



## Five Key Leadership Lessons I learned from Serving on Non-Profit Boards

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Like many of you, I serve on several non-profit boards in various capacities including chair. And, like many of you, I have had great experiences and frustrating experiences. Here are some of the key leadership lessons I have learned along the way that are critical for success. These lessons can serve you well in both a non-profit and for-profit environment.

- 1. Have a vision.** This should be clear and well articulated so that everyone understands where the organization is going. People want to be part of something important if not big. Your job is to show them how their work is going to make a difference and then inspire them to want to do whatever it takes to deliver that vision.
- 2. Plan the work, work the plan.** Develop a strategic plan with deliverables, deadlines and key responsibilities. Then, your job is to motivate and coach team members to success. You should also expect to be called upon to secure resources, remove roadblocks and hold people accountable. Sound obvious? Maybe, but you'd be surprised at how many boards I've served on where there wasn't a plan in place. Poor board performance and lack of results were the outcome. Remember, most boards and teams want to be part of a group that makes things happen.
- 3. Get the right people on board.** Create job descriptions, identify key competencies, and benchmark positions to ensure that you put the right team in place. There are a number of assessment tools that can help you do this cost effectively and efficiently. And, don't be pennywise and pound foolish. If you lack critical skills in-house, then be willing to outsource to obtain those skills. I've never worked with an organization where budget wasn't a key consideration; however, completing a simple cost benefit analysis can go a long way in helping to make the business case for obtaining critical skills, particularly if they are required to achieve key outcomes.
- 4. Fire poor performers.** That's right. You're not doing anyone a favor by allowing someone that doesn't fulfill the minimum requirements of their position to continue in a particular role whether they are volunteers or paid employees. At best, it damages your credibility as a leader. At worst, it damages the performance of the entire team. It will be much harder for you to overcome a lack of credibility or worse, the resentment of your team, than it will be for you to muster up the courage to fire someone from your team. Of course you will want to follow your organizations policy for handling this type of situation.

**5. Make course corrections along the way.** Leaders make decisions based on the information currently at hand. As new information becomes available, you've got to be willing to use that information to implement changes along the way, and if necessary, to cancel projects and initiatives that no longer make sense altogether. Ignoring reality, unwillingness or inability to make key decisions, and inability to manage change, will only serve to undermine your effectiveness and the performance of those you are leading.

If you are currently leading or plan to lead a corporate or non-profit team, heed these lessons and you will find yourself and your team on the fast track for success.

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