



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Not Bored Meetings

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Welcome

Board meetings don't have to be "bored" meetings. You don't need to "retreat" from a board retreat. These influential meetings can be high-powered with a lasting impact.

Every issue I write carries my own personal viewpoint. I always have a vested interest in what I write about -- it's usually a topic I feel passionate about. This issue carries a very personal tone as I get ready to assume the Presidency role in a not-for-profit organization (Meeting Professionals International - Chicago Area Chapter). Read on for my research, thoughts and philosophy about Board Meetings and Board Retreats as I indulge in searching for tips to help me and everyone make board meetings more innovative.

Sue

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Boards Direct...

Board of Directors exist for

- Not-for-profits
- Associations
- Public corporations

- Private/closely held companies (including family run companies)

And their functional role varies depending upon the maturity and needs within the organization. Boards can have a broad range of "personalities." Board of Directors are charged with some of these responsibilities:

1. Policy Making -- setting procedures and policies to guide the organization
2. Strategy -- determining mission, vision and metrics for success
3. Organizational Success -- reviewing progress against basic objectives, strategies, policies and plans for the organization
4. Fiduciary responsibilities -- electing, removing, and approving compensation arrangements for senior management/Executive Directors as well as budgetary and financial issues

Directors are expected to exhibit the duty of care and a duty of loyalty. The duty of care requires a director to be reasonably informed, to participate in decisions, and to act in good faith with the care of an ordinary prudent person in similar circumstances.

The duty of loyalty requires directors to exercise their powers in the interest of the organization, not in their own interest, nor the interest of another entity or person. This duty requires the director to avoid conflicts of interest and to protect the confidentiality of information.

I won't be Bored

At a basic level a board should be directing strategy, maintaining the direction of the "business", identifying where things are going awry, and ensuring corporate governance requirements are met. Board meetings are the backbone of an effective board. Board of Directors typically meet no more than once a month (oftentimes less).

A Board represents high-priced talent and their time is precious. All organizations can benefit from a more rigorous approach to running and following up their board meetings.

Organizations often under-utilize their boards when they see their role as a formality that enable them to comply with governance guidelines. Think of Board Meetings as a forum to allow an influx of new strategic ideas, make decisions and fine tune operational issues.

Creating great Board Meetings requires the convergence of three elements:

- Prepared Board Members
- A Skilled Chair
- Well Planned Agendas

Lets examine the first of these three components.

Board Members are "prepared" in two different ways. The first is to orient new Board Members to their responsibilities and the workings of the Board. This can be accomplished through a Board Retreat (see that section later) or through Mentoring. Serving on a Board for the first time can be intimidating. The organization "owes" new board members training and advice on how to be effective.

The enactment of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act has produced an added emphasis on training (or retraining) Board of Directors on their responsibilities and duties.

This ties to the second aspect of preparedness. Individuals must come to the Board Meeting prepared. To a great extent, the work done before each board meeting will determine the effectiveness of the board. Reading materials, being familiar with the organization, and understanding roles are all crucial aspects to being prepared. Board members must take their duty of care seriously.

The Chair

The chairperson must be able to galvanize the board, direct them and ultimately produces sound, collective decisions. Within meetings, the chair is responsible for the quality of the debate. He or she must also control time, hold back their opinion until the end, and summarize where appropriate.

Here are some Do's for the Chair:

- Encourage contribution from all
- Keep discipline, without being overbearing
- Look for agreement where possible
- Keep the meeting discussion impartial and impersonal. Disparate opinions are good; seek consensus not 100% agreement
- Maintain deliberation towards decisions; don't start acting like a committee. Where necessary either table or delegate.
- Keep the meeting tight and focused
- Ensure meeting notes are circulated

Setting up an effective agenda will help the chair be successful.

The Agenda

Before individual meeting agendas can be crafted, the Board should take the time to decide what the overall priorities are. The identification of priorities can be the outcome of strategic planning or it may occur as a result of operational needs. Either way, each

For specific agendas, here are some tips on Board Meeting Agendas:

- Strike a balance between strategic and operational issues that is right for your organization. Some boards function as working boards others remain more strategic.
- Devise an annual calendar with meeting dates and locations. Schedule recurring issues such as insurance, pensions and company car policy in advance throughout the calendar year.
- Delegate work to sub committees that report to the board. Board meeting time should not be spent researching and formulating recommendations. Board meetings are for deliberation and decisions.
- Keep your goals or initiatives top of mind. I like to print them on the top of every agenda. This visual reminder will increase the clarity of discussion.
- Consider utilizing a Consent Agenda. Many boards use a consent agenda for action on routine items that do not require board discussion. A consent agenda can streamline meetings by combining action on standard items into one motion.
- Use a Verb-Spurred Agenda. Agenda items will be verb-spurred not listed by subject only. For example: "Decide on vendor for website hosting" rather than "Website". Here is a list of verbs to encourage precise and concise action oriented agenda topics:

Add, Agree on, Assign, Audit, Brainstorm, Build, Calculate, Check, Classify, Combine, Compare, Compile, Complete, Conduct, Confirm, Continue, Debate, Decide, Delegate, Delete, Deliver, Determine, Divide, Draft, Edit, Evaluate, Explain, Find, Force-rank, Gather, Give, Hear, Illustrate, Judge, Jump-start, List, Listen to, Make, Map, Negotiate, Organize, Persuade, Plan, Prepare, Present, Preview, Rank, Rate, Recommend, Report, Resolve, Re-write, Revise, Schedule, Select, Set up, Share, Simplify, Solve, Suggest, Summarize, Trace, Tell, and Write

Don't use the terms "Review" or "Discuss".

- Place items on the agenda strategically. Submit action items and motions in advance in the following format:
 1. I would like to submit the following Action Item/Motion to the Board:
(use action verbs)
 2. Here is why the item has surfaced:
 3. By dealing with this item we will be able to (list 2-3 benefits):
 4. I estimate it will take ____ minutes

I read these past 2 tips in Fat Free Meetings.



- Create the litmus test. Create a series of questions that establish the criteria for projects or topics for discussion. If the item at hand does not meet your criteria, then do not allow discussion. Empower people attending your board meetings to "blow the whistle" on discussion that does not meet your test.
- Establish your agenda with specific time limits set for each item. You can also elect to establish standing rules (see Roberts Rules for more details) that specify the overall rules for your meetings. An example of a standing rule might be that debate is limited to 10 minutes per topic.
- Allocate time for self-evaluation. A Board should improve its future performance based upon evaluation.

Board Tools

Boards and Board meetings represent special challenges. For associations, there is the annual rotation of volunteer. Corporate boards can be too clubby with position filled by "yes" people. No one wants to be the person shouting "The Emperor has no clothes!".

Want more ideas? I love these ideas and tools:

- Robert's Rules of Order: These parliamentary procedures were designed to allow all opinions to be discussed. The intent is not to stifle discussion while still invoking order and a process. Focus on the 3 - 5 motions that are most used and educate the Board on these. Don't overwhelm people with the intricacies of Robert's Rules of Order. Stress that anyone can make a Point of Inquiry to understand either what is happening or what "words" they need to say to make something happen.
- Mission, Vision, Values Discussion: These activities have been perhaps overused in corporate settings, but not used enough in non-profit and association boards. This discussion is about getting everyone on the same page. And it is worthwhile to define what is a mission, value, strategic goal, initiative,

tactic, etc. These terms are bantered about and often people don't have the concrete distinctions between the terms to provide the true clarity that is sought.

- Group Decision Making Processes: Create a framework and process for making decisions. Use the model to guide discussion. This allows you to disengage (or temper) emotion from the deliberation. Avoid groupthink. Groupthink is a concept, identified by Irving Janis, that refers to faulty decision-making in a group. Groups experiencing groupthink do not consider all alternatives and they desire unanimity at the expense of quality decisions. (Again, I have more detail - email me. [Decision Processes](#))
- SWOT: Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats Analysis (Refer to back issue of March 2003 on Problem Solving. [SWOT and Problem Solving Back Issue Request](#))
- Brainstorming Rules (Short white paper available - email me for it [Brainstorming](#))
- Use Time Management: Borrow from Steven Covey's time management principles to define your discussions. What's important? What's Urgent? Discuss focusing on the First Things First principle. Prioritization in light of mission, vision, values is key to consistency.
- Explore Communication Styles; Whether you utilize Myers Briggs or DISC or some other method, these activities offer a common language and understanding for people to explore differences in the way others do things.
- Code of Conduct: Jointly establish with the Board a code of behavior that everyone can agree to for the meeting. You might include "No interrupting" or "No side conversations" as items of behavior. Post the agreed behaviors during board meetings as a reminder to all participants.
- Parking Lot: The secretary should keep an "issues bin" tablet during the meeting to record themes, ideas or suggestions to explore later. Or you can create a Parking Lot on a flip chart and add the items to the parking lot for later discussion.
- For volunteer Boards and organizations: Perform Skills/Task/Passion Matches: Sometimes there is a "natural" progression within a board that defines who does what next. This assumes all board members are equally skilled at all tasks. Not true. Sometimes members want to use solid skills, sometimes members are passionate about growing new ones. Respecting member reasons for serving is critical to a good outcome.

Don't Beat a "Hasty Retreat"

Designed and conducted properly, a retreat or off-site meeting is the single best mechanism for making breakthroughs of many kinds including:

- Strategic planning
- Assessing identity and mission
- Discovering flaws in the strategy
- Launching into a new direction
- Financial assessment/reassessment
- Analysis of major organizational changes (restructuring or mergers)
- Commitment to special projects (development, capital fundraising)
- Building an administrative management team
- Goal-setting for a new leadership team
- Orientation of new board members
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of board members
- Transforming the board dynamics
- Bonding and sensing management depth
- Developing a plan for recruiting a new generation of board members and officers
- Infusion of special resources (e.g., information, preliminary surveys, needs assessments, evaluation, outside experts)
- Programmatic problem-solving
- Preparing for an executive search
- Improving communication
- Assessing board performance

Board retreats provide what regular board meetings typically lack – depth, continuity, occasion for informal discussions and relationship building and time to place the issues into a broader context and to link them to people and actions.

Board retreats are effective when they have the following elements:

1. More Time
2. Informal Atmosphere
3. New, neutral environment that is unrestricted by routines, traditional approaches or expected authority roles
4. Agendas that allow for reflection and discussion
5. Time to build relationships and trust

Ideally in your organizing stages you will include these steps:

- Define the goals and desired outcomes. Clarity will dictate the agenda and format.
- Recruit a small committee (of two or three members) to plan the retreat. These board members will guide the planning process, delegate tasks and oversee decisions. Involve key individuals who can bring a variety of perspectives that can bring fresh ideas.
- Select a facilitator (internal or external) that will guide the discussion at the retreat. The facilitator should also be involved in planning the retreat from the inception. The facilitator adds a level of objectivity that allows him or her to guide discussion, maintain the focus, direct the tone of the discussion and keep

aware of time limits. An outside facilitator brings their broad experience and expertise to the planning and execution of the event. The presence of someone else to lead the meeting also allows full participation of all board members. For more information on Facilitation, see the back issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events from September 2001.

One session cannot solve or resolve all the issues, challenges or opportunities. However, a great board retreat will create closure on a few key issues. Like all meetings, you can measure the value against the specific goals established for the meeting. Furthermore, its success will be reflected in the board's sense of accomplishment and smoother operation. Finally, the board's enthusiasm is a testimonial of a great board retreat. A good retreat becomes the launch pad for more effective teamwork in the coming year.

I am very grateful to several outside resources that helped me clarify my thinking about Boards and Board Retreats. They include first and foremost, Erick Burton of Burton Resources, [Burton Resources](#) or www.burtonresources.com. [Erick](#) was my soulmate and facilitator at a recent board retreat. He was instrumental in helping me achieve my objectives and teaching me about Boards and their ideal behavior.

I was also impressed with the work of Kathy Bell from the Chicago office of SmithBucklin. Another great resource.

The web has been a great resource and I strongly recommend several sites in the Freebies section. And finally, I am recommending this book: To Go Forward, Retreat! The Board Retreat Handbook by Sandra R. Hughes.



[Freebies: More resources](#)

FREEBIES:

BOARD CAFE is an e-newsletter published monthly by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and the National Center for Nonprofit Boards. E-mail them at boardcafe@compasspoint.org if you are interested in being added to their mailing list.

I read the work of Lee Draper and assimilated much of into this newsletter:
<http://www.drapergroup.com>

More Freebies. I have worked on several "litmus" tests to help Boards assess whether items should be entertained by the group. If you are interested in this criteria, email Sue at stinnish@ameritech.net or click here [Sue Tinnish](#) with the words "EVALUATING NEW STRATEGIC PROJECTS"

Future T.I.M.E.

I will be speaking at the following conferences:

National Business Travel Association, Orlando, Florida, Wednesday, August 4

For **Independent Meeting Planners**, I will be the speaker during a Brown Bag TeleWorkshop (audio conference) Thursday, November 11, 2004 offered by The Harris Group. Registration will open up in August. You can view more details on the website under the topic "Calendar" at <http://www.groupharris.com> or [click here](#) **The Harris Group**. The topic is "Adding Muscle to Your Business – Stretching the Meeting and Your Value" and will be based upon a chapter in my book "Meetings with Muscle". Participants will receive a copy of the book as part of the audio seminar.

South Florida Chapter of Meeting Professionals International, February 22, 2005

Meetings with Muscle is taking shape. This book will focus on increasing the productivity of meetings through better communication strategies. Meetings with Muscle will suggest ideas, strategies, and tips for improving the very core of the meeting -- the content. If you have any contributions or are willing to preview parts of the book, I would love to include you on the team! Please email me and offer your suggestions.

T.I.M.E. Gone By

Again, a quick note of thanks to Erick Burton of Burton Resources, [Burton Resources](#) or www.burtonresources.com. His email is erick@burtonresources.com or [Erick](#) and to Kathy Bell from the Chicago office of SmithBucklin (kbell@smithbucklin.com or [Kathy](#)). I am not bored because of their insight and help.

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues [Back Issue Request](#):

May 2000: **Teambuilding** and (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding

June 2000: **Green Meetings** and (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises

July 2000: **Values** and (Freebie) Meeting Analysis

August 2000: **Minimum/Minimal Meetings** and (Freebie) Web Winners

October 2000: **Evaluations** and (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions

November 2000: **Politics**

December 2000: **Toys** and (Freebie) Brainstorming Ideas

January 2001: **Sales, Award Presentations** and (Freebie) Sales Tips

February 2001: **Change** and Communicating Change and (Freebie) Change Bombs

March 2001: **Open Space Technology**

April 2001: **Adult Learning Styles** and (Freebie) Learning Style Questionnaire

May 2001: **Trade Shows** and (Freebie) Trade Show Timeline

June 2001: **Emotional Intelligence** and (Freebie) EI Quiz

July 2001: **Presentation Tips** and (Freebie) Speaker Introductions

August 2001: **Ice Breakers** and (Freebie) Resource List

September 2001: **Facilitation** and (Freebie) Problem Personalities In A Meeting
October 2001: **Humor** and (Freebie) The Benefits Of Laughter
November 2001: **Customer Care** and (Freebie) Complaints
December 2001: **Slack** and (Freebie) Quiet Time

January 2002: **Teambuilding Options** and (Freebie)
February 2002: **Promotional Products** and (Freebie) Case Study
March 2002: **Multicultural Communication** and (Freebie) Multicultural Meeting Tips
April 2002: **Outdoor Learning** and (Freebie) Justification Checklist
May 2002: **Budgets, June, June, and ROK** and (Freebie) Budgeting Beyond Excel
June 2002: **Creativity** and (Freebie) Building the Case for Creativity
July 2002: **High Touch Technology** and (Freebie) Personal Technology Tools
August 2002: **Economic and Business Cycles** and (Freebie) Investment Strategies for meetings
September 2002: **Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers** and (Freebie) Learning Environments
October 2002: **Return on Investment** and (Freebie) Balanced Scorecard
November 2002: **Incentive Meetings** and (Freebie) Forum Synopsis
December 2002: **Resource Recap** and (Freebie) Resource Lists

January 2003: **Everyday Meetings** and (Freebie) Meeting Quiz
February 2003: **Diversity** and (Freebie) Survey Results
March 2003: **Problem Solving** and (Freebie) Techniques Illustrated
April 2003: **Marketing: Pre- and Post- Event** and (Freebie) Blogs
May 2003: **Entertainment** and (Freebie) Storytelling
June 2003: **Balance in Meetings and child caret** with (Freebie) Child Care at Meetings Tips
July 2003: **Mobile Events** with (Freebie) Sponsorship
August 2003: **Last Minute Ideas** with (Freebie) Audience Participation
September 2003: **Training Meetings** with (Freebie) Kirkpatrick Challenge
October 2003: **Unique Venues** with (Freebie) Experiential Checklist
November 2003: **Data, Information and Number Crunching** with (Freebie) European Privacy
December 2003: **Deja View**

January 2004: **Branding** with (Freebie) Identity vs. Brand
February 2004: **Audio Visuals** with (Freebie) Speaker Guidelines
March 2004: **Networking** with (Freebie) Networking Ideas
April 2004: **Strategic Budgeting** with (Freebie) Budgeting Ideas
May 2004: **Sensory Meetings** with (Freebie) Music's Impact

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