



What To Do With Board Members Who Don't Do Anything

Short and Long Term Strategies

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 or an officer, you have a special role, but every board member has a stake - and therefore a responsibility - in all members being active. In some cases you may need to talk with the executive director about improving the way he or she works with board members. If you're the executive director, you may need to discuss the situation with board leadership.

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 we ask all board members to attend the annual dinner and, hopefully, to help sell tickets. 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 personnel policies. Since you're so busy, maybe it would work out for the best if John took your notes on the policies 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 than board membership for you to be involved."

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 for a while. An individual can, for example, take a six-month maternity leave or a disability leave.
- 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. Have lunch with semi active members or the executive director: "I'm sensing that board participation just isn't as substantive or 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 board membership 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.

And what if you are the one who isn't as active as you had expected to be? Fix the situation either by going to the next meeting and committing yourself to something big, or by calling the board chair and explaining that you're just too busy to be a good board member, and you'd like to part ways on good terms.

Source: <http://www.blueavocado.org/content/what-do-board-members-who-dont-do-anything>