TEN TIPS FOR BOARD CHAIRS

The board chair of a nonprofit organisation is in a tough position...the post is unpaid, authority is expressed through persuasion rather than command and the meetings they run are supposed to be productive and not sleep inducing. The following is a checklist for anyone considering jumping in the deep end and chairing a board.

1. **Create a positive board culture.** The most important job is bringing order and purpose to the boardroom. This requires good communication skills and the ability to ensure all board members are heard.

2. **Be an advocate for the organisation.** A chairperson has to be willing to “fly the flag” which means attending social function or speaking publicly to describe or defend the organisation.

3. **Conducting productive meetings.** The responsibility for making meetings effective falls heavily on the chairperson. They must not only seen to be in control of the meeting but actively do so by being well informed about the agenda and ensuring board members are able to freely express their views. Ensure the shared wisdom model of discernment is followed.

4. **Lead by example.** Unlike a for-profit that can pay people to be good and fire them if they are not, there are few inducements available to the chair to influence the behaviour of the board. Ignoring the gossip and focusing cheerfully on the good is one way of setting a good example.

5. **Deal with people individually.** The skilful chairperson has some idea of the interests of each board member.

6. **Motivate the board.** People participate best when they are interested or challenged not when they’re made to feel guilty. The first step is to arouse their interest.

7. **Relationship with the principal.** Learn to deal with each other’s style, preferences and temperament.

8. **Chairpersons must be leaders.**

9. **Dealing with difficult board members.** The board chair is the first line of defence with an “Unruly” board member. The board chair has to have the courage to admonish, correct or reign in a board member who creates unnecessary conflict. Conflict on the board can be productive and it is the board chair who is charged with making sure it is healthy.

10. **Celebrate.** People thrive on recognition and it inspires others. Recognise the achievement of an individual board member or celebrate a successful result.

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