Week 1
Building a Constructive Partnership between the Chief Executive and the Board
Leadership Certificate of Nonprofit Education for Chief Executives
Leadership Certificate for Executives

Series Schedule and Topics

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Objectives

WEEK ONE
Define “constructive partnership” and name at least one strategy that can help facilitate a balance in roles and responsibilities between the board and the Chief Executive.

WEEK TWO
List at least three of the five areas in which the Chief Executive and the board chair have the opportunity to positively structure the board’s work.

WEEK THREE
Describe the Chief Executive’s role in developing future board leadership and identify one to two ways to do so.

Week 1 Agenda
Building a Constructive Partnership Between the Chief Executive and the Board

I. Board Relationships in Context
II. Cultivate Relationships
III. Inform and Communicate
IV. Facilitate a Balance in Roles and Responsibilities
I. Board Relationships in Context

Constructive Partnership

Well-led nonprofits tend to have high-performing boards, leadership succession plans, and strong partnerships between the chief executive and board members.

Navigating the Organizational Lifecycle

Organizational Lifecycles & Board Leadership

Start Up
- Founding board, passionate, committed, hands on role in management and oversight

Adolescent
- Expansion of programs, reach & connections; board relinquishes operational role, board member job descriptions

Mature
- Board increases policy & oversight functions; formalizes structure, assesses itself

Stagnant
- Lack of adaptive capacity, declining client base; unclear goals

BOARD LIFECYCLE STAGES

ORGANIZING/FOUNDING BOARDS

GOVERNING

INSTITUTIONAL

KARL MATHIAISON III FOR BOARDSOURCE
How Functional Are We?

Dysfunctional | Functional | Responsible | Exceptional
---|---|---|---
Dramatic Disengagement Conflict | Of no real consequence | Compliant | Anticipates plans
Unconscious → Conscious → Enlightened

Constructive Partnership Defined

Exceptional boards govern in constructive partnership with the chief executive, recognizing that the effectiveness of the board and chief executive are interdependent. They build this partnership through trust, candor, respect, and honest communication.

“The Source, Twelve Principles of Governance that Power Exceptional Boards

Do You Have a Constructive Partnership?

Shared understanding of mission and vision
Clear roles and responsibilities
Open and honest communication
Two-way evaluation

The Human Factor: What is the Balance?

“Great organizations have board chairs and chief executives who lead and take responsibility on one hand and embrace inclusiveness, delegate, and empower others to have a voice on the other hand – all in the context of serving the organization.”

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What Factors Affect the Balance Between You and Your Board Chair?

- Experience, knowledge, background
- Personal leadership style
- Needs of the organization
- Organizational culture

Potential Sources of Conflict

1. Poor data/info/communication
2. Varied working styles/personalities
3. Unclear expectations
4. Different values or priorities
5. Change or transitions in the leadership or organizational direction

Strategies for Developing Common Ground

- Have an open dialogue
- Provide the right information at the right time
- Deal with issues quickly, no surprises!
- Collaborate

Cultivate Relationships

Build Habits and Interactions that Engage and Involve the Board
Cultivating a Positive Relationship with Your Board

- Practice self-management and avoid self-defeating habits
- Balance roles and responsibilities
- Create and maintain a good relationship with the board chair
- Build relationships with individual board members

Practice Self-Management & Avoid Self-Defeating Habits

Self-Management Strategies

- Ask questions
- Build a support network
- Stay open and approachable
- Find the balance between being too laid back/personal and being too rigid/professional

Avoid Self-Defeating Habits

- Don’t do everything yourself
- Don’t drown the board in information
- Don’t avoid uncomfortable situations
- Don’t avoid sharing bad news at the first sign of trouble

Calibrating Roles: Some Pitfalls

- Friendly, laid back new board chair willing to have CEO do most governance tasks
- Successful at fundraising CEO who doesn’t assert herself in challenging or confrontational situations
- CEO makes firm decisions without consulting others and alienates staff with rigid personality
- Eager new board chair wants to take over performance evaluations of all staff members
- Always creates the board meeting agendas because board chairs are too busy

Roles of the Board Chair

- Maintain a mutually supportive relationship
- Ensure effective board development
- Support board in policy and oversight
- Chair and facilitate board meetings
- Align board actions with organization’s priorities

Roles of the Chief Executive

- Develop staff
- Establish operational plans
- Manage resources
- Represent the organization
- Identify internal/external issues
- Support board governance functions
- Collaborate with chair on board meeting prep

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### Orienting a New Board Chair

- Discuss how you can build trust
- Talk about your strengths and weaknesses
- Remain flexible and play to each other’s strengths
- Consider having a board chair orientation retreat with you, the outgoing board chair and the new board chair to discuss:

  - Biggest issues facing the organization
  - Goals for the board chair’s term
  - How to best work together—preferences, habits, style
Two-Way Communication

“Board members often don’t know what they don’t know... board members don’t deal with the organization’s issues on a daily basis, and we may forget details that are important to the decision-making process. We look to the chief executive to provide key information... including information about unknowns and uncertainties.”

(Board Chair)

What Kind of Information Does Your Board Need?

- Foundational
- Mission-specific
- Action-oriented
- Early indicators

Board Information – When is the Right Time?

- Meeting Preparation Materials
  - Varies: within a few weeks of the meeting
- Minutes
  - Within a few weeks following the meeting
- Communications to Encourage Board Engagement
  - Should be ongoing, not just prior to or following the meeting
- Bad News and Handling Crises
  - The sooner the better

Sample Dashboard
Dashboards: Why and How

**Value of a Dashboard**
- Saves time
- Tracks progress
- Sheds light on system dynamics
- Points up potential problems
- Reveals patterns
- Expands comfort zones
- Develops a shared knowledge base
- Focuses information
- Reinforces board oversight

**Dashboard Metrics: Approaches**
- Outcomes
- Mission as spine
- Strategic initiatives or drivers of success
- Risk factors
- Services and resources

Strategies for Focusing on Mission

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**Dashboards: Why and How**

**Strategies for Focusing on Mission**

**Using Policies to Address Organizational Priorities**

4. **Facilitating a Balance of Roles and Responsibilities**

- Code of Ethics
- Public Affairs or Advocacy Policy
- Crisis Communications Policy

- Collect stories of organizational impact from staff and volunteers. Share them.
- Participate in some of the organization’s operations or services (tours, educational sessions).
- Infuse meetings with a mission focus (guest speakers, video clips, or sharing “mission moments”).
- Review the strategic plan for relevance and refresh, if necessary.

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Board Responsibilities

- **Set Strategic Direction**
  - Determine mission and purpose and advocate for them
  - Ensure effective planning

- **Ensure Adequate Resources**
  - Ensure adequate financial resources
  - Select the chief executive
  - Build a competent board
  - Enhance the organization's public standing

- **Provide Oversight**
  - Ensure legal and ethical integrity
  - Protect assets and provide oversight
  - Support and evaluate the chief executive
  - Monitor and strengthen programs and services

Legal Obligations of Individual Board Members

- **Duty of Care**
  - Using your best judgment
  - Actively participating, paying attention
  - Asking pertinent questions

- **Duty of Loyalty**
  - Avoiding conflicts of interest
  - Putting aside personal and professional interests

- **Duty of Obedience**
  - Staying true to the organization's mission
  - Obeying the law, both public and organizational

Shared Leadership

- **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**
  - Create & Review Policy
  - CEO Hiring & Oversight
  - Connections to Funding
  - Financial Due Diligence
  - Recruitment & Engagement

- **CEO (STAFF)**
  - Strategic Plan
  - Fundraising Plan/Strategies
  - Evaluation
  - Operations Reporting

  **Policy Questions**
  - Staff Hiring & Oversight
  - Develops, Implements, & Oversees Programs
  - Chief fundraiser

Which Quadrant Describes Your Current Relationship?
Tools for Clarifying Board Responsibilities

- Bylaws
- Expectations statement or job description
- Board self-assessment (full board)
- Individual board member self-assessment

Tools for Clarifying Chief Executive Responsibilities

- Written job description
- Formal and informal check-ins with board chair
- Written performance evaluation

What Should the Chief Executive Expect from the Board?

- Timely and clear decisions
- Informed and prepared directors
- Mutual accountability

- No micromanaging
- A board that speaks with one voice

What Should the Board Expect from the Chief Executive?

- Positive attitude
- Identification of issues
- Strategic information
- Recommendations for action before meetings
- No surprises! Accept accountability
**Board Responsibilities**

1. Exceptional boards govern in *constructive partnership* with the CEO, becoming allies together in pursuit of the mission, and building a relationship based on trust and forthrightness.

2. CEOs can encourage a constructive partnership with their boards—starting with the Board Chair—by cultivating relationships, evaluating strategies to inform the board, and facilitating a balance in roles and responsibilities.

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**Up Next**

Week 2

**Structuring the Work of the Board**

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