

What to do with board members who are not fulfilling their responsibilities.

"She never comes to meetings or does anything. Why does she even stay on the board?" "She always says she'll take care of it and then she doesn't follow through. Aaagh!"

Whose responsibility is it to "**do something**" about a board member who is AWOL, deadwood, undependable, a procrastinator, or worse? Regretfully the answer is: Yours. If you're the board president, you have a special role, but every board member has a stake - and therefore a responsibility.

You *must* do two things in the case of a board member who is not participating. First, you must do *something*. The problem is likely only to get worse, and nonparticipating board members have a demoralizing impact on even the best of boards. Second, *be confident and hopeful*. Many board members just need a little reminder to be more conscientious, and others will be grateful that you've given them a graceful way to relinquish tasks or even leave the board. Things will work out.

Short-term strategies

- Check to be sure that expectations were made clear to the board member before he or she joined the board. "I know you joined the board recently and I'm not sure that you realize that all board members are to attend meetings, events and programs and, hopefully, to help in other areas when needed. Let me explain to you what most board members do, so you can see whether you'll be able to work on this with us."
- Hold a board discussion at which expectations are reconsidered and reaffirmed. Agree on a list of minimal expectations for *every* board member, and ask people to suggest how they might individually help as well.
- Be sensitive to possible health issues or personal reasons why a good board member isn't participating as much as he or she has in the past.
- Transfer responsibilities to someone else. "I'm concerned about finishing the revision of the bylaws. Since you're so busy, maybe it would work out for the best if John took your notes on the bylaws and developed a first draft."
- Together with the board member, explore whether he or she really has the time right now to be an active board member. "I'm calling to check in with you since you haven't been able to make a meeting in the last several months. Are you temporarily a lot busier than usual? We really want to have your participation, but if it isn't realistic, perhaps we should see if there's a less time-consuming way for you to be involved." Remember you always want to part on good terms, they may want to take on a role in the future when they have the time.

Longer-term strategies

- Make it possible for individuals to take a leave of absence from the board if they have health, work, or other reasons why they cannot participate fully short term.

- Have a board discussion or conduct a written board survey on what makes it difficult for people to participate fully. "Are there things we can change about the frequency, day, time, or length of board meetings that would make it easier for you to attend?" "Are there things about the way that board meetings are conducted that would make it easier for you to attend or that would give you more reason to want to attend?"
- Consider whether board participation is meaningful to board members. Meet with semi active member(s) "I'm sensing that board participation just isn't as significant as some board members want it to be. What do you think are the reasons, and what do you think we can do to make your board position more meaningful?"
- Revise what is expected of board members. Perhaps responsibilities have been given to a board member that are unrealistic for any but the super-board-member. Reduce the number of committees and utilize short-term task forces instead. Redesign jobs and responsibilities to fit the ability of a busy achiever to accomplish them.