

Transparency In Volunteer Boards – A Dozen Tips For New Association Directors

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As a volunteer director, the trust of your community is precious, and truly the only reward that one receives for board service. If a director is not trusted by the neighbors, volunteering to work for the community becomes less meaningful, and certainly less rewarding. However, trust is not automatic, and it can be easily destroyed.

Making good decisions for the association's best interests is not enough. One must make decisions in a manner which is above reproach, and a manner which displays integrity at work. Here are twelve tips to help build and preserve the trust of the membership in your board's volunteer work:

INITIAL ATTITUDE

- Begin board service with the proper attitude, which is an attitude of service, not control. With the right frame of mind, you'll be less offended when someone asks you to explain board decisions.

BOARD MEETINGS

- Other than the very few items permissible in closed session, make sure that board discussion is in open session. While it is easier for the board to work in closed session or "working meetings", this violates the law and destroys the legitimacy of the open board meetings. Members will not trust a board which acts in secret on matters which should be in open session.
- Board actions taken due to emergencies or other circumstances outside of a board meeting should be disclosed in the next board meeting, and the reasons noted why the matter could not wait for the next meeting. Then, with a motion recorded in the minutes, vote to ratify the action.
- Listen during Open Forum – show your neighbors you are willing to listen to new information and new ideas. Do not argue but take notes. Not all Open Forum remarks require the board to respond, but many may require investigation from management or a committee. Members who know you are really listening to them during Open Forum will be more likely to trust and respect your service, as you show them respect.
- If you are voting upon something affecting your building and not the entire community, or some other matter which concerns you distinctly more than the community, abstaining from voting is not enough –step away from the board and join the audience.

COMMUNICATION

- Work with your chair or manager (or whoever sets the agendas) to make sure the agendas are truly informative, and not designed to be so broad as to not inform the members as to what will be decided in a particular meeting.
- Try to increase communication with the members who do not attend board meetings. Newsletters, web sites, and bulletin boards are common vehicles to increase communication. When a major issue is in play, such as a major reconstruction contract, consider occasional “town hall” meetings, where the only item of business is to report to the members on what is happening and how things are going with the project.

ASSOCIATION FUNDS

- It is not YOUR money, it is the community’s money – there are few financial questions that are out of bounds. Except for the rare instance where confidentiality is important (pending negotiations, for example, or member arrearage questions) questions regarding association money should be answered without hesitation.
- Make sure the person who signs the checks is not the same person who prepares the checks.
- Do not take compensation of any kind for your board service, and do not ask for reimbursement of anything for which you cannot show proof of an out of pocket expense paid.

VENDORS

- Avoid doing business with a member of the association or a relative of a member, unless it is first disclosed to all members.
- Keep vendor relationships clean. Obtain three bids for all significant contracts. If a bidder asks for an unfair advantage or offers any benefit to you as a director individually, drop them from consideration – a vendor who will cheat to get or keep the account will also eventually cheat you.

Association openness brings trust and confidence, which in turn reduces conflict – and therefore reduces the stress of board service.