



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set II Number 5

September 2004

Set II Strategies for Presidents

Boardsmanship! Nine Principles

by James LaRue

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

This paper discusses the characteristics of a good board member. Sometimes a few guideline reminders can improve the tenor and work of the board. The focus of this paper is to describe a board that works well together and gets the work done.

The information on page 4 which directs the interested person on how to obtain copies of this paper is incorrect.

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The FGS Society Strategy Series consists of papers which offer suggestions and instructions for innovative and effective management for genealogical and historical societies. The Federation holds a copyright to this material. A list of sets and ordering information appears at the end.

Set II. Strategies for Presidents Boardsmanship! Nine Principles by James LaRue

I think I've worked about every side of this now. I have worked for a Board in three capacities: as the Chief Executive Officer (a library director hired by, reporting to, and accountable solely to the Board), as the staff member working for the CEO (but presenting information to the Board), and as an independent contractor or consultant.

And, I have worked on a Board as a member (sometimes with few responsibilities, sometimes as a committee member or chair), as an executive officer (Secretary, for instance), and as Board President. In that time, I've worked out some expectations of Board members. I sure wish someone had given all this to me at the beginning.

So in the hopes that this might do some good, I hereby offer "Nine Principles of Boardsmanship."

1 Governance
Understand the difference between governance and management. The purpose of the Board is oversight—in other words, dealing with the big issues. Keep your eye on mission, on planning, on broad institutional

strategy. Don't mess with day-to-day operational decisions.

2 Focus
Respect your fellow Board members' time. Stay focused on the tasks before you. All of us have lives that matter to us. Unless you have good reasons not to (meaning "reasons that are vital to the organization and actually involve you"), stick to the agenda.

3 Inform
Bring all relevant information to the Board. The purpose of the Board is to make informed decisions, to provide intelligent organizational leadership. If you have data that matters, bring it forth. Don't sit on it in the hopes you'll get your way. That's intellectually sloppy and morally dishonest.

4 Be considerate
Thoughtfully consider the opinions of others. Board deliberations do not consist of just waiting for the other person to finish so you can speak. They consist of open-minded evaluations of the ideas of your colleagues, and staff. This obligation extends to each issue and each person, not just to the issues or people you usually agree with.

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5 Voice Opinions

Have your say. Argue passionately for your beliefs. Articulate your opinions as clearly, concisely, and forcefully as possible.

6 Vote your Conscience

Vote the way you believe, not what you think others might believe. Don't assume consensus simply because no one else voices an opinion.

Perhaps others on the Board are waiting to see how the discussion comes out, or waiting for someone else to voice their dissatisfied but inchoate opinion. Take a stand!

7 Represent the Board

Represent the “Board decision” honestly. It could be that you voted your conscience—and were roundly defeated. So be it.

Be clear about when you're speaking as yourself, and when your discussion represents the Board. You're entitled to your opinions, your doubts, and your free speech. But do your colleagues and your audience the courtesy of clearly identifying “who” is speaking: you as an individual or you as the Board representative.

If your comments are spoken as a member of the Board, begin with a careful representation, without slander, of the decision of that body.

8 Avoid Rehashes

Move forward until new evidence urges a reconsideration. Don't keep revisiting things you've already decided. On the other hand, sometimes new evidence arises that compels you to think again. It could be that new evidence supports your dissenting opinion. Or it could be that it contradicts the majority opinion with which you agreed. Either way, new data should be examined without bias.

9 Practice High Standards

Build the organization by example. This is a big one. It speaks to a fundamental attitude. There are lots of pieces to this, but here are the main ones:

- Presume innocence and the good intention of all parties.
- Make each other look good: speak well of fellow Board members.
- Build on each other's work.
- Hold to the vision—spend your time working FOR the big organization goals (not against this or that).

And, just in case you don't hear this enough, thank you for caring enough about an organization to give it your time.

THE AUTHOR

James LaRue, Castle Rock, Colorado, is the director of the Douglas County Libraries in Douglas County, Colorado. He has held office and served as a general board member of the Academy Charter School Board and the Central Colorado Library System, and was the president of the Colorado Library Association and the Rotary Club of Castle Rock, Colorado. Since 1987, Mr. LaRue has written a weekly newspaper column. This paper comes from one of those columns. The content appeared in FGS FORUM Magazine as “Nine Principles of Boardsmanship” in the column, Manage 2002 Practical Management Skills for the Twenty-First Century (14:2 (Summer 2002), page 28.

The American Bar Association publishes *Guidebook for Directors of Nonprofit Corporations* (2002), product #5070388-10-25. The Guidebook addresses principles and corporate governance issues. Topics include taxation, supervision of internet activities, volunteers, employees, director liability, and duties of directors in special circumstances. Order online at <http://www.ababooks.org> or by calling toll-free 800-285-2221.

Boardsmanship! Nine Principles

DUTIES: TWO VIEWS

by Sandra H. Luebking

Mr. LaRue's Nine Principles of Boardsmanship presents certain fundamental truths for those who serve organizations as board members. Essentially, they result from a knowledge and understanding of the duties demanded of a board member. Following are two separate views of "duties."

View 1

Members of a board in a non-profit organization often carry the title of director. Following are some practices and concepts of the position. They apply regardless of how the board member is titled.

A Guide for the Organization and Management of Genealogical Societies lists duties for Directors on page 36. (To order this publication, visit the Web site of the Federation of Genealogical Societies at <http://www.fgs.org>.) The duties are:

- A. Represent the will of the membership.
- B. Participate actively in strategic planning.
- C. Vote on Society policy and program issues.
- D. Serve as a resource of knowledge and counsel to the Executive Board and membership.
- E. Assist in locating and developing funding sources for the Society.
- F. Represent the Society at the request of the President.

View 2

The National Center for Nonprofit Boards, Washington, DC 20036, has published "Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards." In July 2004 the list, as follows, appeared in the Web site of the Internet Nonprofit Center (a program of The Evergreen State Society), at <http://www.nonprofits.org>.

- Determine the organization's mission and purposes
- Select the executive staff through an appropriate process
- Provide ongoing support and guidance for the executive; review his/her performance
- Ensure effective organizational planning
- Ensure adequate resources
- Manage resources effectively (the buck stops with them, ultimately)
- Determine and monitor the organization's programs and services
- Enhance the organization's public image
- Serve as a court of appeal
- Assess its own performance

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WEBSITES

CompassPoint offers board-related courses, consultants, books and publications, and an electronic newsletter for members of nonprofit boards. <<http://www.compasspoint.org/>>

The Internet Nonprofit Center (a program of The Evergreen State Society) features frequently asked questions and recommended books/videos. <<http://www.nonprofits.org/>>.

The Nonprofit Bookshelf is a joint project of the Nonprofit Management Association and the Southern California Center for Nonprofit Management. <<http://www.genie.org/>>

CLOSE

For a lighter look at the workings of the board, see *Board Overboard: Laughs and Lessons for All but the Perfect Board* by Brian O'Connell. New York: Jossey-Bass, 1995. This spoof of a nonprofit organization is presented in the form of minutes from fictitious board meetings.

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