6 Things You Can Do Right Now to Boost Your Board’s Performance

Robert Acton, Principal & Founder of Cause Strategy Partners & BoardLead

@RobertActon
#BLF2017
Cause Strategy Partners helps social good organizations achieve their missions fueled by great leadership, great strategy and, most importantly, great results.

Our Services:

- **BoardLead**: Our Signature Program
- **CSR & Corporate Foundations**
- **HR / Talent: Leadership Development**
- **Board Governance**
- **Board Placement, Training & Support**
- **Board - CEO Coaching**
Let’s Connect:
@RobertActon
@CauseStrategy

#BLF2017
How do you grade your board?

Well-oiled, miracle-working, resource-driving machine!

A+ B C D F

Board? What Board?
PASSION LED US HERE
Why Do So Many Boards Underperform?

Low Expectations
Wrong Expectations
Lack of Opportunity to Engage
Tolerance for Underperformance
Wrong Expectations

- Strategy
- Fiduciary Oversight
- Professional Skills
- Resource Development

BoardSource
Empowering Boards. Inspiring Leadership.
Lack of Opportunity to Engage

- Caged Bird
- Superstar
- Whack-A-Mole
- Leech
Tolerance for Underperformance

- Caged Bird
- Superstar
- Whack-A-Mole
- Leech

Willingness to Engage

Opportunity to Engage
Board Structure Has To Change

Caged Bird

Superstar

Whack-A-Mole

Leech
Willingness + Opportunity = Full Engagement

- Caged Bird
- Superstar
- Whack-A-Mole
- Leech
6 Things You Can Do Right Now

Make better use of Board Meetings

Treat Board Members as individuals, not just ‘the Board’

Reshape Board Culture, starting today
6 Things You Can Do Right Now

Make better use of Board Meetings

Treat Board Members as individuals, not just 'the Board'

Reshape Board Culture, starting today
We Want Board Members to Be:

- ENGAGED
- WELL-INFORMED
- STRATEGIC
- ENERGIZED
Create Engaging Board Meetings

If We Want Board Members to Be:
- Engaged
- Well-Informed
- Strategic
- Energized

Board Meetings Must Be:
- Engaging
- Informative
- Focused on Strategy
- Energizing
Booster #1: Reimagine the Agenda

Make Generative and Strategic Questions the Backbone of the Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generative</th>
<th>Strategic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Deeper-level thinking on topics of particular importance to the organization</td>
<td>● Board discussion and planning around a central responsibility: shaping an effective strategy for the future</td>
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<td>● Often focus on topics related to vision, mission or values</td>
<td>● Focuses on internal/external scans, priority setting, programmatic direction</td>
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<td>● Framing, exploring why</td>
<td>● Questions related to developing, reviewing, modifying or monitoring the strategic plan</td>
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<td>● Often no decision is required; there is value in simply discussing as a board</td>
<td>● Decisions often required</td>
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<tr>
<td>● First in the agenda</td>
<td>● Backbone of the agenda</td>
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## Booster #1: Reimagine the Agenda

### Examples

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Our mission statement refers to our clients as the ‘poorest of the poor.’ What does this say about our work to the outside world?</td>
<td>● Why are membership renewals in decline? What are the environmental factors leading to this outcome?</td>
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Booster #1: Reimagine the Agenda

My Favorite Generative Questions

1. What word in our mission statement means the most to you? Why?
2. What word doesn’t appear in our mission statement, but should?
3. On what list would we rank #1? On what list would we want to rank #1?
4. What three words best describe our organization?
5. What is the greatest opportunity you see for us to grab ahold of in the upcoming year?
6. If you heard someone talking about our organization a row behind you at a Cubs Game, what do you hope you’d hear?
7. If we were approached about a merger, what values would we need to see demonstrated by the organization before we’d even consider it?
Booster #1: Reimagine the Agenda

Facilitate Participation at Every Stage of the Meeting

1. Include go-around activities
2. Stop reading the report
3. Remake committee reports
4. Assign stakeholder roles
5. Assign a contrarian
It doesn’t cost anything

You can begin today!
Booster #2: Develop a Board Dashboard

Two Approaches

1. Quick and easy
2. Longer and more complex
Booster #2: Develop a Board Dashboard

Quick and easy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>BOARD LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>REVENUE</th>
<th>EVOLVING PROGRAMS</th>
<th>ADVISORY SERVICES</th>
<th>CATALYTIC EFFORTS</th>
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<td>New York</td>
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Booster #2: Develop a Board Dashboard

Longer and more complex
It doesn’t cost anything

You can begin today!
6 Things You Can Do Right Now

- Make better use of Board meetings
- Treat Board Members as individuals, not just ‘the Board’
- Reshape Board Culture, starting today
Booster #3: Hit Their Sweet Spot

Identify (and name) unique strengths

1. Explore during board member vetting process
2. Strengths Finder 2.0 (gallupstrengthcenter.com)
3. At My Best Strengths Cards (atmybest.com)
Booster #3: Hit Their Sweet Spot

Establish a Task Force Around a Board Member’s Expertise

1. Based on skill sets, expand the number of board leadership opportunities
   - Task Forces
   - Committees
   - Working Groups

2. Don’t get stuck by the traditional Standing Committee structure
Booster #3: Hit Their Sweet Spot

Make Big Asks

1. The more accomplished, the bigger the ask
2. Leaders are drawn to challenges
It doesn’t cost anything

You can begin today!
Booster #4: Amp Up Communication

Celebrate Accomplishments

1. Have the Board Chair share the specific contributions of each Board Member, in detail, at the beginning of each meeting
Booster #4: Amp Up Communication

Arm Board Members with Stories of Impact
It doesn’t cost anything

You can begin today!
6 Things You Can Do Right Now

- Make better use of Board meetings
- Treat Board Members as individuals, not just ‘the Board’
- Reshape Board culture, starting today
Let’s Be Creative

Board Culture Reflection

Describe your Board’s culture with the title of a movie, song or TV show.

Share why.
# Symptoms of an Unhealthy Board

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<th>Conditions</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Silent Start</td>
<td>Board Members sit in awkward silence as they wait for the Chair to call the meeting to order. You can cut the air in the room with a knife.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Frantic Beg</td>
<td>Less than half of the Board is present at meeting’s start time. The Chief Executive begins frantically calling and texting board members, begging them to call in to achieve quorum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Dominator</td>
<td>The Board Chair or Chief Executive dominates the conversation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Great Escape</td>
<td>Board Members drift out of the meeting early….or drift off to sleep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Paper Chase</td>
<td>The Director of Development has to chase down the annual personal gifts of Board Members, numerous times, at end of the fiscal year.</td>
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So if following good-governance regulatory recipes doesn’t produce good boards, what does? **The key isn’t structural, it’s social.** The most involved, diligent, value-adding boards may or may not follow every recommendation in the good-governance handbook. **What distinguishes exemplary boards is that they are robust, effective social systems.**

- Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld, Yale School of Management
Booster #5: Tap into the 4 Dimensions of Health

What Makes for a Healthy Individual?

1. Emotionally connected
2. Mentally focused
3. Physically energized
4. Spiritually aligned

Booster #5: Tap into the 4 Dimensions of Health

A Healthy Board is Emotionally Connected

1. Structure board work so authentic relationships can develop
2. Never waste a good crisis
Booster #5: Tap into the 4 Dimensions of Health

A Healthy Board is Mentally Focused

“Board members who are asked to sit through mind-numbing, show-and-tell meetings with predetermined outcomes can’t be faulted for wondering how their presence makes any material difference....”

- Nancy R. Axelrod
Booster #5: Tap into the 4 Dimensions of Health

A Healthy Board is Mentally Focused

1. Engage the intellect and wisdom of your board
2. Ask them big questions
3. Ensure diversity of personal backgrounds and professional skills
4. Build better board meetings
Booster #5: Tap into the 4 Dimensions of Health

A Healthy Board is Physically Energized

1. Get them out of their seats
2. Bake movement into meetings and retreats
3. Take a walking tour of a neighborhood
4. Bring Board Members together for programs
Booster #5: Tap into the 4 Dimensions of Health

A Healthy Board is Spiritually Aligned

1. Keep Board Members close to the “Why are you here?” question
2. Expose them to the organization’s “holy discontent”
It doesn’t cost anything

You can begin today!
Booster #6: Get Started Today
Robert B. Acton, Founder & Principal, Cause Strategy Partners
Email: rob@causestrategypartners.com
Twitter: @RobertActon