution of a Species.....	60
Case Study 22: Do-Si-Do	63
Case Study 23: Cats and Dogs.....	65

PART 7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST	67
Case Study 24: Committed Yet Conflicted.....	68
Case Study 25: A Hot Tip on Heart-Tech	70
Case Study 26: Not Over 'Til Everyone Sings	73
Case Study 27: When Family Runs the Board	76
Case Study 28: It's All Relative.....	79
PART 8. REVITALIZING THE BOARD	81
Case Study 29: Clinging to the Past	82
Case Study 30: Opening the Door.....	85
Case Study 31: The Wisdom of Experience	88
Case Study 32: Heal Thyself.....	91
PART 9. MISSION DRIFT	93
Case Study 33: Tough Decisions	94
Case Study 34: Follow the Funder-Paved Road.....	97
Case Study 35: A Thriving Gift Shop	100
Case Study 36: Singing Off-Key	103
PART 10. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.....	105
Case Study 37: Sacred Cows.....	106
Case Study 38: At the Board Chair's Bidding.....	108
Case Study 39: Storm Watch in Effect	110
PART 11. FUNDRAISING	112
Case Study 40: Board Contributions	113
Case Study 41: A Good Board that Won't Give	116
Case Study 42: Dinner Reservations.....	119
PART 12. PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CRISES	121
Case Study 43: A Poisoned Reputation	122
Case Study 44: Crime and Punishment.....	125
Case Study 45: Face the Press	128
SECTION 2: RESPONSES TO CASE STUDIES	
Responses to Case Study 1: Simon Says.....	132
Responses to Case Study 2: Creating a Monster at the Office?.....	134
Responses to Case Study 3: Executive Privilege	137
Responses to Case Study 4: Can Oil and Water Mix?	140
Responses to Case Study 5: Questioning Authority.....	143
Responses to Case Study 6: Boardroom Confidential	145

Responses to Case Study 7: Missing in Action.....	147
Responses to Case Study 8: Dear Jon	149
Responses to Case Study 9: The Search Is On	151
Responses to Case Study 10: Challenges of Choosing a New Board Chair	153
Responses to Case Study 11: The Next Big Thing	156
Responses to Case Study 12: Rewarding Good Behavior	158
Responses to Case Study 13: The Warning Signs of Burnout.....	160
Responses to Case Study 14: Style Over Substance	162
Responses to Case Study 15: A Hiccup in Leadership	165
Responses to Case Study 16: Replacing a Legend.....	167
Responses to Case Study 17: Sharing the Vision	170
Responses to Case Study 18: Big Shoes to Fill.....	172
Responses to Case Study 19: On the Rocks	174
Responses to Case Study 20: Stealing the Spotlight.....	176
Responses to Case Study 21: Evolution of a Species.....	178
Responses to Case Study 22: Do-Si-Do	181
Responses to Case Study 23: Cats and Dogs.....	183
Responses to Case Study 24: Committed Yet Conflicted.....	185
Responses to Case Study 25: A Hot Tip on Heart-Tech.....	187
Responses to Case Study 26: Not Over 'Til Everyone Sings	190
Responses to Case Study 27: When Family Runs the Board	193
Responses to Case Study 28: It's All Relative.....	195
Responses to Case Study 29: Clinging to the Past	197
Responses to Case Study 30: Opening the Door	199
Responses to Case Study 31: The Wisdom of Experience	202
Responses to Case Study 32: Heal Thyself.....	204
Responses to Case Study 33: Tough Decisions	206
Responses to Case Study 34: Follow the Funder-Paved Road	209
Responses to Case Study 35: A Thriving Gift Shop	211
Responses to Case Study 36: Singing Off-Key.....	213
Responses to Case Study 37: Sacred Cows.....	215
Responses to Case Study 38: At the Board Chair's Bidding.....	217
Responses to Case Study 39: Storm Watch in Effect	219
Responses to Case Study 40: Board Contributions	221
Responses to Case Study 41: A Good Board that Won't Give	223
Responses to Case Study 42: Dinner Reservations.....	226
Responses to Case Study 43: A Poisoned Reputation	228
Responses to Case Study 44: Crime and Punishment.....	231
Responses to Case Study 45: Face the Press	233

INTRODUCTION

Everybody loves a good story! We all like to read about how other nonprofit boards are governing and how they are meeting their challenges. And, let's face it, sometimes we like to be able to say, "Thank goodness we didn't make THAT mistake."

It's just human nature to want to know how the other guy is doing. In the case studies that follow, you'll get to do just that. Each case presents a real nonprofit board dilemma, full of the twists and turns of real life and the drama that occurs when people come together to sort out thorny governance issues. Although the organizations and characters in the cases are fictitious, the issues that the cases address are based on situations that BoardSource has encountered in boardrooms around the country.

Following each case study, you will find a worksheet with questions. You should take some time (either privately or during a board meeting as part of a planned agenda item) to think about the case and fill in your answers. While this type of exercise can be beneficial when done alone, it is especially constructive used as the basis for a robust discussion among board members around the board table.

After you've finished writing your own responses to the case issues, turn to the back of the book to see how your recommendations compare to those written by other nonprofit leaders. Each of the 45 cases has three responses that represent a broad spectrum of viewpoints from chief executives to board members to consultants to senior staff. This variety ensures a rich diversity of possible solutions, and you can be confident that the opinions (written by 135 different people) were formed after years of experience in the boardroom "trenches."

While it will be tempting to read the responses right away, we encourage you to think about the situations and write down your thoughts first, without "peeking." It is our hope that the cases ignite the kinds of generative discussions that happen when your board members are fully engaged and excited about the task at hand. And, if you see yourself and your organization in a case or two, so much the better — you might think about how you could have handled a similar situation differently in the past, or how you might respond to one in the future.

We hope you'll find the cases and responses interesting, inspiring, occasionally humorous, and always educational. Let us know how this book has been useful, and send us your own scenarios that we may use for future case studies, thus helping all of us further our shared vision of better boards and more effective organizations.

The Editors

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