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INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**

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DEFINING THE STANDARD



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A Member of the Tokio Marine Group

Board Cohesion in times of Confusion and Controversy

Governance Workshop

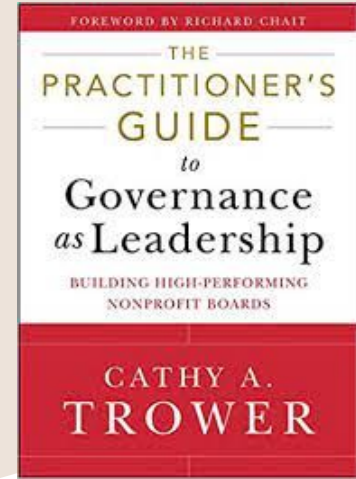
Lynn Wendell

March 11, 2022

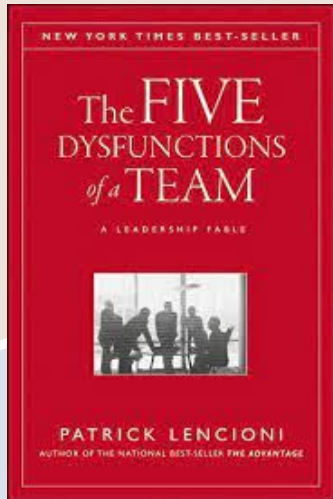


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INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Sources:



BoardSource[®]
Empowering Boards. Inspiring Leadership.



80+ Independent Schools and other nonprofit boards



Guiding Questions...

1. How can Boards remain cohesive in times of complexity, confusion, and - sometimes - controversy?
2. What can we do to ensure that all Board members are engaged meaningfully in the work of the Board?
3. What is the role of Board Culture in determining Board efficacy?

Tools we will use...

1. Polls
2. Breakout room(s)
3. Chat entries
4. Q and A
5. Break

In the chat box...

ONE highlight or ONE thing you are grateful for as you think about your board work so far this year...

As our communities return to campus

Kids have lost the ability to navigate conflict.

There is an unusual level of bad behavior amongst our students.

Students used to learn a lot from watching the older grades, but the chain has been broken and those cultural norms are not being passed down from grade to grade.

We are seeing a lot more crises than usual among the students

Many of our students are unmotivated to learn because they are so focused on re-engaging socially

Many students have forgotten the basic expectations of how to live in a community.

I am seeing kids at all grade levels about two years behind developmental norms in their social interactions



As our communities return to campus

The faculty members are exhausted.

My teachers are tired.

We have a lot of HR issues, including mid-year departures

We have had to sideline plans for academic initiatives, to deal with the interpersonal issues.

I have had to hire external support for Human Resources to deal with the teachers' needs.

We are seeing a lot of mental health issues amongst the faculty

There are conflicting expectations about when we should allow teachers to work from home



As our communities return to campus

We are seeing very “crispy” adults having a lot of conflicts.

We have had a lot of bad behavior by parents recently.

Parents have become overly involved

Elementary school students are less independent, and their parents are struggling to separate from them.

Middle school parents are unusually co-dependent post-pandemic, getting personally involved in middle school social drama



As our communities return to campus

People have been thinking intensively about ideas for a long time, and they have all decided to share their ideas with me at the same time.

I have told my board that this is a recovery year - we are not ready to start new initiatives.

The board wants us to return to normal, but the community is not there yet.

We're not back to normal.



Poll:

Which sentence BEST describes the “state of your Board” this spring?

1. Our board is highly engaged and energized and looking forward to *making progress* on our strategic priorities next year.
2. Our board has been focused on supporting the School through COVID, and is planning to *re-connect* with strategic priorities next year.
3. Our board members have not been as engaged as we would like; we need to work on balancing the work load and involving more trustees in specific ways next year.
4. We have had a rough year of controversy and tension around the Board table and in our community.
5. We are experiencing a Head transition (in a search, in the final year of the current HOS, in the New Head’s first year) and will be setting our annual goals for next year with that in mind.

Breakout #1

Random Breakout Groups of 4-5 people

1. **Introduce yourselves.**
2. **What - if anything - has resonated with you so far this morning? If none of this sounds familiar to you, describe what *is* going on at your school.**
3. **When we return to the main room, I will ask you to post your reactions in the chat.**

How can Boards remain effective in this challenging era of complexity, confusion, and - sometimes - controversy?



1. **Trust**
2. **Information Sharing**
3. **Teamwork**
4. **Culture**
5. **Gratitude. Collegiality. Fun!**

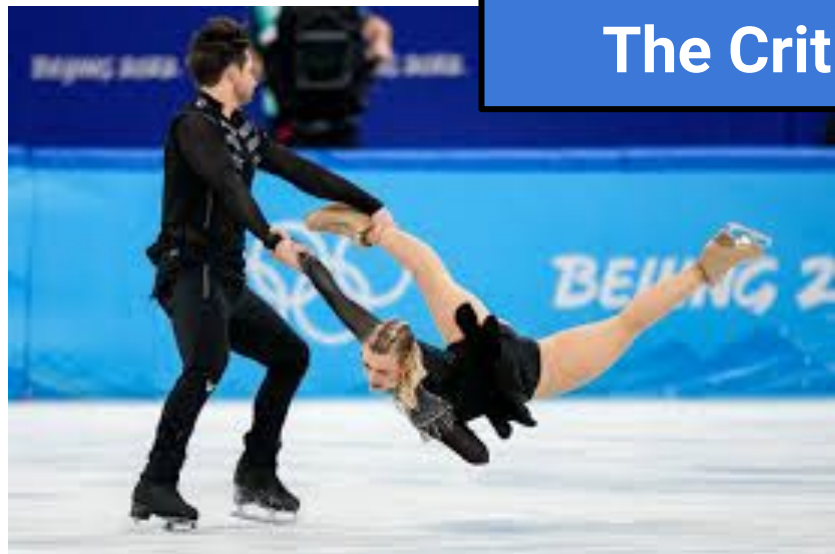
Trust



- 1. Set the tone from the top.**
- 2. Agree on the rules of engagement; set Board norms.**
- 3. Help Board members get to know each other.**
- 4. Create conditions that support candor and consensus, i.e. a “safe space”**



The Critical Partnership





Set the tone from the top. *“Consciously help each other achieve their responsibilities.”*

ABC School Board Norms

Be mindful of patterns of participation

- Step up, step back
- Use “I” statements and “and” (instead of “but”)
- Lift as you climb: acknowledge different tracks of learning & bring others along
- Allow for creativity and curiosity
- Speak and listen from the heart

Be intentional

- Come to meetings prepared
- Monitor your use of tech during meetings
- Encourage and acknowledge a range of expressions, including dissent & discomfort
- Remember to wear your trustee hat

Teamwork

- We share a common sense of purpose
- Maintain a high level of sensitivity & confidentiality
- Assume good intentions & demonstrate mutual respect
- Keep your eye on the big picture
- The board has one voice

Community Agreements

- We ***care*** for ourselves and others.
- We ***listen*** to learn and understand.
- We ***speak*** from our own, “I” perspective and avoid generalizing about others.
- We ***take responsibility*** for accidental hurt.

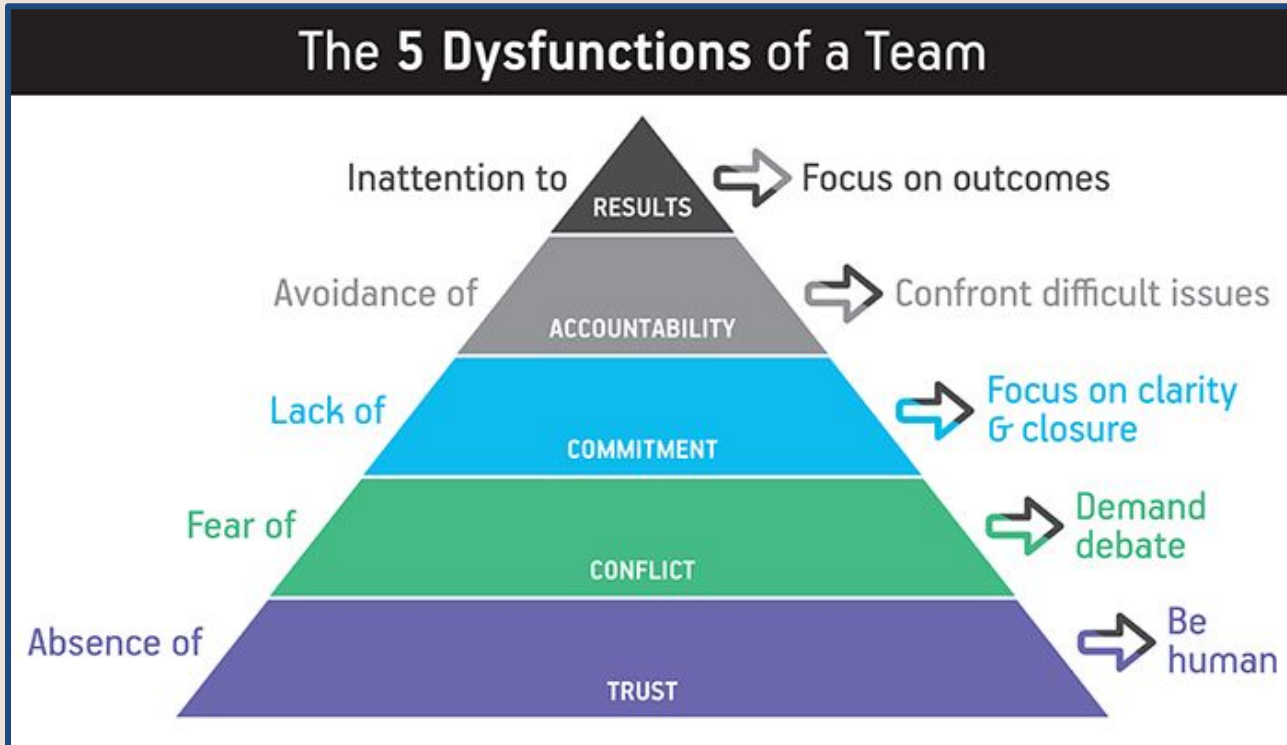


Sample: Sensitive Discussion Norms

- **Be fully present**
- **Speak from the “I” perspective**
- **Listen, Process, then Respond**
- **Value Multiple Perspectives**
- **Lean Into Discomfort**
- **Explore new behaviors/ responses**
- **Take risks, make mistakes**
- **Accept conflict as a catalyst for learning**
- **Be comfortable with silence**
- **Be crisp -- say what is core**
- **Suspend judgment**
- **Honor confidentiality**
- **Assume positive intent**
- **Correct for harm caused**
- **_____?**

Source: Learning for Justice

Ground Zero = Vulnerability Based Trust



From Five Dysfunctions of a Team, Patrick Lencioni

Personal Histories *Lencioni*

1. Where did you grow up?
2. How many siblings did you have? Where did you fall?
3. What is one challenging or difficult situation you faced in your childhood?
4. What type of schools did you attend growing up?
5. What was one lesson you learned from your first job?

Culture of Belonging

Research shows we are more committed, engaged and empathetic when we know each other on multiple levels.

- 1. Select one of the prompts below and share your response with the group.**
 - a. Tell a story about your childhood summers.**
 - b. Share something about your identity that you want others to know.**
 - c. Tell about a time when you felt as though you didn't belong.**
 - d. What's the best vacation you ever had?**
 - e. What is one thing nobody in this room knows about you?**
- 2. Volunteer to share with the group!**

Psychological Safety

The Fearless Organization

Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation and Growth

Amy C. Edmondson, HBS

If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you.

Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.

People on this team sometimes reject others for being different.

It is safe to take a risk on this team.

It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help.

No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.

Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

Other practices and tools for “safe” conversations.

1. **Insist that conversations are not personal.**
2. **Meet fellow trustees where they are; use stories to build bridges.**
3. **Stage a debate OR assign a Devil's Advocate**
4. **Be sure everyone has the information they need and time to process materials.**
5. **Don't ask for a Board vote the first time the Board hears about an important issue.**

Information Sharing/Communication



1. **Use Board Orientation as key opportunity to share information.**
2. **Label agenda items to support board consideration.**
3. **Provide contextual information.**
4. **Present the information in a format that works for the Board.**

- **Governance Training for Independent School Trustees**
- **Overview of Strategic Plan and Current Progress**
- **Campus Tour**
- **Separate meetings with key administrators to understand their work:**
 - **Finance, Development, Strategic Enrollment Management, High School or College Counseling**
- **Board Buddies**
- **Individual, welcome conversations with Board Chair or Chair of COT**
- **Access to resources that track the independent school world and current issues and trends.**

Sample Plan for New Board Member Orientation: Not a “one-shot” effort

Sample Agenda Monthly Board Meeting

Dinner at 6:00 PM

6:30 PM–8:30 PM
Board Meeting

8:30 PM–8:45 PM
*Executive Session with
the Head*

6:00 Dinner available in dining room

6:30 Call to Order, *Board Chair*

6:35 Community Commitments/Board Norms. *COT Chair*

6:40 Approval of Minutes: *Board Secretary, vote*
Approval of Consent Agenda: *Board Secretary, vote*

6:50 **2022-23 Budget Discussion**

CFO, Chair of Finance Committee

Presentation, Small Group/Full Group Discussions

Determine additional information/analysis needed

7:40 **DEIB Vote**

Approval of 2021-22 DEIB Plan

Director of DEIB, Chair of DEIB Committee

Responses to last month's Board presentation

8:10 **College Counseling Office Presentation**

Director and Assistant Director of College Counseling

Informational presentation and Q&A

8:30 Adjourn to Executive Session

Provide Contextual Information

Refer Board members to industry conferences, workshops.

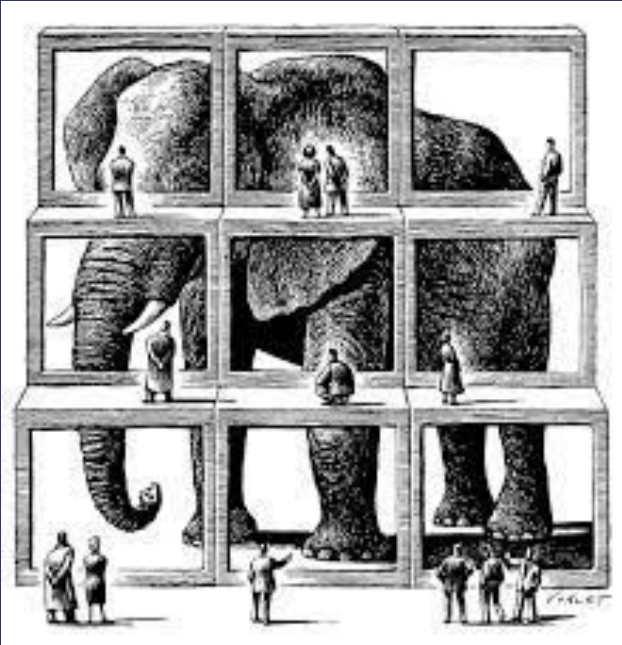
Establish a Board Budget. Provide confidential mechanism for Board members to seek financial support if needed.

Establish an online Board Library of articles, white papers and other resources.

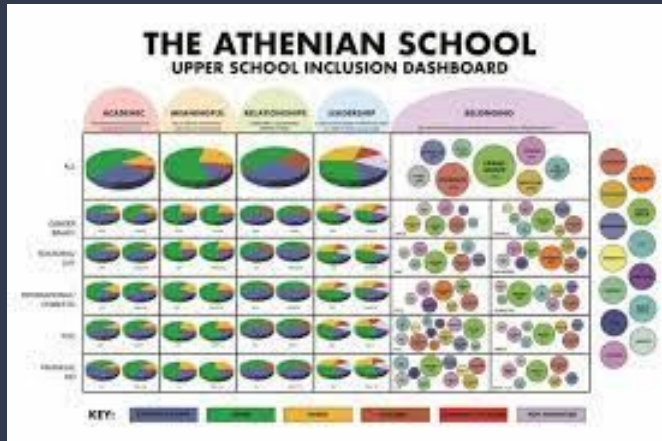
Consider arranging to meet together with another school board. Jointly, create a meaningful agenda.

Hold a Board retreat annually.

Bring former Board members back to attend social events and/or to provide context on specific matters.



Present information in a manner that works for the Board.



Provide information to Board members in a manner that is efficient, engaging and encouraging of creative thought:

Written background information provided in advance.

Short videos presenting a key issue with multiple options to resolve. *ZOOM has made this easy!*

A dashboard created by Board and Administration.

A series of dashboards: The Business Dashboard, The Program Dashboard, The Strategic Plan Dashboard. The Inclusion Dashboard.

Graphic facilitation or presentation of complex issues.

Breakout #2

1. **We have talked about Trust and Information/Communication as tools for Board engagement and cohesion.**
2. **What is ONE idea you think you might bring back to your Board?**
3. **Do you have a question about anything you have heard so far?**

Time for a (Screen) Break



How can Boards remain effective in this challenging era of complexity, confusion, and - sometimes - controversy?



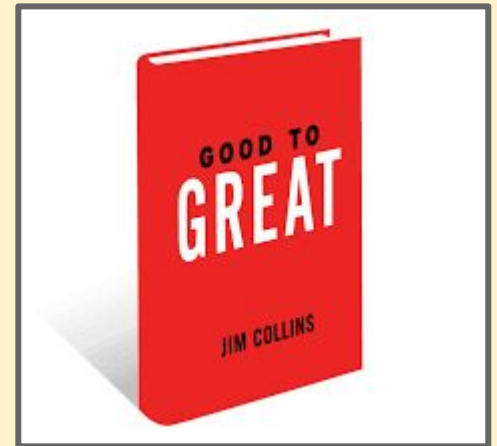
1. **Trust**
2. **Information Sharing**
3. **Teamwork**
4. **Culture**
5. **Gratitude. Collegiality. Fun!**

Teamwork

- 1. Develop a balanced Board.**
- 2. Engage Board members.**
- 3. Strengthen the Committee Structure/Role of the Committee Chair**
- 4. Cultivate discussion and facilitation skills and habits.**
- 5. Understand work and leadership preferences**
- 6. Get feedback. Use it.**

***“Get the right people ON the bus,
the wrong people OFF the bus,
and the right people in the right
seats.”***

Jim Collins, Good to Great



Building a Balanced Board: Examine your Board Matrix

Traditional Categories		Newer Considerations
Gender (Male, Female, Nonbinary)	Current Parents, Parents of Alumni, Alumni	Experience with Nonprofit Governance, HR, DEI
Race, Ethnicity	Geography (Parts of the Country, Zip Codes)	Strategic Thinkers; Workers
Lower School, Middle School, Upper School	Socio-economic	Different Family Structures
Professional Skills (Financial, Legal, Medical, Communications)	Philanthropic Capacity	A proven commitment to collective decision making

Trustee's Personal Job Commitment

Sample, Reveta Bowers

Individual Trustee Name: David Johnson

Date: August, 2021

Understanding that in my “generative role” I bring specific skills, expertise, and resources to my service as a trustee of this school, I am willing, if needed to participate in the following ways:

Committee Assignments:

1. I will serve as Chair of the Finance Committee.
2. I will serve as a member of the Executive Committee
3. I will serve on the Development Committee

Specific Skills I am willing to employ:

1. I have professional experience as an investment banker.
2. I have raised money for other nonprofits

Areas of Expertise:

1. I have chaired committees on other nonprofit boards; I continue to raise funds for my college, UC Berkeley

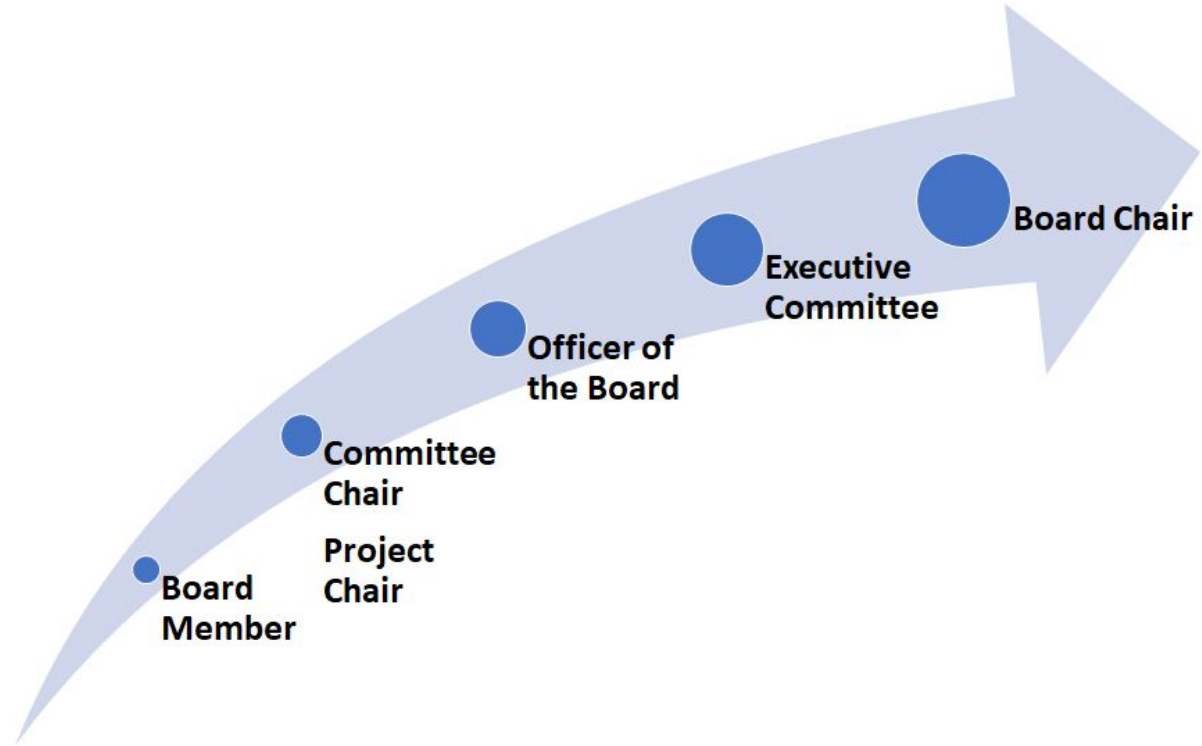
Resources I can offer the school and the board.

1. I can host cultivation events in my home.
2. I can solicit in-kind donations on behalf of the school (e.g. printing)
3. I can continue on the financial implementation steps of our Strategic Plan

Strengthen Committees and Chairs

*From governance
“table stakes” to
efficacy and impact.*

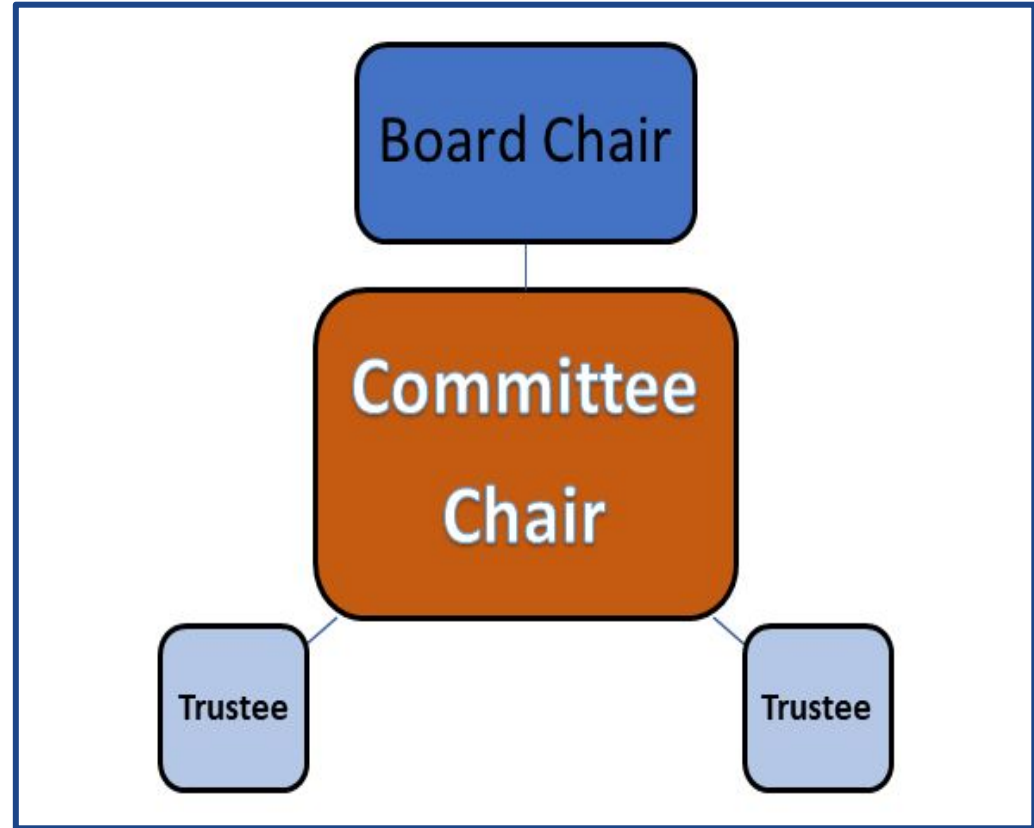
*Every Board member
should be willing to
take on a leadership
role at some point in
your tenure.*



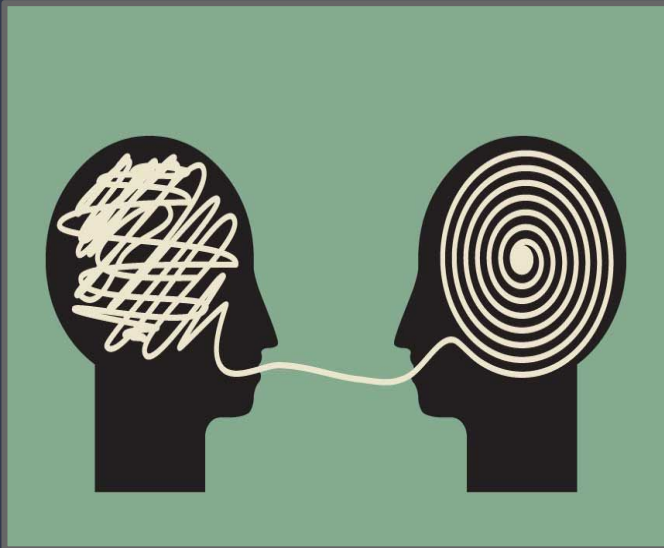
Committee Chairs are the lynchpin for effective Board work.

Excellent committee work is a known strength of strategically effective Boards.

The Committee Chair is best positioned to ensure broad and consistent Trustee engagement.



Committee Chair Training



**Board Chair: Board ::
Committee Chair: Committee**

- **Committee Chair as leader.**
- **Committee Chair as planner.**
- **Committee Chair as partner and supporter.**
- **Committee Chair as standard bearer.**
- **Committee Chair as communicator.**
- **Committee Chair as facilitator.**
- **Committee Chair as motivator (for engagement)**
- **Committee Chair as disciplinarian.**

Consider Annual Training for Committee Chairs and Admin Partners!

Routine Assessment/Culture of Feedback

Post-Board Meetings:

- What went well?
- What did not go well?
- Were you comfortable participating in the discussion?
- What else would you like to say?

Annual Board self-assessment:

- Progress towards Annual Board Goals
- Feedback for Board Committees/Committee Chairs/Board Chair
- Feedback regarding individual board contributions.
- Future planning:
 - 2-3 areas for the Board's time and attention
 - 1-2 areas for improvement in Board structure/process

Cultivate Discussion (and Facilitation) Skills

Previously discussed:

- *Psychological safety*
- *Comfort discussing unpopular ideas*
- *All voices are heard*

1. **Parking lot**
2. **Plan for small group discussions during the Board meeting.**
3. **Board Chairs: Ask for specific help from Officers or Committee Chairs during the meeting:**
 - a. **Help keep time**
 - b. **Notice if some are not participating or the conversation is off track.**
 - c. **Lead small group discussions.**
4. **Review Board norms before every meeting/have them visible in the room. If needed create special norms for sensitive conversations.**

The Compass Exercise: Understanding Our Work Preferences

North: Likes to act
“Let’s do it”

West: Objective.
Likes to know the
who, what, when, where,
why before acting. Data centric.



East: Speculates.
Looks at
the big picture and the possibilities
before acting.

South: Caring. Does what is right; fair
Likes to know that everyone’s feelings have been considered
and voices heard.

Board Culture Rules!

**Culture eats strategy
for breakfast.**

- Peter Drucker

What is our board culture?

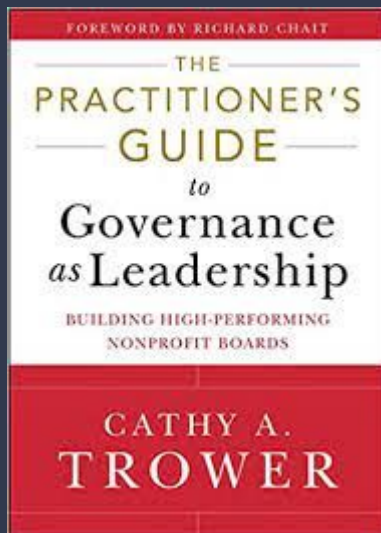


- Degree of transparency
- Presumption of good will
- Interaction and participation
- Balance of reporting and discussion
- Frequency and tenor of debate
- Degree of formality (e.g. adherence to Robert's Rules)
- Palpable spirit of partnership, or "gotcha" ethos
- Board room set up
- Location/Duration of meetings
- Food, Attire
- Virtual or in-person meetings
- Rituals, traditions and celebrations

Board Culture

*The Practitioner's Guide to Governance
as Leadership*

Cathy Trower



- *A culture of “maybe”*
 - Analysis paralysis
- *A culture of “no”*
 - Loudest voice wins
- *A culture of “yes”*
 - Go along; get along
 - Little discernment, or discernment goes underground
- *A culture of “inquiry”*
 - Dialogue, candor, dissent are all part of group dynamics
 - Learning and information gathering are important ingredients.
 - Vigilance is part of the culture; board members are aware that decisions require deliberation, even when they are difficult

How would you rate your board?



board members listen attentively and respectfully to each other.

Most board members are eager to stay on the board for the maximum time allowed by the bylaws.

The board encourages, supports and listens to creative and innovative suggestions.

Board members have the interest of the school uppermost in discussions rather than the interests of their personal agendas.

The board is able to resolve internal conflicts in a positive way, allowing progress to be made.

Success is celebrated on the Board.

The board is adaptable in the face of changes in the environment, funding levels, etc., to sustain the mission and the school.

Board members share clearly articulated core values that guide decision making even though members may disagree on details.

There is honest communication between board members.

The board is a collaborative team that works well together toward a common goal.

Board members appropriately balance short-term and long-term needs.

The majority of board members are actively engaged in overseeing and governing the school.

Board members share accountability and take collective responsibility for failures and mistakes.

The board has social time specifically for its members.

Board members' own further learning and growth about the school and the board's work is a high priority.

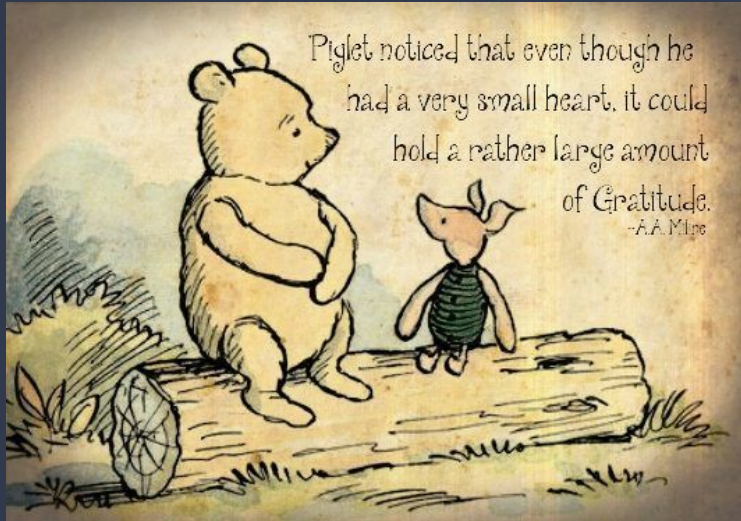
What is our board culture?



Question for Boards:

- What aspects of our culture around *Trust, Information, Teamwork and Fun* **enhance** our effectiveness as a Board?
- Do any aspects of our culture **get in the way** of our effectiveness?
- How might we shift our culture in a more positive direction?

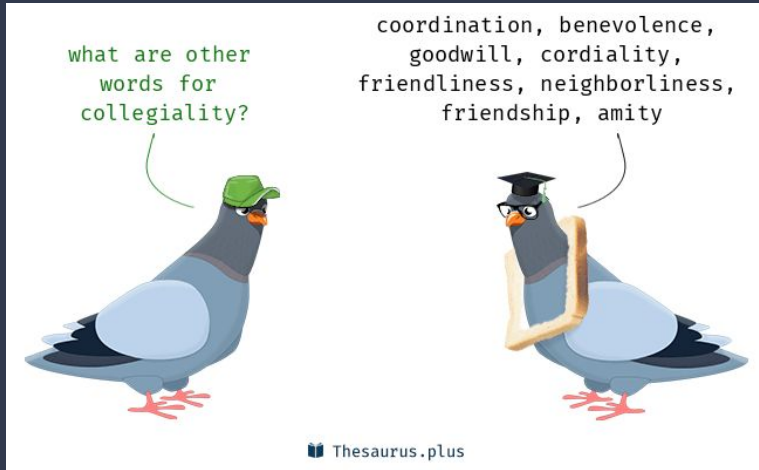
Gratitude.
Collegiality.
Fun!



Studies between 2006--2014 prove the benefits of **gratitude**:

1. Opens the door to more relationships.
2. Improves physical health
3. Improves psychological health
4. Enhances empathy and reduces aggression
5. Helps you sleep better!
6. Improves self-esteem
7. Increases mental strength

Gratitude. Collegiality. Fun!



Definition: Marked by power or authority vested equally in each of a number of colleagues. Marked by camaraderie among colleagues.

(Merriam-Webster)

NAIS, 2015: Strategically Effective Boards:

The percentage of trustees who are current parents has minimal influence on strategic effectiveness. Other factors matter more:

- Influence on culture of giving***
- Expert skills that support strategic priorities***
- Collegial disposition***

Gratitude.
Collegiality.

Fun!



In the chat...

**What is ONE thing you have
done with your Board for fun
this year?**

How can Boards remain effective in this challenging era of complexity, confusion, and - sometimes - controversy?



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For more information:
lwendell@sierraven.com
415-215-9008