

Leading your Board to Excellence

Workshop leader: Gayle L. Gifford, ACFRE

Land and Water Conservation Summit; March 11, 2017

Topics

- What leadership makes possible for your organization
- Barriers to leadership
- What the research tells us about leadership
- Creating a development plan for leadership

About Gayle L. Gifford, ACFRE

I'm co-President of the twenty-year old consulting firm, Cause & Effect Inc.^(R) Cause & Effect provides strategic and facilitative consultation to the nonprofit and public sectors. Our mission is to assist organizations and partnerships like yours to achieve consensus on strategic direction and plan the capacity needed to create the change you want to see in the world.

Forty years ago, I helped start and run our office paper recycling program at the Providence SSA office where I worked. In the early 90s, I served five years at Save The Bay as Director of Development and Marketing and Deputy Director. Since then I've consulted with environmental organizations including ocean and watershed defenders; park, habitat and wildlife protectors; smart growth and bike advocates; local food and agriculture promoters, among many others. Our clients range from all volunteer to professionally-staffed non-profits as well as public agencies.

You can reach me at 401.331.2272 or gayle@ceffect.com. Or follow me on Twitter @gaylegifford or our blog, The Butterfly Effect, at www.ceffect.com/butterfly-effect.



What the research tells us

Governance

- Governance is the systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction, control and accountability of an organization. (Conforth 2004, 2012)
- Governance is a function, and a board is a structure. (Renz 2014)
- Effective governance, like NPO effectiveness, is a *social construction* and *situational* – there is no silver bullet. (Renz 2002)

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gayle@ceffect.com www.ceffect.com 401.331.2272 Twitter @gaylegifford LinkedIn: gaylegifford

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Effective Teams (Google Study 2015)

- First and foremost, demonstrate psychological safety
- Are composed of dependable members
- Have clear roles, plan, goals
- Do meaningful work that matters and creates impact

Effective CEOs relationship to the Board (Herman and Heimovic 1981, 2005)

- Board/CEO role is one of interdependence
- Facilitates interaction in board relationships
- Shows consideration and respect toward board members
- Envisions change and innovation for the organization with the board
- Provides useful and helpful information for the board
- Promotes board accomplishments and productivity

Effective Boards (Axelrod 2005)

- Actively work to achieve role clarity (e.g. performance assessment; job descriptions)
- Ensure all members are oriented and trained for their role (orientation, retreats, workshops etc.)
- Seek to build team and motivate all members to work toward goals (e.g. team-trust building etc.)
- Emphasize full and clear communication on issues brought to the board (e.g. general and specific issues)
- Focus on performance by asking tough questions and using evidence to support decisions (e.g. being strategic, organizing around what matters etc.)

Antecedents to Board Engagement (Brown, 2014)

- Values congruence – personal priorities align with organizational objectives
- Task ownership – directors understand and accept what is being asked of them
- Perceived ability – directors believe they have skills, knowledge, abilities to be successful
- Trust and safety – Positive expectations and safety in showing oneself

Engagement is also influenced by situational constraints (e.g. board size, meeting practices, composition, committees, information availability) and group dynamics (e.g. conflict management, group norms, board culture).

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The Governance Work of your Nonprofit Board

Board Responsibilities/ Functions	I. Community Betterment/ Mission Achievement	II. Wise Stewardship/ Organizational Health	III. Quality Governance/ Intentional Practice
Definition of Success	Our Board has identified our vision of our ideal community and what difference our organization will make to reach that vision.	Our organization has built the resilient capacity, resources and commitment that will achieve our mission objectives now and in the future. We are wise stewards of our resources.	We define what excellent governance looks like. We deliver on our commitments with integrity, respect, competence & ethical behavior.
Questions that every board must answer	What does our community look like and what are the changes we should plan for?	What competencies, knowledge, skills and leadership qualities do we need in our CEO?	What values are we unwilling to compromise?
	What does our community [or our clients] need? What is the gap we are filling?	What capacity do we need now to execute results? What capacity will we need in the future?	How does this board add value to this organization – what are we responsible for as a group and as individuals?
	What good are we trying to accomplish? For whom? By when? At what price?	What does health look like for our organization? Are there other ways to structure our organization that also increase the effectiveness of our community to achieve this mission?	What skills, knowledge, attributes, & competencies do we need in our board and its leadership to govern effectively? How do we ensure that?
	What is our theory of change? What strategy will achieve our desired results?	What are we accountable for? To whom? How will they know?	How will we make decisions and structure our work?
	How do we know that we are accomplishing what we set out to achieve?	What level of commitment do we have?	How will we ensure the uncompromising honesty & integrity required of us? How will we hold ourselves accountable?

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Board Chair Preparation (Beck, Burns, Freiwirth, Hiland, Gifford, 2016)

- 51% of chairs did nothing special to prepare for that position
- Serving as committee chair was a more common preparatory experience for chairs than any other board officer role
- Observing the prior chair or asking for his/her advice was seen as most helpful
- Chairs wanted mentoring, training, peer networking and resources available as needed
- 56% of chairs had been on the board three years or less
- Anecdotally, board leadership succession, even when planned, is fraught with unanticipated changes

A big thank you to Yvonne Harrison, for contributing much of this research and allowing me to share it with you.

Qualities of Leadership

Effective Board Chairs (Harrison and Murray, 2012)

- Do not distract the board from goals
- Create a safe climate where issues can be discussed
- Look for and acknowledge the contributions people make to the board and organization
- Confront and resolve inadequate board performance in a respectful way
- Open to new ideas and information
- Are seen as fair and impartial
- Provide the right amount of autonomy and independence for the board and CEO
- Make people feel like a valuable member of the team

Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership (Kouzes and Posner. 1987)

1. Model the Way
2. Inspire a Shared Vision
3. Challenge the Process
4. Enable Others to Act
5. Encourage the Heart

Leadership Needs of Self-Managed Teams (Barry, 1991)

- Envisioning
- Spanning
- Organizing
- Social leadership

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Create a Job Plan

- Written by the CEO, discussed with and approved by the board annually.
- Linked to your strategic plan and other vision documents.
- Establishes standards for success in outcomes, key relationships, and leadership qualities.
- Becomes the standard for asking for constituent feedback.

To start your own learning:

Board Governance

How to make your board dramatically more effective, starting today. By Gayle L. Gifford. Available through www.contributionsmagazine.com.

You and Your Nonprofit Board, edited by Terrie Temkin, PhD. Charity Channel Press.

Governance as Leadership, by Chait, Ryan and Taylor. BoardSource.

Nonprofit Governance. Innovative Perspectives and Approaches, edited by Cornforth and Brown.

Boards that Make a Difference or Reinventing your Board by John and Miriam Carver. While controversial, Carver offers an excellent description of delegation and policy making.

Some blogs to follow: Blue Avocado, Nonprofit Law Blog, The Butterfly Effect/Cause & Effect Inc.

Personal Leadership

The Leadership Challenge by Kouzes and Posner. Jossey-Bass.

The Answer to How is Yes and Stewardship by Peter Block. Berrett-Kohler

“Managing the Bossless Team: Lessons in Distributed Leadership.” David Barry, Ph.D. *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol 20, Issue 1.

Meetings and Decision-making

How to Make Meetings Work by Doyle and Straus. Berkley Press.

Breaking Roberts Rules by Lawrence Susskind, Oxford University Press.

The Facilitator’s Guide to Participatory Decision-making by Sam Kaner, et al. Jossey-Bass

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Preparing Your Leadership Pipeline

Assess the level of skill or knowledge that your current or potential board leaders possess. H = High; M = Medium, L = Low. For directors receiving medium or low marks in a category, develop a training program for/with them to support their leadership development.

	Director #1	Director #2	Director #3	Director #4
Leadership Skills				
• Facilitation				
• Negotiation: “getting to yes”				
• Coaching				
• Relationship building, connecting				
• Communicating with others				
• Team building				
• Delegation				
• Collaboration				
• Preparation				
• Resource acquisition				
Knowledge				
• Bylaws procedures				
• Meeting process				
• Core nonprofit knowledge				
• Core organizational knowledge				
• Organizational strategy				
Other				
• Commitment to mission				
• Committed to values and culture				
• Time availability				
• Trustworthy				
• Ethical				
•				
Task Specific Skills or Knowledge				

Attribution: Alliance for Nonprofit Management, Governance Affinity Group
