BOARD BASICS FOR CAMPUS MINISTRY

"The seriousness with which a board member is recruited and selected is directly proportional to the seriousness with which a board member fulfills his or her role."[1]

There is considerable literature and discussion these days about board development, not all of it in agreement. It seems to be one of those transitional times between a management style that has worked well in the past and one that seems more attune to today's governance needs. In addition, there can never be a "one size fits all" model for boards. They need to be tailor-made to fit the local context and missional environment, built around the needs of the ministry and the availability of persons with the necessary gifts and experience to oversee and nurture the organization. Campus ministry boards are not, and cannot be expected to be, boards on the scale of large non-profit boards. Yet there are many ways in which all boards, both large and small, share challenges and responsibilities.

Tuning up your board or local governing committee is often like tuning up your car. It takes time and energy you might not have and it seems like a lot of work for not a lot of return—that is until gears begin to grind, the motor coughs and sputters, and common rattles turn into serious chassis defects. Deferred maintenance for boards is even more serious than deferred maintenance on your house or car. It can spell disaster down the road for your campus ministry, probably just at the time when you need to rely on your board most for guidance and support. So let's roll up our sleeves and consider a bit of overhauling, so that the next time the rubber hits the road, your board will be finely tuned and ready to run.

Simply put, boards have three responsibilities or "duties" that are traditionally described. The **Duty of Obedience** asks that board m3mbers be faithful to the organization's mission. The **Duty of Care** asks that board members be active participants in the management of the agency, including financial accountability. The **Duty of Loyalty** asks that board members give undivided allegiance to the organization, regardless of personal differences.

More specifically, campus ministry boards/steering committees are charged with responsibility for the following:

- Setting policy and maintaining the operational aspects of the ministry, including the filing of reports, keeping records, evaluation and visioning for the future,
- Making financial contributions to support the ministry, according to ability, beyond the contribution of time,
- Electing, guiding and supporting professional staff, including provision of adequate salary and benefits, and continuing education,
- Maintaining and improving facilities for ministry, and
- Interpreting to congregations and synods the vision and effectiveness of the ministry they serve.

John Carver is well known for his writing and speaking about the ongoing work of re-inventing boards. He is the creator of the Policy Governance model and author of *Boards the Make a Difference*.[2] He suggests that a strong board is:

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[1] Robert Andringa and Ted Engstrom, *Nonprofit Board Answer Book* (NCNB: Washington DC) 1998, p. 117

- ✓ Rooted in the ownership of the organization
- ✓ In charge of its own job; it is not simply advisory or a rubber stamp for staff
- ✓ Wise and explicit about organizational "ends"
- ✓ Wise and explicit about unacceptable organizational "means"
- ✓ Strong in its delegation to a CEO or director
- ✓ Rigorous in the monitoring of organizational performance
- ✓ Fulfills non-governance responsibilities, fund raising or interpretation for example
- ✓ Attentive to self-evaluation and capacity building

Carver begins his book with these words: "It takes no scholar to find the problems.... The problem is not that a group or an individual *occasionally* slips into poor practice, but that intelligent, caring individuals regularly exhibit procedures of governance that are deeply flawed. Certain common practices are such obvious drains on board effectiveness that one does not need a sophisticated model to recognize them. Although some boards may avoid a few of the following conditions, rarely does any one board avoid them all." Here are some problems Carver identifies:

- **Time on the trivial.** Smaller, insignificant items receive undue attention and energy, while major issues go unresolved.
- **Short-term bias**. The time horizon for completing tasks grows ever more distant, while more and more time is spent on little, current issues that make little long-term impact.
- **Reactive stance.** Response is made to staff initiatives or trends in the environment, rather than focusing on the long-term vision of the organization.
- **Reviewing, rehashing, redoing.** Dysfunctional board behavior is directly related to dwelling on the negatives of the past.
- **Leaky accountability.** Board members act as loose cannons, with little or no accountability to the official decisions of the board.
- **Diffuse authority.** No one is in charge and roles are ill-defined. Authority for making decisions is unclear.

If you were to take a careful look at the health of your board, with your board's involvement of course, what needed changes would be most obvious to you? Here is a description of general board responsibilities from the secular non-profit world. The National Center for Nonprofit Boards lists the following ten areas of board responsibility:[3]

1. Determine the organization's mission and purpose
2. Select the chief executive/staff.
3. Support the chief executive/staff and assess their performance.
4. Ensure effective organizational planning.
5. Ensure adequate resources.
6. Manage resources effectively.
7. Determine, monitor, and strengthen the organization's programs and services.
8. Enhance the organization's public standing.
9. Ensure legal and ethical integrity and maintain accountability.
10. Recruit and orient new board members and assess board performance.

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[2] John Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 1997)
[3] BoardSource, Web site: www.ncnb.org

As indicated earlier, not every board will be doing all of these things well at all times, but every board ought to be aware of these basic responsibilities and be working toward them with some kind of intentionality.

Beginning at the basic level, look at the task of **board recruitment**. Think about the gifts needed at this point in time to address the needs of your ministry. Do you need financial managers, real estate experts, legal advice, vision planners, public relations specialists, fund raisers? Instead of grabbing anyone off the street and hoping they can "learn the trade," recruit on the basis of **identified gifts**. Ask other non-profits and organizations in your area who they would recommend for a board such as yours. Make connections at the university, with the synod office, with other community groups. Find out who has been effective on other boards and ask about their interest in serving on yours. It's a kind of courtship, so be prepared for the "no" responses and rejoice in the "yes" ones. Prospective members may be invited to a "trial" meeting before they agree to serve or hold a meeting with the board chair and staff leader. Call the prospective member soon afterward for feedback. A board profile list may contain the following traits:[4]

ALL MEMBERS HAVE THESE TRAITS

- Demonstrated interest before nomination
- Donor of record in last year
- Some experience in our area of service
- Board service supported by family members
- Able to attend scheduled meetings and special events
- Known to be a good group decision-maker

MEMBERS HAVE ONE OR MORE OF THESE TRAITS

- Recognized community leader
- Prior experience on nonprofit boards
- Knowledge of nonprofit law
- Knowledge of fundraising
- Specialized knowledge of one mission/program area
- Helps balance the board in terms of gender/age/ethnicity
- Experience in marketing
- Good mediator of group disagreements
- Knowledge of land use and facilities management
- Experience in dealing with local government (or church relationships)
- Has network of donor prospects
- Leadership in other organizations important to us

Give yourself permission to "think outside the box" when it comes to board members. Check your bylaws. It may be that a certain number/percentage needs to represent your denomination. However, you may find some latitude to invite others who bring a unique perspective to your ministry. Consider:

- A faculty member with a certain background or skill
- A member of a social ministry area
- Someone who has led a fundraising campaign successfully
- A person with peace and justice concerns and connections

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[4] *Nonprofit Answer Book*, p. 119

- An artist or writer
- Someone who loves to volunteer and knows other volunteers
- A financial consultant or investment banker
- A construction engineer
- A computer expert

It might be helpful to you to design a grid that will allow you to chart the gifts of both current and prospective board members. Across the top of the grid make as many columns as you have positions. Down the side list the gifts you are seeking, including age, gender, cultural background, church affiliation, and a long listing of skills and professional qualifications. A sample follows at the end of this document.

Develop a **job description** for board members. Spell out what members are asked to do, the term of office, and expectations like attendance and financial support. As you and your current board members talk with new people about serving on your board, they will be curious about what you expect of them. A job description will be a good recruiting tool. Be as specific and straightforward as possible. They are being asked to donate their time, energy and financial support; they deserve to know what they are signing up for.

As you recruit, you will develop **a list of potential candidates**. Some of these folks will have the gifts you need now and will be ready to serve. Others will need to wait in the wings for a time when their skills can be best utilized. Therefore, you should keep a listing of potential board candidates, including the skills they offer and when they are available. In the meantime, they might serve as volunteers or on subcommittees. A **board application form** can gather information about skills and interests and where the person has served previously.

Once new members have joined the board, you will want to have a time of orientation, so that all members are on the same page. A mentoring system will connect newer members with more experienced members and add to the building of a positive board culture. Spend time during the meeting to be sure that everyone is up to date. Have a "dumb question" time when anyone can ask anything without appearing to be stupid.

Hold an annual board retreat. This can be a time for evaluation, as well as a time for visioning, goal setting, and budget planning.

Each member of the board should have a **board manual** that contains material relevant to the work of the board. This manual serves two functions. For the new member it provides useful orientation information about board structure, responsibilities and members. For continuing members the manual is a working tool and resource guide. Members are expected to read the book and assist in evaluating it from time to time. Materials should be added and removed to keep the manual up to date. As items are placed in the manual, they should be dated. Staff in consultation with board officers creates the manual. A thorough board manual can include the following[5]:

- ✓ Member listing and bios, including terms
- ✓ Organization chart listing officers and committees
- ✓ Brief history and/or fact sheet
- ✓ Articles of Incorporation and bylaws

[5] BoardSource, Web site: www.ncnb.org

- ✓ Vision and mission statement
- ✓ Strategic plan
- ✓ Financial statements, including prior year annual report, most recent audit and current budget
- ✓ Minutes of meetings
- ✓ Board policies and responsibilities
- ✓ Calendar of important dates
- ✓ Interpretation information, including Web site, newsletters, brochures, mailings, etc

It is highly recommended that one of the important committees of your board be a "Board Oversight Committee." The work of this group is highly significant, because they will be involved in the recruitment, training, mentoring, and evaluating of the board's work. They are the gate-keepers of your organization. They have an ongoing, year-round task that ought not to be shrunk to the quick-minded work of a typical nominating committee that hustles names the night before the annual meeting. Given the scope and responsibility of this committee, you will want to populate it with experienced, savvy board members. If this committee works effectively, the rest of the board will run smoothly. It's that critical.

When the task of fundraising becomes daunting, consider the appointment of a separate "Development Committee." This special committee would function separately from the governing board, but would be accountable to it. It would set the strategic plan for receiving gifts, provide for record-keeping and other support services, publish communications, nurture relationships with donors and encourage the work of the staff. Certainly they would have experience and comfort in gift solicitation and be involved in making significant visits. Members of this committee need a different skill set than regular board members, particularly in finance and investments. This committee may have a specific term of service, for example, beginning and ending with a major campaign.

Remember the importance of saying "thank you." If you and your board find a way to show appreciation for one another and the hard work that you all do together, that work will finally seem worth it. Word will get out that it is rewarding to be on your campus ministry board. People will feel valued and encourage other good folks to consider your board once their own term is completed. Like satisfied customers, satisfied board members are your best recruiters.

James Gelatt has written an insightful article called, "What a Horrible Way to Die."[6] He laments the amount of time meetings take, often in their busyness, detracting from the essential work that needs to be done. He suggests the following ways to ease the pain of meetings:

- **Start your meetings with an objective.** As you build your agenda, decide what the primary purpose of the meeting is and if other agenda items could be accomplished by some other means, such as email or a conference call.
- **Lay out the agenda.** Gelatt says that a good agenda has three parts: 1. Information (time-ordered and significant, not "bring and brag" time), 2. Progress (highlights, questions and future plans), and 3. Decision-making (items that require board action and resources).
- **Decide who should attend.** Not everyone needs to be at all meetings. Those invited should be: 1. those with information, 2. those with power to decide, and 3. those who need to be accountable (peer pressure is one of the values of meetings).

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[6] James Gelatt, "What a Horrible Way to Die," *Contributions,* March-April, 2003, p. 1f. He is the author of *Managing Nonprofits in the 21st Century* and general editor of Aspen's Fund Raising Series for the 21st Century.

- **Prepare for the meeting.** Written reports, including power point presentations, are usually a waste of time as part of the agenda and can be read in advance. Think through what needs to be shared face-to-face and have the material ready in concise, helpful ways. Don't find yourself at the copy machine 15 minutes into the meeting.
- **Check in and check out.** There is a real human need to connect with people before trying to make decisions with them. Set aside limited time before and after your meeting for people to connect. It will give you a chance to hear what's on their hearts and minds.
- **Make minutes brief.** There is little use in recording everything that goes on at your meeting. You should record only the "action items" or future directions. Reports can be noted as an appendix and should be sent in advance. Brief questions about reports may be in order, but not prolonged. Likewise, a financial statement can be sent in advance.
- **Anticipate.** Prior to the meeting ask yourself, which items are most likely to cause disagreement or get us off course? Can you structure the agenda to anticipate the discussion, e.g., early items generally generate the most discussion time. If there is an item that will require research or forethought, send it out in advance and ask for feedback prior to the meeting. Will seating arrangements or a process for discussion make a difference?
- **Assign roles.** Who leads? Who records? Who reports? Is there a role for a facilitator from the outside? Can these roles rotate?
- **Agree on ground rules.** These might include being on time, reading reports before the meeting, speaking both honestly and sensitively, and agreeing to not process board decisions outside the board meeting.
- **Train members in problem solving and decision-making.** This may best be done at a time of minimal conflict and general well-being. Use case studies or "what if" scenarios to prepare the board for times when they will need to use these skills.
- **Assess effectiveness.** At the conclusion of every meeting, spend 5 minutes asking, "How did we do this time?" Was the meeting useful? Are there ways we can improve? Always hold an annual evaluation that contains both written and verbal feedback.

As you consider ways to streamline your board meetings and make them more effective, consider these two possibilities.

1. **Dashboard.** A dashboard is a quick way of getting a read on the health and vitality of your organization. It might consist of a brief financial report, showing the levels of income and expense over the past 3 years in graph form. It might chart worship attendance and other ways to do a quantitative analysis of your ministry. It might show numbers of religious preference cards, congregations who sent names of incoming students, or those who signed up during fall orientation. Put on the dashboard anything that will help your board members get a quick sense of your status—just like the driver of a car looks to the dashboard for fuel levels, speed, mileage, or emergency indicators.

2. **Consent Agenda.** As mentioned above, there are many reports that can be sent to board members prior to the meeting. These should include secretary's reports, staff reports, treasurer's reports and other information that needs to be read and pondered at some length. These can be easily expedited by email or fax, with suggested changes attended to promptly. At the meeting there can be a brief time for questions or comments. Then the entire consent agenda is passed with one vote, becoming part of the record of the meeting.

Finally, build this little exercise into your meeting agendas. At the end of every meeting, spend the last 5 minutes evaluating the session. Ask for feedback on what went well, what could be changed to make the meeting more effective and efficient, or what could be done elsewhere in separate subcommittees or task groups. Talk about specifics, such as, length of meetings, reporting process, integration of all voices, and attention to the agenda. These mini-feedback moments will plant seeds that will open your leadership to larger times of visioning and evaluation.

This is clearly a time to think creatively and outside the box when it comes to board development. Give some time and careful attention to tuning up your campus ministry board. You will need to have it tuned up and in top condition to get you where you need to go. Take good care of your board and they will take better care of your ministry—and you.

BOARD JOB DESCRIPTION

John Carver has had a major influence on board development in the last decade. In his keystone work, *Boards That Make a Difference,*[1] he urges clarity of function, accountability and vision as hallmarks of effective boards. He wants boards to understand that they exist primarily to benefit people. It should be the board's obsession, he writes. Beyond the routine of meetings, budgets and goal-setting is the welfare of people. He advocates that board members be recruited primarily because of their vital interest in and concern for the lives those whom they seek to serve. In our case, that would mean young adults on campus and in the life of the church. A major question to keep in front of your board, therefore, is this: "Are we as a campus ministry board obsessed with the welfare of students and others in the university community?"

Carver is more concerned about commitment than he is about expertise. A "qualified" board member may possess a certain set of skills, which are important and will serve the organization well. Skills are important to consider in recruitment. What is most significant beyond that, however, is the qualification of "grasp, mentality, connectedness and compassion. As an assessment of past selection, consider this test: if fewer than half of the board's members would make good chairpersons, the selection needs improvement."[2] Do board members "get it?" Do they fully understand the mission of your organization and are they able to live into it with passion, energy and commitment?

I painfully remember a coffee conversation with a retiring board member a few years ago. She was not particularly active in her home congregation, but her pastor thought that it would "be good for her" to serve on our board. She was a likeable person and had some skills in finance. She served on the board for two terms and attended the meetings faithfully. She was a member of the executive committee and treasurer for a time. As we drained our coffee cups and got ready to leave, she paused and said, "You know, I never really figured it out," When I asked her what that meant, she said that she had figured out how the budget worked and how the board functioned, but she never understood why campus ministry was all that important.

Obviously the recruitment process is crucial to good board development. Likewise, orientation of new board members plays a large role in helping new members become familiar with current members, mission and goals, and expectations. Some boards invite potential new members to attend a meeting before they sign up, like test-driving a new car. After the meeting they are asked for feedback and have an opportunity to ask more questions. They are then asked to fill out an application form and are given a board job description that they sign, indicating that they fully understand the responsibilities and expectations they are about to assume.

Think about boards on which you have participated as a member. What was rewarding about that experience? What was frustrating? What were the surprises? How many times have potential board members been told something like this:

We really don't do a lot at our meetings.
Oh, just show up and you 'II figure out how it works.
We have a lot of fun; you 'II enjoy the other members.
Our staff person is so good; it really doesn't leave much for us to do.
We let the treasurer worry about the budget.
We're so glad you decided to join us. We were having trouble finding people.

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[1] *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco) 1997.
[2] Page 205.

The Job Description

It is both a courtesy and a matter of good management that everyone who signs on to be a board member receives a job description. This allows them to know in advance what will be expected of them and will serve as an evaluative tool throughout their time of membership. However, it is not so much a listing of tasks to be performed, as it is an outline of overarching responsibilities. It focuses on "performance outcomes" rather than on activities.

For example, the board is responsible for providing adequate financial resources for conducting the mission. Fundraising may be an activity that leads to the outcome of resources and there may be other activities that would lead to the same end. The focus of the board should be on the necessary outcome of all these activities, not just on the activities per se. The board is effective if the needed dollars are raised to carry on the ministry. They are much less effective if they had a huge telethon, but only raised half of the money.

Carver urges us to think of "board products" or end results. "Some might say that fundraising is the chief responsibility, even the *raison d'être*, of a board. I disagree. Fundraising by the board may be critical to a given organization, but it is more important that the organization be *worth raising funds for*."[3]

Carver summarizes the board's job products in three basic areas:

1. Linkage to the ownership

   The board serves as a bridge between the constituencies it represents and those it seeks to serve. For campus ministry that means relating to the families congregations and synods from which students come and who provide funding for our ministries. It means relating to the churchwide organization as well. Our constituents in campus ministry are varied and widespread. Communication, interpretation and advocacy bridging with this audience is a significant responsibility. The board acts as a trustee for the ownership and, as such, owes them accountable reports and personal interaction.
2. Explicit governing policies

   The board sets policy. It determines such things as how staff shall be hired and supervised, how monies are to be secured and spent, how decisions are to be made, and how the work of the board is to be carried out, including committee structure, if any.
3. Assurance of executive performance

   The board is not responsible for micro-managing the day-to-day activities of the staff it hires. It is responsible for the outcomes of staff activities in terms of fulfilling the ministry mission, however. To guide the work of staff, the boar develops a staff job description and performs an annual evaluation. The board must ensure that staff meets the criteria it has set forth.[4]

Each of these board functions is to be considered a "job output," not a job activity, although activities are certainly involved. The board's work is neither built on activities nor evaluated on the basis of these activities. The board's work is based on end products, not simply the activities it takes to get there.

Another example: if the work of the board is to serve as a bridge to congregations, it will evaluate its effectiveness on the results of its contacts with congregations, not on the number of meetings or on the amount

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[3] Page 134.

[4] In some cases, where staff services are minimal, board members are often expected to roll up their sleeves and participate in some of the day-to-day functions of the ministry. They are often called a "workgroup board." In other situations, where staff services are more plentiful, there is a clearer distinction between "staff work" and "board work." If the board wants a staff person to carry out a task, it ceases to be the function of the board.

of paper sent to inform about the ministry. What is important are results, so the board will evaluate whether or not congregations are more informed, more involved and more supportive as a result of their bridging connections.

One more example: a board may decide that its work is to provide sufficient funds for the ministry to operate and for staff to be paid adequately. Although activities are involved in fund raising, the "job product" is actually the dollars raised. There can be a lot of activity that generates few results. The board needs help to see that what is important is the end result, not just going through the motions. An assembly line should produce an automobile. A series of courses should eventuate in a degree. While activities are part of a strategic plan, and are often interesting and fulfilling to do, the board must look at the results to evaluate its work.

With all of this as background information and grist for discussion, consider the following job description for board members of campus ministry agencies.

CAMPUS MINISTRY

Board of Directors Job Description

*Mission Statement:*____

As a representative of the church, you have been called to serve on the Board of Directors of ____________________Campus Ministry at ___________________________. As such, you will be primarily responsible for the work of:

- Linking the campus ministry to its constituencies,
- Developing and implementing policies and procedures, and
- Assuring management of resources and the performance of staff.

In order for this work to happen in a timely and faithful fashion that carries out the mission of campus ministry, it is expected that board members will:

- Understand the mission and goals of campusministry,
- Become knowledgeable with the life and culture of the university and the needs of young adults on campus,
- Provide vision and direction for the future of the ministry,
- Contribute financially to the ministry on an annual basis, as generously as possible,
- Secure, manage and allocate funds provided to the ministry by all sources,
- Maintain liaison with congregations, supporting synods, and the churchwide organization to interpret the ministry and seek feedback,
- Be knowledgeable of important deadlines and issue accurate reports,
- Attend regularly scheduled meetings of the board,
- Serve on special committees or task groups as assigned,
- Hire, direct and evaluate the work of professional staff,
- Attend programs of the ministry as appropriate or when invited,
- Oversee property management, including upkeep, insurance and expansion,
- Participate in a regular evaluation of the board, and
- Ensure that the ministry complies with all applicable local, state and federal laws.

I understand the expectations and implications described above and pledge to fulfill my obligations as a board member to the best of my ability, with God's help and guidance.

____ ______________________
Board Member Signature Date

____ ______________________
Board President Signature Date

An Effective Board Check List

Effective boards make it their top priority to <u>set policy</u> about….

__ the ministry's mission, core values, over-arching purpose/vision
__ the board's own operations (membership, election of officers, evaluation of board and member performance, etc.)
__ major program goals or areas of mission, including the populations served
__ staff configurations and evaluations
__ how the budget is developed and funds raised
__ how the ministry relates to the larger synod/congregation constituency

Effective boards are <u>more than the sum of their parts</u> and more than an expression of strong individual board members because….

__the process used during the board meetings encourages the participation of all board members
__ board members practice the skills of active listening, clear speaking, and straightforward feedback
__ problem-solving techniques are used to explore all possible solutions
__ both disagreement and consensus are encouraged so that the board can speak with one voice

Effective boards insist on <u>receiving in advance</u>—at least one week before their meetings—*written agendas* which include…

__ date, time, location, participants, and phone numbers for questions
__proposed resolutions or options (the board can always change the wording or start over with a new resolution)
__ items for discussion or vote, including supportive information
__ background material (material handed out at board meetings rarely receives the attention it deserves)
__ the financial report, even if it is preliminary
__ written staff reports (which should not be re-read at the meeting, although appropriate questions may be asked

Effective boards distribute <u>minutes</u> following each meeting which….

__record only adopted resolutions—not discussion and not defeated resolutions (unless formally requested by board members)
__ do not record votes (unless a board member requests that her or his yea, nay or abstention be recorded). The board speaks with one voice
__ are sent out within one week after the meeting so that board members' memories are fresh enough to correct any inaccuracies

Effective boards use their meetings to <u>make decisions</u> by….

__ starting on time and ending at a pre-established time

__ placing time limits for the consideration of each agenda item (a motion can always be tabled or extended)

__ presenting formal motions which are repeated before an actual vote is taken and which are submitted for a yea, nay or abstention

__ having a chairperson who

- does not participate in the formal debate on motions or resolutions
- does not vote unless a tie exists
- facilitates discussion by asking for every member's opinion
- summarizes the discussion and repeats the motion or resolution before each vote
- holds everyone else accountable for their part of the agenda

Effective boards take their <u>fiduciary responsibility</u> seriously be requesting….

__ an annual budget which is formally adopted by the board

__ monthly or quarterly financial reports—with balance sheets

__ an annual audit by an outside accountant or a financial review by persons capable of conducting such review according to ELCA Best Practices for Campus Ministry

__ proposed policies for the investment of reserve or encumbered funds

__ an annual report and operating grant request by July 1, as defined by Policies and Procedures for ELCA Campus Ministry.

Effective boards <u>evaluate the principal staff</u> members….

__ annually, which eventuates in a written report

__ on the basis of specific objectives agreed to in advance by the board and the staff member

__on the basis of the staff member's performance in meeting budget and program goals and in carrying out the campus ministry mission.

Modified from a document by Stephen Hitchcock, "How Do Effective Boards Achieve Results: A Checklist for Boards of Directors and Trustees.

MOVING BEYOND RUBBER STAMPS AND CHEERLEADERS

A number of years ago, when I was serving as a local campus pastor, a retiring board member invited me out for coffee. She had served for six years, most of the time on the executive committee, one term as treasurer. She thanked me for asking her to serve on the board and said how meaningful the contacts were with students she had met. Then, as we were leaving, she paused and said, “You know what, after six years I still don’t get what being a board member is all about.”

Her honest appraisal caught me up short, and it has continued to haunt me over the years. We had a mentoring process in place. She was not a personal friend that I recruited; I had received her name from an area congregation. We did annual board evaluations. What did we miss? What might other board members be thinking about their own experiences?

My inbox is attracting a number of email questions recently about the functioning of campus ministry boards. Perhaps it’s the time of year when boards and staff are going through some kind of annual evaluation (hopefully). The concerns are stated something like this:

- “Our board spends a lot of time talking about planning and visioning, but when it comes to getting the work done, it always seems to fall to me (the campus pastor).”
- “Members of our board enjoy baking cookies for students during finals week, but they don’t seem to have the energy to work on the larger issues of the ministry, such as fund raising or interpretation.”
- “I’m a little worried that my board willingly goes along with whatever I as a staff person want to do. ‘You know best’, they say.”
- “The board chair ‘gets it,’ but everyone else defers to her when decisions are made.”
- “We don’t seem to ever carry through on our great planning. Everyone gets enthused, but then it falls apart because there is no one to carry out what we have dreamed—except me.”
- “Things are going pretty well right now. My board is made up mostly of my friends. What should I be aware of?”

First, I want to acknowledge that nearly everyone reading this article has related to boards that were “rubber stamps” or had some other general dysfunction, such as attrition or complacency. Perhaps we have experienced them as staff, even contributed to their malaise. But we “get by” with them without having to fix them or overhaul them to any major extent. It’s like a lot of folks here in the upper Midwest who drive “beater” cars during the winter months. It’s just something to get them by until the spring thaw or until they can afford something better. Rubber stamp boards help us to “get by.” They may not be very efficient or effective. They may even involve us in an organizational “wreck” at some point down the road. But for now we throw in another quart of oil and risk the possible wreck, just to get by for a few more months.

Rubber stamp boards happen for a number of reasons.

1. Their role or job description is not carefully defined. Members are recruited to be on the board with the sense that not a lot would be required of them.

2. They are friends and family, often quite literally. They took on the board role to be supportive, but not with the expectation that their work in that capacity would be evaluated or that hard decisions would be required of them.
3. They felt "fortunate" to serve where there is a very capable campus pastor who has been there for many years. This staff person "knows the ministry" and just needs the board to support their decisions.
4. The board does not have a larger vision of the ministry. They have not been asked to dream or plan. They spend all of their time and energy getting from one meeting to the next, often fretting with small details rather than working on major decisions.
5. The relationship between board members has not been defined. Often one or two "long-term" members make the decisions, leaving the rest of the members to acquiesce.
6. The synods, who often appoint board members, do not request or expect feedback from them in any meaningful way.

Boards generally do not set out to be rubber stamps. New members join enthusiastically. They have made a commitment to serve and they are willing to do just about anything to help the ministry move forward. Rubber stamping happens over time, as decisions are increasingly deferred to staff and more power is sapped from the energy core of the board. It is the road less traveled. It happens when someone says, "I'll just do it; you don't need to worry about it." Or, "Let's ask Mary what she would do; she's been on the board for so long." Or, "The campus pastor will get those bids for the new roof taken care of." Before you know it, the board becomes a bunch of bobble-heads, nodding at decisions they have not grappled with and okaying results for which they have no responsibility.

Les Stahlke, president of Governance Matters, states in a recent article about rubber stamp boards, "A CEO (read campus minister) who wants to drive board decisions or who thinks the board is a 'necessary evil' does great disservice to the organization and is certainly abusing his/her power. In all four basic responsibilities, the board must: (a) design its own structure and processes; (b) direct the strategic plan; (c) delegate authority and responsibility to the CEO; and, (d) determine progress and measure results."[1] His solution is to have the board spend time on the agenda discussing the role of the board and the role of the director. When this key relationship is understood, everyone will be happier, he says.

In a related article describing the "cheerleading board," Stahlke notes the way in which a board that begins as "friends who want to be supportive . . . who agree to serve by helping you, not to give an outlet for their own expertise in the area of your own," never makes it to a more mature stage without some serious understanding of their role as a governing board. They are like dependent adolescents who never grow up. They have some of the marks of maturity, but they never get there.

Stahlke writes, "Everything still depends on you. Your board is no less supportive than they have always been. Unfortunately for you, however, they are in no better position to take the organization forward without you. . . . You thought they would be able to take on the load of strategic planning, to search for and select the perfect successor, and to take the organization into the future without you, like a flywheel carrying the momentum of change. But they are still cheerleaders. They are definitely not a mature governing board."[2]

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[1] *www.relationshipmodel.com/fb/articles/govproc/rubgov.aspx,* 4/9/2007
[2] *www.relationshipmodel.com/fb/articles/govstruc/cheerbrd.aspx* 4/9/07

Stahlke states that there are two necessary components that need to be in place. One is a statement of relationship between the board and the director, the other is the relationships between the board members themselves, between the board and its chair, and between the board and some other governing authority up the line, such as synods in our campus ministry structure. These are the relationships that so easily go undefined in an organization. There are assumptions about responsibilities, but never candid conversation or deliberate decisions. There may be a board manual, but it's not followed. Cheerleaders who enjoy their position seldom aspire to put on the pads and be players.

Healthy organizations are clear about lines of authority, limitations of staff and board, areas of responsibility, expectations and results, and accountability. There is a known process for determining how decisions are made and for how directives are to be carried out. There is regular evaluation—not to be punitive, but to learn from mistakes and false assumptions. Throughout the organization there is affirmation for work well-done, a strategic plan that makes everyone's contribution significant, and ways to empower leadership at all levels to take appropriate action.

As I consider the experience I shared at the beginning, I think that we missed it at the point of empowerment. As staff, we took too much responsibility from board members, hoping to make life less difficult and demanding for them. In doing so we also took away the challenge to plan and the rewards of work accomplished. We did not empower them. We thanked them for their stamps of approval, but then wondered why they didn't show up for the next meeting.

Someone has said that at every board meeting something should be at stake. There should be important reporting, significant planning, challenging visions, or earth-shaking decisions that must be made that require the active presence and participation of every board member. Empowerment, that's the key to turning around a rubber stamp board. How can that happen where you serve?

BOARD EVALUATION

‘To rule is easy,” quipped Goethe,” to govern difficult.” It’s one of those insights that seem to span the ages. With poetic incisiveness, Goethe seems to have touched the nerve of so much of our present difficulty, whether it is national politics or the local school board. Don’t you wish, sometimes, that a benevolent autocrat would simply arise and tell us all where to go and how to do it? Then we could lay aside the messy stuff of governance, quit the endless meetings and reports and move on with it—whatever “it” is.

With careful and clear-headed reflection, however, we can be thankful that that’s not the way we do things. We’re more collegial, more consultative, and more democratic than a knee-jerk response to bad governance suggests. Our more enlightened ways of leadership and progressive action always seem to involve the perspectives and critical thinking of others. It’s not that we’re indecisive, most of the time. We have come to know through years of experimentation and experience that collective visioning, planning and evaluation gets the mission accomplished more effectively and faithfully than allowing one person to shoulder the responsibility him/herself. So we have, in our wisdom, sought to surround ourselves with competent, engaging, thoughtful people who can help us carry forward the ministry to which we have been called. That group of folks is called “a board,” or other similar nomenclature that you may use locally. **The purpose of boards is to govern—to give structure and direction to the ministry by setting policy, hiring and supervising staff, and interpreting the work to those who support it by lifting up the vision and inviting their response.**

A few months ago Jack Fortin, who teaches leadership at Luther Seminary, shared some insights about boards with several Minnesota staff and board members. Jack said that boards have *authority*, while staff members have *leadership*. Boards *stabilize* while staff members *stretch* the boundaries of the vision and the daily work. Staff members are like the *flow* of a river, while boards provide the *banks* and boundaries. Boards can help focus the energy that the activities of staff generate. Staff members are about *action* and boards are about *reflection and direction*. While staff may deal with the *urgent* issues of the day, the board is called to deal with the *important* issues of today that impact the ministry tomorrow.

I know that I’m preaching to the choir when I say that board development is crucial to the ongoing ministry to which we have been called. We have known this for decades. However, as resources become scarce in these trying financial times, we will find a greater emphasis placed on the effectiveness of local and area agency boards. At the time of the quadrennial review, the review team will consider renewal based on the effectiveness of the ministry and its faithfulness to the campus ministry mission. This review will consider more carefully the work of the board than is now the case, in addition to viewing the leadership of the staff person. While this is not meant to strike fear into the heart of anyone currently struggling with board sluggishness, it does suggest that in the ensuing months attention needs to be given to the care and nurture of those good folks who are in charge of governing our ministries.

Two writers in the field of board evaluation, Andringa and Engstrom,[1] tell us that one of the most neglected and sensitive of all board evaluation duties is the assessment of its own performance. There are a number of reasons:

- Evaluation of peers is touchy business
- No external entity requires it or even exerts pressure to do it.
- Few board members know how to coordinate an evaluation and fewer still volunteer to do it.
- The press of other urgent board business keeps the board from less pressing topics such as self-evaluation.

The authors go on to suggest reasons why evaluation is essential:

- An organization, in the long run, is no better than its board. It is in everyone's interest to help the board to function as effectively as it possible can.
- Board members become frustrated when they perceive that the board is dysfunctional in key areas. As a result, attendance drops, some may resign.
- Staff morale suffers when the board doesn't seem interested in getting its act together. When staff trust and respect for the board wanes, few chief executives can on their own fill that leadership vacuum.
- When a board can address its own needs honestly, it sends the right signal to staff members that making mistakes and learning from them is natural and good.
- An effective board addresses issues, keeps the mission clear, uses funds wisely, and makes board meetings enjoyable. New member recruitment is easy.

There are a number of ways to conduct board evaluations. The simplest way is to have conversation on an ongoing way. Set aside 5-10 minutes at every board meeting to ask, "How are we doing?" "What went well at this meeting; what could be better?" Solicit the comments of newer members especially. They often have the keenest eyes and ears. When members are given the freedom to make suggestions for improvement, they feel more ownership and understand that their ideas are valued. However, when change is discussed, change is expected. So when a consensus emerges about a new direction for board action, it should be addressed, perhaps by a task force or subcommittee.

The next level of evaluation is to consider a retreat or special event where the board will avail itself of some training by using a book or tape, by having an outsider with experience work with them, or by hiring a consultant. In this kind of setting standards can be set and job descriptions written by which board members can gauge their performance.

A third level might be a survey conducted either internally by a special committee or externally by a third party. A survey includes aspects of the board's life to be rated on a scale of one to five, as well as several open-ended questions. The board receives a summary of the responses, although no names are mentioned. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete and should be collated by someone outside the board, perhaps a former member. The survey covers such material as mission, board size, committee structure, orientation, and quality of meetings. An alternative would be to do shorter surveys periodically on a single aspect of the board's work.

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[1] Robert Andringa and Ted Engrstom, *Nonprofit Board Answer Book* (National Center for Nonprofit Boards: Washington, DC, 1998).

A fourth level of evaluation would be an external audit. At this level a consultant with expertise on board governance would be asked to examine: review of the articles of incorporation and bylaws, interviews of officers, other board members and staff, observe board and committee meetings, create and administer a survey, and facilitate a discussion about key issues raised.

While board evaluations can occur at any time, there may be natural cycles in the life of campus ministry that are obvious for such activity. The end of the academic year is one important time for self-reflection. The process of the quadrennial review is another built-in time for campus ministry. Summer months, when activity on campus is at a minimum, leaves some time for gathering survey responses. Early fall is often a good time for retreats that look both forward and backward.

I remember reading about an elderly couple from the Midwest who left home to travel to a nearby town. As they drove, they got more and more disoriented, but the just kept driving. They stopped for gas, for an occasional bite to eat, and to sleep by the side of the road. But they did not stop for directions or to ask for help. I guess they just figured that if they kept driving they would arrive at their destination sooner or later. If you've ever felt like you were along for that kind of ride with your board, you know how valuable it would be to stop and ask for directions or for some help. A board that never evaluates its performance is hoping, even risking, that all it needs to do to accomplish its mission is to keep on driving. But what do you think its chances are of getting there?

Attached is a draft of an evaluation tool that may be useful with your own board. If it is helpful, use it. If not, guide your board in the development of their own instrument. The outcome of your trip together as staff and board will depend on it.

BOARD EVALUATION

	INDICATOR	5	4	3	2	1	NA
1	The roles of the board and staff are well defined and respected.						
2	The board participates fully in visioning and strategic planning.						
3	Each board member has an up to date job description and has signed it.						
4	The board sets fund raising goals and is involved in the generation of resources.						
5	The board's nominating process ensures that membership is appropriately diverse.						
6	Board members receive initial orientation and ongoing training, including mentoring.						
7	The board regularly reviews the bylaws and policy documents.						
8	The board has a process for handing urgent matters between meetings.						
9	The board has an attendance policy and an annual calendar of meetings						
10	Meetings have written agendas and materials are distributed in advance of the meeting.						
11	The board has a process for managing conflict.						
12	An audit or financial review occurs annually.						
13	The board is involved in accurate reporting of programs and financial resources						
14	The board has a process to regularly review staff performance.						
15	The board has comprehensive personnel policies that have been reviewed by a professional.						
16	Each board member feels involved and interested in the board's work.						
17	The board takes time regularly to understand campus issues and students' concerns.						
18	Care is taken that necessary skills and professional expertise are present on the board.						
19	The board understands and follows campus ministry policies and procedures.						
20	The board is involved in interpretation and communication to the community and churches.						

(5=Very Good, 4 Good, 3 Average, 2 Fair, 1 Poor. NA=Not Applicable) TOTAL						

Best possible score: 100

Please list three to five points on which you think the board should focus its attention in the next year. Be as specific as possible.

BOARD MEMBER BILL OF RIGHTS

- The right to know the responsibilities of a board member prior to deciding to become a member.
- The right to be invited to serve because of my particular gifts and interests.
- The right to be oriented to the process and culture of the board.
- The right to receive mentoring, when needed or requested, to become more effective as a board member.
- The right to receive information on time, including all financial reports, minutes, staff reports, and any other materials that need to be read prior to the meeting.
- The right to hear words of appreciation and affirmation, when appropriate.
- The right to have my ideas valued and my opinions registered fairly.
- The right to participate in an evaluation process with other board members.
- The right to know when my service is not satisfactory, so that I can correct it or cease to serve.

Dealing with Dysfunctional Boards

"A good board is a victory, not a gift."

Center for Non-profit Boards/Boardsource

There is very little "fun" in dys*fun*ctional boards. When boards do not perform according to the needs and expectations of the organization, meetings become boring banter or hostile encounters between power-seeking factions. Accountability drifts, work goes unattended, and needed resources never arrive. As dysfunctional behavior continues, it becomes harder to recruit new board members. Some members who need to retire find reasons to continue *ad infinitum*. Finances are in disarray. You get the picture; you've been there. So have I. What I would like address in this edition of First Monday are the reasons why boards become dysfunctional over time and how we can help them find purpose and direction once again.

In conversations with many local staff and board members, the most common concern I hear is that board members don't know why they are on the board to begin with. They have been recruited by friends who currently serve (and are hoping for a way to leave) or by staff (who take too much responsibility for identifying and inviting). Or they may have been referred by synod offices or a local congregation, because they have served well in other organizations (and are probably dead-tired by now). There are several issues here.

1. There usually is not a nominating committee in place until such a time as someone notices that new members are needed, and usually within a very limited timeframe. The committee becomes desperate and recruits "any warm body" who agrees to serve, but with no sense of why they were asked or what they are supposed to do once they get into the harness.
2. There is no discernment by the current board about what skills and gifts are needed to match the challenges faced by the board in the years ahead. While some board responsibilities can be learned, others need to be tailored specifically to professional training and experience, such as fundraising, legal concerns, real estate, or financial issues.
3. There is no training for new board members. Obviously, for those who have served on other boards and committees, there is transferable experience. However, serving on a campus ministry board is a unique opportunity. New members will need help to understand campus and young adult culture, the history of the ministry, financial complexities, or church operations at a different level. We expect new members to "get it" by some kind of miraculous process of osmosis, but when they don't, they get frustrated and step back or leave.
4. There is no annual evaluation of the board. Usually, when things are running relatively smoothly, there is not the sense that things could be better or that there is a need to affirm good board activity. When things become urgent, however, evaluation quickly becomes finger-pointing and blaming, rather than being an objective look at what needs improvement.
5. Well-intended boards become meddlers and micro-managers. With no solid guidelines or job descriptions, they often default to doing something/anything to make their time worthwhile. They spend their time critiquing the daily schedule of the campus pastor or re-decorating the campus center. They seek to shore up the questionable work of the staff or become regular volunteers, rather than tending to their more appropriate work of oversight and governance.

6. The roles between board and staff become blurred. If there is a strong staff personality in place, the board often defers to the decisions made by the staff member. As an opposite extreme to the meddling board named above, they become rubber stamps for the decided directions laid down by over-managing staff.

LOOKING ANEW AT RESPONSIBILITIES

Let's begin to look at some correctives to the problems identified above by taking a new overview of board responsibilities. Holland and Hester[1] invite us "to look at the board's performance from a new perspective: the board's main functions are to help the executive or minister identify the most important issues facing the organization in the months and years ahead, to work together to formulate creative responses, and then to shape and fine-tune decisions in partnership as the work of the organization goes forward."

From this new vantage point several things are possible.

- ✦ The vision of the ministry and the strategic plan can guide the work of the board and the decisions that are necessary to carry the mission forward. It is an opportunity to lift heads and hearts and ask appropriate questions about vision and purpose. A board that is mired in too much hands-on detail, or conversely, a board that is complacent, can find its reason for being by focusing again on the overall vision and what they need to do to move it forward. New energy can be generated from this new sense of purpose.

- ✦ The responsibilities of the board, both individually and collectively, can be defined and affirmed. A job description for the board can be designed based on this new vision of what tactical responsibilities are necessary to reach important goals.

- ✦ The search for new board members takes on a serious tone. Care is given to identifying what skill sets will be needed from board members in the days to come. Intentional recruitment of persons with specific gifts for specific tasks takes time. Good boards have a nominating or oversight committee[2] that functions throughout the year. They are always on the lookout for potential members, nurturing them, inviting them more deeply into an understanding of the ministry, so that when the time comes to ask them to serve, they can respond with some sense of understanding and information.

- ✦ The board begins to take its own health and culture seriously. They begin to ask themselves about the climate of the meetings, were they effective, and did they get the job done. They put in place an annual board evaluation process to discover not only how they did in the past year, but how they can function better in the year ahead. They can be both self-critical and self-affirming, not out of crisis or a sense of desperation, but because they want to grow in stronger, healthier ways.

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[1] *Building Effective Boards for Religious Organizations,* Thomas P. Holland and David C. Hester, editors (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2000), p. 88

[2] In the best of all worlds this is a standing committee that is responsible for interviewing and recruiting new candidates, mentoring, and evaluating the board's performance monthly and annually.

- ✦ Relationships between staff and board improve, because each has an understanding of the proper role of the other. They don't do each other's work; they work inter-dependently, each with their own job descriptions and means of evaluation.

MAKING BOARD CHANGE HAPPEN

A reality that must be recognized is that boards will not change their behavior if they see no need to do so. We know that change can't be forced on individuals, neither can it be forced on organizations. Unfortunately it may take a crisis to bring the need for change to everyone's attention. The building may be falling down, the budget may have developed a black hole, or the board is ready to fire the staff (or vice versa). Change requires new energy and new commitment. Board members may just be treading water until their term in office is over. While they may have a sense of the magnitude of the work ahead, it may seem so daunting that they don't have the collective will to attend to it.

"As a board member, you have a responsibility to subvert mediocrity." Kay Sprinkle Grace[3]

Grace's point in the quote above is that it is the responsibility of every board member to challenge the way in which the board functions and to contribute to the health of the board culture. She observes that there is frequently a slide to mediocrity by boards and a lowering of expectations and performance. One can expect it, like sin in the human family. It has individual as well as corporate dimensions. Mediocre boards don't happen overnight, but they may happen without anyone noticing or reversing the slide downward. Grace lays the responsibility for change at the feet of each member. "The non-profit sector deserves the very best leadership possible. As a board member, it's your mandate not only to lead and govern, but to ensure that others do as well."[4]

Although staff may be highly sensitive to the need for board change, staff responsibilities for effecting board change need to be carefully considered. It's not *your* board that needs changing; it's the ministry's board. They don't work for you; you work for them, albeit in a mutually supportive way. Machinations that attempt to move out certain members and/or add new members are bound to backfire. Changes in the way that decisions are made or goals addressed may be obvious to you, but may not be obvious to others.

The most effective way in which staff can speak to change is by providing information about ministry needs that the board must address or by describing outcomes which are crucial to the ministry, but are not happening at the present time. For example, the need for fundraising will become more urgent when staff informs the board of the costs of continuing the service events or what the ramifications of dissolving the peer ministry program might be in terms of their own work load and the overall impact of student leadership on the ministry. The need for board involvement in recruiting new members will become apparent when staff point out the obvious implications of inviting their own friends to serve. Times set for board and staff evaluations have an expectation that candor and good listening are the rule of the day, without the fear of punitive consequences. The appointment of a mutual ministry committee may also help the process of honest speaking and hearing.

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[3] *The Ultimate Board Member's Book*, Kay Sprinkle Grace (Emerson & Church: Medfield, MA, 2008) p. 60.
[4] *Ibid*, p. 60

James Gelatt[5] acknowledges that he has worked with "boards with bad attitudes" over the years. He is sensitive to the need for boards to change and to the propensity of staff to want to fix the way the board works (or doesn't). He suggests:

1. Advocate for a consultant. Stack the deck with someone you know who can bring about the concepts of change as a "neutral" outsider, even though this is a person you know you can trust and be candid with.
2. Encourage board education sessions as a way for the board to grow and be healthy. Stay away from "training" language, which suggests that no one knows what they are doing. Talk about these as "growth" sessions or "information" sessions.
3. Share information from time to time about good board governance, but don't use it critically or as a way to whip your board into shape.
4. Be "apolitically political" by formatting problems as questions that need answers or concerns that need responses.
5. When possible, get the board to agree to self-evaluation. Maybe an "I'll go first" approach will work. If they see the positive value of evaluating staff, they will see the value of looking at their own process and outcomes.
6. Look for champions—people on the board or elsewhere who understand the challenges in the same way you do. Help their voices to be heard in a non-threatening way. For example, students can be very helpful in acquainting board members with the realities of campus life and the need for doing ministry in a particular way.

HOW BOARDS LEARN

The learning that a board must to do change its own culture is tied to both the developmental and the tactical work of the boards. It is a false dichotomy to separate the two. The dimensions of group interaction (discernment, decision-making, problem-solving, feedback), are critically tied to the accomplishment of goals and outcomes. Further, as these twin aspects of board change are identified, the reality is that change is not a quick fix that happens overnight or at one meeting alone. Meaningful change happens over time.

Holland and Hester remind us, "Effective boards are composed of members who work intentionally at learning and developing group skills. . . . Strong boards take time to examine their performance, to learn from their successes as well as from their mistakes, and to build skilled teamwork."[6] They also note that it is easier to change a board's behavior collectively than change members attitudes or personalities. Exhortations and pleading do not work nearly as well as changes in routines, procedures, and structural formation.

Members begin to think differently and act differently as a result of such practical steps as bringing thoughtful questions to the board, providing relevant and focused information on the issue, dividing members into small groups to brainstorm alternative solutions and formulate recommendations, and encouraging critical and analytical thinking about coming changes that are before the group, focusing on specific priorities, and agreeing on steps for accountability.[7]

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[5] "Boards with Bad Attitudes," James Gelatt, *Contributions*, September-October, 2005
[6] Holland and Hester, pp. 88-89.
[7] Holland and Hester, pp. 91-92

Boards learn as most adults learn—by examining their successes, evaluating their failures, and trying new strategies and structures. Nurturing a group setting where all questions are legitimate, all voices heard, and all possibilities examined will help a board break out of its indenture to stifling routine and grinding apathy. Topics of discussion at poignant intervals might be:

- What did we do well that made this goal happen?
- What could we have done better to make the event more effective?
- How could we structure the board to get more done outside regular meetings?
- What new skills do we need to invite onto the board to accomplish our new goals?
- How did we get into this situation?
- What alternatives could we consider in the future?
- When could we have used more information?
- What new things do we need to learn to mover forward?
- Are there criteria for staying on the board or leaving that we need to consider?

DIS-INVITING BOARD MEMBERS

This may be the most difficult dilemma—how to get a dysfunctional board member(s) to resign, particularly when they feel the need to stay. For example:

- A board president has not only been on the board forever, they have held the key position of president for 12 years, and have expected all decision-making to go through them.
- A fundraising committee has taken on the responsibility for the annual fund, but the income has slid decisively for the past five years.
- A strategic planning task force has been appointed, but has not met for the past year.
- Two members of the board use the meetings to work out personal vendettas, drawing other members into taking sides.
- The person responsible for maintaining the Web site refuses to turn over the work to someone else.
- The treasurer promises monthly reports, but offers only excuses why they are not available.

When the board itself becomes aware of issues like those noted above, there are several directions that can be taken.

1. The bylaws can be reviewed and, if necessary, changed to address term limits, terms of office, and attendance. Once in place, bylaws need to be enforced and can be used as leverage to change leadership.
2. How responsibilities are to be handled through the board structure, by the executive committee, or mutually by board and staff can be reviewed or reassigned.
3. A job description can be put in place for the board and used at an annual evaluation.
4. If the member was appointed by the synod council, for example, the council could act to remove the member.
5. If malfeasance is detected, for example careless work on the part of a treasurer, that member can be asked to step down from their position.

When a staff person becomes convinced that a board member(s) is dysfunctional, there is little overt action that can be taken. If a meeting is called for with such a member, the staff person should always go in the company of the board chair, or if the chair is at fault, with at least one other member of the executive committee. Every attempt should be made to help the member become part of a healthy board once again before any resignation is asked for. If problems persist, perhaps the synod bishop will agree to participate in further conversation. Avoid triangulation. Use the tools named above for the board itself to utilize. Be patient; look for cracks in the process to insert a carefully chosen word. Pray.

Very often uninvolved board members are looking for a way out. Someone who was once active and productive may find it difficult to continue, but they do not want to let others down, so they hold their place at the table knowing that soon their term will come to an end or that by slacking they won't be asked to serve on another committee. When dysfunctional behavior becomes obvious, it's the responsibility of the board chair to thank the member for their service, acknowledge the current dilemma, and offer the member the opportunity to step down. Kay Sprinkle Grace reminds us, "It's important to prune deadwood on a board. But it's also key to discover why the wood is dying. Only then can you prune correctly, or water and witness new growth."[8]

[8] Kay Sprinkle Grace, p. 108

INVOLVING THE BOARD IN FUND RAISING

If you want to provide a quick and accurate stress test for your board members, just lay this mandate (gently) before them at your next meeting: "One of your primary responsibilities as a board member is to do fund raising for campus ministry." With few exceptions, the response will probably be immediate and definitive: "You want us to do what!?" This approach is most effective if you wait until they are signed on as board members and have been lulled into thinking that their most important contribution will be baking cookies for the next student dinner. You said that this was going to be fun (or at least interesting) and that being on the board wouldn't require much time or energy from them, right? And now, you have betrayed them and dragged them into this "fund raising thing," which they have no interest in or intention of doing. So after the dust settles and all the gauntlets are thrown down, what do you do now? How do you get this lovely group of well-intended folks, many of whom are your personal friends, to rollup their sleeves and get on with the work of fund raising?

I have met with many boards and staff over the years and I can tell you that this is not an easy sell. I would have better luck pushing Cheesehead hats in Viking country or walking my cat in a rainstorm. Most board members track the conversation pretty well when we talk about the responsibilities of hiring and overseeing professional staff, interpreting the ministry, creating a vital vision, and establishing "best practices." It's when the discussion turns to the responsibility of providing adequate resources for the ministry, and their role in soliciting those resources, that they have this collective "deer in the headlights" look. They can't imagine that they agreed to do fund raising. And maybe they didn't, particularly if there was no board job description to read prior to signing up. But here we are, together in this quandary, trying to make sense of what it means to raise resources as a member of the board. With our wits semi-assembled, how can we begin to think about what's both necessary and possible for fund raising in our ministries?

Hildy Gottlieb has a helpful suggestion. In an article titled, "Riding the Horse the Way It's Going,"[1] she remembers an old cowboy saying that to her at a time of frustration. While the horse may be finally tamed and brought under control, there is a certain sense that the final destination might be negotiable between the horse and the rider. She says that what you need to figure out is "which way the board's horse is going so that you can find ways to ride along WITH them to get to where BOTH the board AND the staff want to be—a funded and secure organization."

She suggests that we begin by looking at what the board is already doing well. She lists five responsibilities of boards, which are similar to other lists we have noted recently.

1. Hire, fire, and measure the performance of the CEO (that translates into the campus pastor/minister in our settings).
2. Act as the ambassadors to the community, relaying information between the organization and the community and vice versa.

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[1] Help 4 Nonprofits & Tribes, 4433 E. Broadway, #202, Tucson, AZ 85711.
The Web site address is http://www.help4nonprofits.com

3. Be accountable for the organization by providing the results the community needs, and ensure that the organization has the resources it needs to provide those results.
4. Define the values upon which the organization will base its actions and decisions, establishing the ground rules for what is appropriate behavior within the organization. (I would add strategic planning and visioning as well)
5. Be responsible for the board itself.

Gottlieb indicates that if the board isn't attending faithfully to any of the above responsibilities, the whole organization is on shaky ground. These duties are necessary in any organization, without exception. They provide accountability and linkage with the community, both of which are vitally essential to successful fund raising. She says, "If the board doesn't do the 'Big 5,' they are abrogating their responsibility and cannot call themselves accountable." Moreover, since the board is responsible for itself (#5), the board alone can determine how it does its job and what additional tasks to take on. It's not up to the CEO (campus pastor/minister) to determine how and if the board does fund raising. They have signed up to provide resources (#3), but they need latitude to determine just how that will happen.

Initially, the board may find itself on one end of a continuum that stretches from "actively involved" to "not involved at all," most likely at this less-active end. If "the horse you are riding" is currently not involved in fund raising and is not anxious to learn, there are at least some minimal expectations. One, they should provide training resources to staff, if it is their expectation that staff do the fund raising on their behalf. This includes an adequate computer system and data managing software. If a board won't raise funds, they must hire or train someone to do it for them. They can't have it both ways. Second, board members must contribute financially themselves, beyond the time they give as volunteers. Obviously this means giving within their means. This is not an option, no matter how many cookies they bake or how many meetings they attend. Board members simply must support financially the ministry that they oversee or leave the board. Not only do other donors want to know about board support, members themselves must see this as a sign of their commitment. Even if a few dollars is all that a board member can afford, it is important that the gift be made. 'Nuff said.

A mid-range point on the involvement continuum is the place where board members might agree to take on certain aspects of the fund raising task, such as coordinating the annual appeal or helping with a phonathon. Some of the members may feel comfortable with making visits in person, but others may hang back for good and sundry reasons. Again, the board determines how this happens and makes sure that it fits into the strategic plan for receiving ministry gifts.

The "active" end of the continuum involves those who have learned how to make effective fund raising contacts and enjoy doing so. Certainly not everyone will get to this point, even with good training and affirming support. When some do, rejoice.

In my visits with boards, I am always quick to suggest that a "Development Committee" (to use a generic term) be appointed by the board to care for serious, long-term fund raising initiatives. While a board member or two should serve as liaison to the committee, the primary membership should be made up of persons with experience in fund raising, with connections in the community, and with a deep commitment to campus ministry. Duties of this committee will include:

- General oversight of the long-term financial well-being of the ministry, particularly relating to future needs and visions.
- Establishment of an annual/sustaining fund that will supplement the contributions of synods and the churchwide office.
- Establishment of an endowment or capital campaign for the ministry, including the attendant case statements and feasibility studies.
- Provision for planned gift opportunities.
- Oversight of the management of these ministry generated resources, either through the denominational foundation or through a mutually agreed upon and fiscally responsible alternative.

Depending upon the skill sets and interests of the committee, they may also take responsibility for data management, publications related to fund raising, and ongoing stewardship of donors.

Ride the horse the way it's going. There may be boards that just refuse to raise funds. If that's the case with your board, it's time to step back and ask the question about how both horse and rider can agree on a direction with will still uplift and enhance the ministry. Hildy Gottlieb suggests that there are still valuable things a board member can do beyond raising money. Primarily, board members are ambassadors for the ministry. They may be able to fulfill the responsibility of obtaining resources by helping expand the base of the ministry's supporters—those who know and care about what you are doing on campus for God's sake. Good fund raising is "friend raising" after all. Friends of the ministry may eventually become funders of the ministry. But in the beginning, they are simply asked as potential friends to come and see what your work on campus is all about. Board members can attend events and invite others they know. They can ask for volunteers. They can provide contacts with international students. They can set up forum presentations in their congregations. They can say a good word for you at synod assemblies. Yes, they can bake cookies. And they can pray.

In the end, the work of the board is about making the ministry strong, accountable, faithful, and visionary. How funds and resources figure into that equation is the board's responsibility. Your job, as a staff person, is to ride the horse in the way it's going, even if for the moment that might not be the exact direction you had in mind. Just hang on; it'll get you there.

A RETREAT IS A WAY TO ADVANCE

From one point of view there are really two choices—good planning and poor planning. We have all experienced the results of both choices, I suspect. We know when we are the beneficiaries of good planning by the smoothness of the program, the obvious preparation of the leaders, the adequate provision of materials and resources, etc. But when a program "circles the drain," it's often because no one took the time to think it through, implement it carefully, or evaluate it at the end. This is particularly precarious when the lack of planning affects more than a single program. When it is the whole scope of the ministry that goes unplanned, the dangers are these:

- Not everyone is on board with the same understanding or level of support.
- The budget has not been brought into line with the projected programs.
- Adequate staff or volunteers have not been secured to carry off the program successfully.
- What seems to be a "good idea" at the moment may not fit with the core values and mission of the ministry.
- Not enough time is available for publicity and interpretation.
- No evaluation is done to see what can be learned from the experience for the future.
- The direction for ministry is left in the hands of a few persons, particularly staff, which works against ownership and accountability.
- Instead of a certain sense of moving forward, a general drift seems to accompany the ministry, to the extent that some may begin to wonder if there is any direction at all that serves to guide ministry into the future.
- Funding partners may become disillusioned and disinterested.

If your ministry is struggling with some of the above indicators, you may want to consider a retreat as a way to regain focus and (re)introduce healthy planning for the long-term well-being of the ministry. Retreats offer an opportunity for board and staff to get to know each other in a more relaxed atmosphere, where quality time can be given to a broader discussion of the ministry beyond the usual reports and action items. Retreats are usually held at a location away from the usual meeting site. A facilitator is often engaged to lead the process; this allows everyone to fully participate and offers the perspective of someone from the "outside," who can hear with a new set of ears. Most board retreats are held either as full day or overnight events and are scheduled at a time convenient to all. No new information here—just the encouragement to consider a planning retreat as part of the regular, ongoing way in which your ministry moves forward.

Kay Sprinkel Grace, a professional fund raiser and board developer, offers her perspective on the importance of retreats.[1]

1. **You may have to do a selling job to get your board members to buy-in.** This is especially true, she says, when the last retreat was a flop or when board participation is uneven. Members may be skeptical about spending too much time on things like visioning, when it's the plumbing they're worried about. She states that a well-designed retreat, with an appealing schedule and expected outcomes, will lure some of the busier or more skeptical members. She says that the invitation (which should come from the board chair, not the staff member) should include: (a) why the retreat is important, (b) what the principal goals are, and (c) the process that will be used (such as videos, small groups, etc.) If you have trouble getting members to commit to a full day retreat, begin with a shorter

[1] Kay Sprinkel Grace, *Contributions*, May-June, 2005, pp8f.

time to build interest and positive expectations. Talk about the retreat several months in advance to allow everyone a chance to get on board

2. **Be inclusive, not exclusive, when developing the list of who will attend, and make sure to include all those whose presence is needed to ensure the desired outcomes.** If there are program staff, such as music directors or peer ministers, consider inviting them as part of the leadership team. The retreat should not become divisive, making those who stayed at home feel less important. Also, don't "work around" troublesome members; invite all voices to be heard if they have a stake in the outcomes. Most retreats are settings that provide great opportunities to explore new ideas in a relaxed setting. Build on that dynamic as a way of incorporating all voices.

3. **Enlist a retreat planning committee whose members are representative of those who will attend.** These committee members become the champions of the event they are planning. When they get excited, those whom they represent will become excited too. For example, if students are part of the planning experience, they will be more eager to participate and encourage other students to attend when asked.

4. **Allow ample time for the planning committee to develop the agenda, make the arrangements, organize the program to ensure the outcomes, and build in activities to help people get to know each other better.** Three or four months prior to the date of the retreat provides adequate time for preparation. If this becomes an annual event, you may be able to set the date a year in advance. Or you may want to declare that the first weekend in June, for example, is the date for the annual board retreat. That way when new members consider joining, they know that they are expected to set that date aside. With enough time for planning, invite the facilitator to join the planning committee so that she/he can begin to understand the context and issues. The facilitator can also help with the list of desired outcomes for the retreat. If board members have been a part of successful retreats in other organizations, have them share what was helpful or interesting to them.

5. **Be sure the agenda mixes information, inspiration, and motivation.** These are the three frames for organizing a retreat. They also become the outcomes, according to Kay Sprinkel Grace. **Inspiration** is gained by having the members "see the product." In our settings that will mean sharing campus ministry stories and, if possible, having students present these stories themselves. Inspiration happens when ideas are embodied successfully. **Information** that is accurate is critical at a planning event. Know realistic budget figures. Know projected program costs. Have information available about the university or about cultural shifts that impact the ministry. **Motivation** is calculated confidence. Members need to know that their efforts make a difference in the way the ministry functions and in people's lives. Perhaps at the end of the retreat participants could write down a new commitment they are making to the future of the ministry. Then, when you return to work, write each person a note thanking them for their commitment. It's a way to recognize the valuable work accomplished in the retreat. With permission, share these commitments with the whole group.

6. **Seek 100 percent attendance; be happy with 85 percent; cancel if only 70 percent sign up.** Grace says that it's simply not worth the effort or expense if only a few die-hards participate. Consider what might keep people away: driving distance, calendar, length of the event, etc. Have the planning committee call members two weeks prior to the retreat. If there seems to be a dramatic falloff, have the board chair call to see if there is a reason that can be addressed. Otherwise, consider cancellation.

7. **Decide early in your planning if you'll use an inside or outside facilitator.** Inside facilitators are less expensive—often free—but you may lose objectivity. Insiders often know the dynamics of the ministry, but may be seen by others only in their inside role. Outside facilitators can be expensive ($300 to $1,000 per day). Check with others to get references and verify the effectiveness of the person you are considering. Whether insider or outsider, involve the facilitator in the planning of the retreat. Do not bring a facilitator cold to a retreat and expect miracles.

8. **Disarm all potentially explosive individuals and issues before the retreat or, if that's not possible, be sure the facilitator and the participants are aware that the situation may be volatile.** Before the retreat event, you and the leaders need to know where the land mines are, so that a sensitive response can prevail when expected explosions happen. A good facilitator can help address issues objectively, so that individuals who share these concerns can feel respected and heard.

9. **As the retreat approaches, keep the reminders and the information flowing.** One week prior to the retreat, send out a final package that includes directions, the agenda, and any other information that you want participants to look over beforehand, such as the budget. A word about the facility and dress will be appreciated. Emphasize starring and ending times, with the expectation that all participants will honor them. At the retreat be attentive to the time and keep to the agenda as much as possible. If new items or issues arise that are important, but not part of the set agenda, respectfully let the person who raised them know that they will be addressed in the near future as appropriate.

10. **Have solid closure to the retreat.** At the end of the retreat, give each participant a sense of the importance of their presence and contribution. Is there a small gift you could offer as a token of appreciation to help them remember the event? Allow enough time at the end to confirm the planning steps that have been determined. Have the facilitator make closing observations. Conclude with a final inspirational moment or worship time. If there is a theme or a biblical phrase that will be used in the planning for the next year, use this time to lift it up. Finally, shortly after the retreat, send a thank you note to all participants. Include a summary of the decisions, recap the next steps, and accent the highlights. Send this to those who were absent as well, so that they have some sense of involvement. Let them know that at the next meeting some time will be given to bringing them up to speed.

DUTIES OF THE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

In most cases the Development Committee will serve at the request of the Board and will be accountable to it. Members of the Board may serve on the Development Committee as liaison or as regular members.

The Development Committee may have as its responsibilities the following:

- General oversight of the financial well being of the ministry, particularly relating to future needs and visions.
- Establishment of an annual/sustaining fund that will supplement the contributions of synods and churchwide office. The income from this fund typically is directed toward shortfalls in programming, facilities management or short-term staffing needs.
- Establishment of an endowment or capital campaign for campus ministry. In the case of a capital campaign, these gifts are often used for major projects and programs or for shifts in staffing needs. Endowments are created to provide ongoing support for the ministry from the interest provided through careful investment. Often endowments are created for specific purposes, such as a speaker series or scholarships, while other endowments are used more generally for ministry needs—always with the permission and knowledge of the donors.
- Provision for planned gift opportunities that may attract sizeable contributions from persons who wish to leave a lifetime expression of support for campus ministry.
- Oversight of the management of ministry generated resources through a mutually agreed upon and fiscally responsible investment source.

In order to accomplish the above responsibilities the Committee should:

- ✓ Work with the board and staff to determine the long-range, strategic vision of the ministry
- ✓ Provide for the keeping of accurate records relating to fundraising, including mailing lists, contributions and thank you responses
- ✓ Publish communications and interpretative materials for fund raising purposes
- ✓ Nurture relationships with donors and potential contributors
- ✓ Make contacts with donor prospects as appropriate
- ✓ Direct staff in their work to support the fund raising efforts
- ✓ Be among the first to contribute to the ministry
- ✓ Secure and train new members for the Committee

HOW LARGE IS YOUR VISION?

"If there is no vision, the people perish."

Visioning is the in-thing these days. Everybody's doing it—or thinks that they should. Maybe it's the tow truck that will lift them from the survival rut, they think. Or perhaps there is some new thing out there on the horizon that will be the magical harkening to a new way of doing things that will make life more interesting and meaningful. Or, worst case, maybe it's just another of those "should" things on the agenda that keeps reminding us that if we want to be trendy and with it these days, we have to be fussing about vision.

Vision is that long view of the future of your ministry that keeps it moving along from day to day. Years ago, learning to canoe in the Boundary Waters of northern Minnesota, I was taught that the way to paddle in a straight line from one shore to another is to keep your eye on a fixed point on the far horizon, such as a tall tree. If your are too short-sighted as a canoeist, you will use up too much time and energy snaking across the lake or, worse, end up paddling in circles. So I ask the question, "How big is your vision?" Where is it taking you and how will it help you get to the far shore?

Simply stated, a vision is a realistic, credible, attractive, yet inspiring future for your ministry organization. Your vision is the answer to the question, "If our fondest dreams were to be realized, what would this organization look like or be doing in 5 years? In 10 or 20 years?" Like a travel poster, the vision doesn't get you where you want to go, but it does give you a pretty good picture of what it will be like when you get there. It paints a picture that is so compelling that you can't help but summon all of your resources and energy to get there. It is a picture that is greater and more meaningful than the present for everyone who selects to make the journey.

A shared vision collects all of the activities of those who commit to it and act accordingly. Victor Hugo said, "There is nothing like a dream to create the future." Leaders are dream weavers who invite others into a way to make a difference. They provide the big picture and do it with such compelling magnetism that only the faint-hearted will drop away. A shared vision is a major source of hope, challenge, and accomplishment for members of an organization. They can see the value of their contributions. They feel pride in being part of the whole effort. It makes them want to go the extra mile to help the organization achieve that vision.

Walt Disney understood vision. He knew that "dreams are the wishes a heart makes." He knew that if you could dream it well, it might just happen. Some years after Disney died, a tourist to Disneyland remarked to a friend that it was too bad that Disney didn't live to see it. The friend remarked, "He did see it. That's why it's here!" He knew that vision is the first step into the future.

Some think that having a good mission statement is enough. A mission statement is a "being" statement. It says why you exist as an organization. A hospital exists to cure the sick. A museum exists to display great art. The church exists to spread the good news of the Gospel. Every organization needs to know what its business is and why. But the mission needs to be led forward by an attainable, yet inspiring vision. A vision statement is a "future" statement. It says where the organization wants to go. It is not the road map, but the destination.

In an article titled, "The Vision Thing," Burt Nanus and Stephen Dodds offer four steps in the development of a new vision statement:[1]

1. The Vision Audit
   In this first phase fundamental questions are raised about the nature and purpose of the organization, its values and culture, its strengths and weaknesses, its benefits to society and clients.
2. The Vision Scope
   The major constituencies are identified and examined, including threats and opportunities, and boundaries for a new vision are specified.
3. The Vision Context
   A wide range of future developments that may affect the choice of a new direction are identified and evaluated. Funding patterns, socio-political realities and changes in client needs are to be considered.
4. The Vision Choice
   Alternative vision statements are formulated and compared and strategic implications are considered.

Dreaming and visioning is best done by a group of people over several weeks or months of time. Although a leader may articulate the vision or announce it in some compelling way, a group effort will pay off ultimately. It encompasses a broader range of perspectives. It involves others in the search and draws them closer together as participants, as those who share the dream. It broadens everyone's understanding of how me mission will play out once minds are stretched and eyes uplifted.

Jerry Panas, in his new book, *Asking*, says that a person doesn't go to a hardware store to buy a drill. S/he goes to a hardware store to buy a drill—because s/he needs a hole. It's not the drill that you are about, it's the hole. It's the hole that's the vision of your organization. It's the hole that gets people excited, not the drill.

People will rally around and support your vision if it's big enough, creative enough, and far-reaching enough to get them across the lake to the distant shore. How can you join with others to create a vision for your campus ministry that will invite people to get involved, be excited and become dedicated, so that they will support the future of your ministry with their time and contributions?

[1] *Contributions*, December 1999

STRATEGIC PLANNING

"Strategic planning is an attempt to let future priorities have an influence on today's activities." Guy Saffold

Strategic planning is the process of determining how to get from where you are to where you want to be in as effective, efficient and faithful way as possible. We all do strategic planning and do it on a rather regular basis. We do strategic planning when we prepare a meal, map out a trip, write a paper or shop for a gift. What is involved is a sense of what we want to accomplish, why we need to do it or make it, what it will cost, and who will be involved.

On a higher plane, we do strategic planning when we change jobs, build a house, move to another part of the country, seek another's affections or birth a family. In these larger situations we have to think further ahead, involve more people, finance or pay a higher cost, and learn how to depend on reliable feedback.

While much of our lives involve planning, there is a time and purpose in the life of an organization to take planning seriously. Andringa and Engstrom list the following reasons to be involved in intentional, strategic planning:

- Survival
- Achieving the mission
- Reality check
- Focus
- Consensus and ownership
- Effectiveness
- Leadership review[1]

Along with strategic planning, strategic thinking takes a high priority on the agenda of boards and those in leadership. In fact, if the thinking doesn't happen, the planning probably won't either. Strategic thinking is that energizing, uplifting activity that happens, often spontaneously, when people who care about an organization begin to dream about what they would like to see happen, without regard for cost, time, or effort.

The ultimate goal of both thinking and planning is to stimulate action in the direction of the future, while maintaining faithful to the mission. Often the vision is simple and clear, unencumbered by layers of goals and objectives, at least in the outset. When leadership is committed to thinking into the future, strategic planning follows remarkably close behind. Leaning into tomorrow guides our actions today.

Where Does the Word "Strategic" Come From?

The word "strategic" comes from the Greek word for a military campaign **στρατεία** (2 Cor. 10:4; I Tim 1:18) or high-ranking soldier **στρατηγός** (Acts 16:20) or temple official (Acts 4:1). A derivative form, **στρατιώτης,** refers to a soldier or even a soldier of Christ (2 Tim 2:3). If one nation

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[1] Robert Andringa and Ted Engstrom, Nonprofit Board Answer Book (National Center for Nonprofit Boards: Washington, DC, 1988) pp. 17f.

intends to wage war on another nation, it has to have a "strategic plan." It has to know the power of the opposing army, the kind of terrain they will fight in, what the campaign will cost, what the end benefits will be, and who, in the end, will carry the cause into action. Throughout the campaign leaders will need to be aware of supplies, the energy and effectiveness of their troups and the counter movements of their assailants. A strategic plan has limits, expectations and consequences. It also has fluidity, interaction and the anticipation of failure; it is a dynamic process that must be reflected upon and adjusted by large and small increments as the campaign goes forward.

While the military metaphor may not be the best one for use in planning for ministry, it is helpful for us to consider all of the planning that goes into such a process and what the separate elements of this planning might encompass. Some of the reasons that organizations give for doing strategic planning are:

- Sharpen the organization
- Gain advantages associated with size
- Find a niche
- Simplify or downsize
- Focus on one or two success factors
- Engage the community as an ally
- Replicate
- Go after root causes
- Become entrepreneurial
- Become chaos pilots—helping the organization navigate rapid change
- Plan the mix of programs and funding[2]

While your ministry may choose to make changes or alterations at certain points, the basic elements of a good strategic planning process are as follows.

1. Get Organized

Before you begin, you will want to know who will share in the planning process with you. Will it be only your current board members? A new sub-committee? A select group of the board? Some organizations have found it helpful to involve someone from the "outside" who can bring a fresh perspective and creative energy. You may want to consider using a consultant to help you through the process. If so, check with other groups who have used consultants and get their recommendations. Build the consultant's fees into your overall budget.

If you and your ministry are new to the strategic planning process, you may want to work with a relatively simple and straightforward process, with a short-term vision of one year, to test out your readiness and gain some confidence. Then, during the second year, make your reach longer and your plan more comprehensive. If your leadership cannot commit to forty hours of planning, begin with ten hours. Even some time dedicated at each meeting to certain aspects of thinking and planning will help you begin to nudge the long range process.

Be sure to get the commitment of all participants as you begin. Let them know how many meetings there will be, the time span of the project, and what they will be expected to do at these meetings. Let them know that it will be hard work, although it will also be rewarding and energizing. If

[2] Strategic Planning Workbook, Amherst Wilder Foundation, p. 65f.

you encounter resistance at this level, stop the process and address the concern before moving on. Persons in leadership must sign on for the whole process. Strategic planning cannot be solely the responsibility of staff. Accurate reporting and a sense that people's wisdom and work are valued and contributing to the new direction can strengthen commitment along the way.

2. Know your history

It is likely that a history of your campus ministry has been written in recent years, especially if you have had a significant anniversary event. If not, collect as much relevant historical information as you can, since you will need to refer to it in the days to come. Also, if you have written a "self study" or have had a quadrennial review recently, draw upon that as a way of helping your group get on the same page with the history and context of the ministry.

Also, it would be helpful at the outset to have a financial history available, charted out over the past ten years. Fund raising activities and endowment reports will also be valuable in assessing how far the ministry has come and how far it needs to go. Counting the cost in terms of dollars needed to implement your strategic plan will be an important step.

3. Analyze the Context

While a look at the past is important, a more critical need will be to examine the current context of your ministry. This is often called an "environmental scan." It is the terrain over which you must travel to accomplish your goals. It includes everything you can put your finger on that influences your ministry—the situation of the university to which you relate, economic or political trends, area church dynamics, and community situations to name a few. How do these elements affect your mission? Might they challenge you to do something new or different in response? How does the environment in which you serve influence your future for good or for ill?

You will also want to do an "internal audit" that will give you and your leadership a reading on the health and vitality of your ministry. What assets and resources are at your disposal? What kind of expertise is available? What facilities and technologies are at hand? What logistical support is available? What personnel resources do you have to get the job done?

It is often at this important, initial stage that many groups choose shortcuts that have serious ramifications later on. For example, if you are considering building a new facility, but did not know that the benevolence income in local congregations had dropped by 20 percent in the past three years, you might not factor this into planning your financial future. Or you may attempt a major capital campaign without assessing the need for staff, computer software and fund raising expenses. Your ministry is not an isolated entity, but inter-connected with the environment in which you serve. It is also likely that you will discover that you will have to do some tuning up of the old machine before putting it on the road. Good trip planning involves both a vision of where you want to go and the means to get you there.

There are a number of ways to do an environmental scan. One of the more common ways is known as the **"SWOT Analysis."** With this method you ask:

S What are the **strengths** of our current ministry?
W What are the **weaknesses** of our current ministry?
O What are the **opportunities** that lie before us?
T What are the **threats** that we are facing?

The responses to these questions can be ranked in order of importance. Some issues may need to be addressed immediately, such as finances or staffing. Some might be important, but can be included in later plans. Look for connections and synergies. What issues are obviously interdependent? Are there groupings of issues that, if addressed, could leverage the current state of the ministry?

4. Establish the Direction

Given all that can be known about your ministry at this point, both past and present, the group begins to draft a future direction for the organization. There are a number of crucial elements of this stage. Developing a **vision** for the organization is the keystone that will guide all other aspects of the planning process. The vision states where you want to be as an organization 5-10 in the future. It should be both challenging and realistic. The vision should be do-able, but it may stretch the ministry to accomplish it. It should capture the imagination and raise the collective pulse rate—maybe even make you ask if you are crazy to consider such a vision. The vision should be strong enough and persuasive enough to drive the ministry into the future.

This compelling vision will require that a number of other decisions be made to bring it to life. A whole subset of **goals** will need to be described. These are smaller pieces of the vision that, when you work at them one-by-one, move you ever closer to making your vision a reality. If your vision is to cross the river, the goals are the steppingstones that allow you passage. If you are going on a trip, you map out your direction by noting a series of highways, turns and even detours that will get you to your destination. Goals are short-term, financially feasible, deliberate movements that make the entire journey possible. Establishing goals may involve input from a variety of persons at many levels. For example, if part of your vision is to serve commuter students at your university, one of the goals may be to get to know staff on campus who work with these students. Another goal may be to invite commuters to become involved in the planning process. Another may be to spend time in places that commuter students frequent and find ways to conduct interviews with them. Goals are answers to how to get where you want to go as a ministry. Goals are always malleable and subject to change, so that you stay true to the vision and mission of the ministry.

At this stage of planning **objectives** are often mentioned as a sub-set of the established goals. Objectives are simply milestones along the way that mark progress. They are achievable and definable, so that we know we have reached them and can then go on to other sub-steps. Sometimes the acronym **SMART** is used to describe objectives that are appropriate to the overall plan. They are **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based**.[3] When your progress can be charted by SMART objectives, you will have a way to chart your progress, like crossing items off of a grocery list or pointing your finger at a new place on the map.

5. Check Out Your Plan

After many long hours and much insightful reflection, you are now ready to draft your strategic plan and share it with others who can give you adequate, accurate feedback. A planning process is always in flux, so it is helpful at this stage to know that you will be continually revising your work. In one sense, you will always be working from a draft. The first draft is probably best written by one knowledgeable person, who attempts to capture the vision, spirit and general direction of the process thus far. Then, through review sessions and subsequent drafts, a working draft will be launched.

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[3] "*A Short Course in Strategic Planning*," Farrel North, Arvada, CO, p. 7. Used by permission.

This is an excellent time to involve those who may be beneficiaries of your planning. Reviewers can include university faculty and staff, area clergy, parents and students, and inter-faith colleagues. You will want to know if your plan is feasible. You will want to test your goal steps and determine if you have dealt realistically with financial implications. Feedback at this point will keep you from having to make serious corrections farther out or undo critical elements of the plan.

A draft of your strategic plan will include the following:

- ✓ A summary of the overall plan
- ✓ A vision statement, including the mission of your organization, in succinct form
- ✓ Core values or guiding principles
- ✓ A profile of your current ministry, including current programs, financial statements and staffing needs
- ✓ An analysis of the context
- ✓ Goals for short term implementation, including specific objectives for each goal
- ✓ Expected outcomes that are measurable and definable as success indicators
- ✓ Financial expectations, showing income sources and projected expenses
- ✓ Facility needs or requirements
- ✓ A timeline for implementing the plan
- ✓ Staffing needs, with a detailed listing of who is expected to accomplish what tasks
- ✓ A process for periodic evaluation

Realistically, no one strategic plan incorporates all of these items listed above in great detail. Select the items that will make your plan intelligible to an outside reader. Try to capture the spirit and general direction of your vision. Keep it simple and focused. Then, as conversation and thoughtful responses provide feedback, rewrite the draft until it becomes a plan that everyone in leadership can affirm and support. If an important new issue arises while you are editing your drafts, or appears in the future, take it into account when the next draft is written.

6. Implement the Plan

Now that you have developed the best possible strategy for moving your ministry ahead to accomplish your vision, you will need to implement what you have planned. It's time to move the boat out into deeper water—proverbially to "fish or cut bait." If you have taken the time to move through the steps described above, you can begin with confidence and hope. Often the single biggest mistake is not acting on the plan you have developed. Too often quality plans are shelved for lack of courage. When this happens, all those who worked so hard to develop the plan are discredited and feel alienated. Also, many plans are time sensitive, so that to delay means missing the "*kairos*," the opportunity to buy a piece of property or enter into a new ministry coalition, for example. Timeliness and strategy have a direct correlation.

7. Evaluate as You Go

Along the way you and your leadership will need to monitor the progress and keep evaluating your goal steps. Stay focused on the critical issues and don't get side tracked by oiling squeaky wheels. Like most everything else in life, your strategic plan is an exercise in probability. You are engaging in an experiment in creative change that seeks to move the forces around you and, in turn, are moved by these same forces. Ongoing feedback, information and analysis are part of keeping your strategic plan vigorous and on target. The same kind of collaborative insight that created the plan will keep you going. Participatory ownership continues to be important, as everyone in leadership watches, feels, tweaks, senses and re-directs the life of the ministry. Mistakes will happen; correcting these mistakes will keep you on track.

Summary

In summary, there are four critical ingredients in the development of a strategic plan:

1. Getting good ideas on the table
2. Making good decisions about how to proceed
3. Developing a shared understanding of and commitment to the directions chosen
4. Implementing a plan that has a heart.[4]

A plan with a heart allows all participants to speak freely about their hopes, their commitments and their frustrations. This kind of plan connects the heart with the head, helping all who are involved to own the process and to celebrate the victories. Ask this question: "Given our mission, are we heading toward the place we eventually want to be?" When the head and the heart agree, you are involved in strategic planning.

[4] *Strategic Planning Workbook*, Amherst Wilder Foundation, p. 18

THE ONE PAGE STRATEGIC PLAN

Let's also acknowledge that we live in a time when quick fixes abound. We grab any magazine off the shelf that promises "10 easy ways to lose extra weight or find a love interest while walking the dog." Books "for dummies" abound, and we hold out hope that the "One Minute Manager" will finally get us organized. We line up for fast food, we "Google" for fast information, and we can't wait to get off the plane before using our cell phones.

So I'm thinking that there must be a market for doing strategic planning in a relatively expedient way. Often it's an arduous process that takes months to accomplish. It requires committees and subcommittees working on drafts and redrafts. Strategic planning needs goal statements, but not before we've honed our mission statements, which spawn vision statements that need to be continually examined in light of our contextual (SWOT) analysis and an affirmation of our core values. And we haven't even mentioned the budget-building process or the necessity of attending to action plans and appropriate evaluation. What we need, perhaps, is a brief format for doing ministry planning that will allow us to put on one page the results of all of this brain-wrenching activity, not as a way of subverting the more thorough process, but as a way of breaking an ice jam and getting a quick overview of the process. Think of it as a helicopter fly-over prior to the more-involved overland excursion.

One of you, my good colleagues, mentioned an online resource called the "One Day Business Plan.[1]" I checked it out. It said that the Plan can be used to "summarize your business proposition when time is of the essence." It described itself as a "suitable road map for a more comprehensive plan." (At least it suggested that a larger process would be useful). Then I clicked on the printable *PDF* version of the worksheet, and found myself intrigued. Would it be helpful, I mused, to suggest a format for a One Page Strategic Plan that would invite campus ministries to condense all of their hard work and reflection into one concise document? What follows is such an attempt.

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[1] http://www.smbtn.com/onedaybusinessplan/

THE ONE PAGE STRATEGIC PLAN

MISSION: Who are you as an organization? What are your core values? What is your key identity?

VISION: Where do you want to be in five years as an organization?

STRATEGIES: Specifically, how will you accomplish this vision?

Goals:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

LEADERSHIP: Who is in charge? How are decisions made? What roles do staff members play?

INTERPRETATION: Who needs to know about your vision? How will they find out?

COST: How does the budget reflect the goals you have set? What changes might this budget imply?

EVALUATION: Are your objectives measurable and how will you know when you have achieved them?

A few comments about each of these sections are necessary. Although this may be a truncated process, it still requires time and careful, deliberate attention by the full board and staff.

First, the **mission statement** needs to express the heart and soul of your ministry in very heartfelt and soul felt ways. You may want to stand back and examine your core values to see if everyone agrees that these are things you would live or die for, such as the centrality of worship, the vitality of evangelism, or the importance of hospitality. On your best days as an organization, what makes you tick? What gives you energy? Can you say that in a compelling, succinct way? What happens when this is forgotten or pushed aside in favor of other things that seem like priorities at the time? The mission statement should be brief enough and memorable enough so that all staff and board members can recite it easily. Mission statements need to be active; they are rather useless if written and then shelved. I know one group that recites the mission statement at the beginning of every monthly meeting—kind of like a pledge of allegiance. It may sound a bit corny, but it keeps the mission in the forefront.

Second, the **vision statement** reflects the determination to move the organization to a new point somewhere in the future. It affirms and builds on the present, but it is not content to remain there. It is energized by new possibilities and opportunities. It lifts heads and hearts; it beckons. It acknowledges the need for growth and change in the light of perceived challenges. It is not somebody's best guess; however, it is creatively crafted on the basis of realistic observations and information.

Third, **goals** are the stepping stones of a strategic plan. They are incremental, do-able movements that allow the organization to proceed. They are often laid out in some sequential format that draws the planning forward. If you are going to walk on water, you need to know where the rocks are. And if you're going to accomplish your vision, you need to know which goals, if completed successfully, will get you there. If you can see the pattern of the goals you are planning and can develop a timeline for accomplishing them, you will find that your vision becomes much more attainable and less left to chance.

Leadership for your strategic plan is of paramount importance. Often the decisions and process of implementation fall into the lap of the (unsuspecting?) staff person. The board thinks that its work is done when the framework of the plan is set in place. The staff person assumes the responsibility and the board is glad to let them. But in a healthy ministry environment, careful decisions are made about roles and tasks. Board members may be asked to serve specifically because of interests or experience they bring to the plan. Staff may be hired for certain duties. Volunteers may supplement the process. Chaos creeps in when it is unclear who is responsible for what. Key leaders and primary staff guide the strategic plan as it moves forward.

Fifth, **interpretation** of the strategic plan is important at many levels. It involves the wider constituency in the process and informs them of the vision of the ministry. They care about the ministry and want to know of its current vitality and future direction. If there is significant change going on in the ministry, more frequent communication needs to occur with your friends and supporters. An annual mailing or newsletter is not enough. You will need to be more intentional about informing others, using such means as written materials, phone, email, visits, invitations to events, and directions to your Web site. Certainly students need to know about the strategic plan. They are not simply "consumers" of the present ministry; they care about the future as well. Regular communication among key leaders is also important, so that everyone responsible for working on the strategic plan knows how it is progressing. Interpretation needs to happen both externally and internally and with varying levels of information depending on the audience.

Sixth, count the **cost** of implementing your strategic plan. Big ticket items, such as building renovation and adding professional staff, are obvious expenses and require considerable attention. However, smaller ticket items are also important to making the plan viable and need to be rolled into the projected budget. These may include computers, software (especially for data management), signage and publicity expenses, extra office assistance, travel to meetings, and hospitality costs. While a good strategic plan may be calculated to save money at some junctures, it will likely cost more money to implement than it saves. Don't get caught in the middle of an exciting vision by having to say, "I guess we really can't afford that!"

Finally, prepare to **evaluate** your strategic plan at several key points. In the beginning make sure that your goals are achievable and measurable. That simply means how you will know when and if you have accomplished your goals. Measurable objectives let you know about your progress. Instead of leaving Chicago with your car pointed westward and hoping to arrive in San Francisco, you plan the trip with a certain map in mind. You cross the Mississippi at Davenport, Iowa on I-80. You go through Omaha, stop for dinner at your favorite restaurant in Denver, and arrive at the Bay according to schedule. If you see the lights of Phoenix, you will have to make some course corrections, alter the time of arrival, make some phone calls to waiting relatives, etc. The reason why granting institutions harp so much on "measurable outcomes" is that they want to insure that you get where you are going. They know that a wandering organization often gets sidetracked and fails to arrive at its intended destination. Evaluating and checking appropriate measurements at key points helps everyone know that the ministry is still pursuing its vision realistically and intentionally.

The not so tacit assumption in all of this is that you will need to do quite a bit of background work and reflection in order to roll out the One Page Plan. In the end, the short form is possible only because you and your board have done the requisite thinking and planning to advance the vision for your ministry. The One Page Plan can be a helpful digest of your planning. It can become a "suitable road map for a more comprehensive plan." It allows the leadership to have a *précis* of organizational decisions close at hand, rather than having them capriciously located in file drawers and individual memories.