



# Getting the Board You Deserve

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# Learning's From Our Time Together

- The learning behind Steve's story
- Whether you're a Swiftie?
- How I learned from my mistake
- Three stages of board development
- The difference between Heavy and Light Lifters
- That you need a board of Heavy Lifters
- The primary charism of your board and why it matters
- Five ways to invite new board members
- The power of consent agendas to your change process
- The steps of a change process



*CEOs get the board they deserve! \**

Harsh, but true.

The story of Steve.

\* Attributed to Alex Plinio, Co-founder Rutgers's Institute for Ethical Leadership.



# Taylor Swift Knows All About You and Me and Boards

“I have this thing where I get older, but just never wiser. Midnights become my afternoons. When my depression works the graveyard shift. All of the people I've ghosted stand there in the room. I should not be left to my own devices. They come with prices and vices. I end up in crises. Tale as old as time. I wake up screaming from dreaming. One day I'll watch as you're leaving. 'Cause you got tired of my scheming. For the last time.

**It's me. Hi! I'm the problem, it's me.”**

**Song, Anti-Hero.**

# My Own Tale of Whoa

- ❑ **Freedom House, Richmond, VA.** Emergency services for the chronic homeless. It's my first Exec. Dir. position. I had a great five-year run with fundraising at record peaks, but I forgot the board. They determined I wasn't right for their next level of growth, and they were right. It's me, I'm the problem, it's me.
- ❑ **I hired an Exec. Coach.**
- ❑ **Harlem United Community AIDS Center, NYC:** I hired a Chief of Staff who managed the staff, and I focused on the Board myself. Over five years I built a strategic board focused on innovation. I got the board that I deserved.
- ❑ See why I am a Swiftie? Are you a Swiftie?

# Three Stages of Board Development

In broad stroke, Karl Mathison, III documented that boards experience three stages of organizational growth:

1. The organizing stage, driven by the founder(s)
2. The governing stage, driven by the trustees/board members
3. The institutional stage, where staff and board achieve integration

I was fortunate to be Karl's student, and he was clear: *You need heavy-lifters to progress through each stage.*

# Back to Steve

I shared these stages with Steve. Recall that his nonprofit was 30-years old. I asked him what stage he thought his nonprofit was in. Without hesitation he stated, “The organizing/founding stage.” I concurred, but gently pointed out that 30 years had passed!

# Heavy Lifters Vs. Light Lifters

All great teachers exaggerate to make a point.



# Anatomy of a Light Lifter

What's a light-lifter? This is a person who comes to one meeting a year, and doesn't return the CEO's phone calls, or leaves a 6 am voicemail in response saying, "Tag, you're it." Light-lifters promise to do this and that, but then you never hear back from them. Talking to many such board members over the years, I've learned that they often believe their chief contribution is to permit your nonprofit to associate with their name. "I'm vice president of XYZ Bank. I'm on your board. Isn't that enough?" They don't solicit their personal contacts. They don't roll up their sleeves. Many don't even include your agency in their own giving. In their DNA, they don't see a problem. Worse, many stick around for a long time creating a tremendous disadvantage for your nonprofit. Boards full of light-lifters remain stuck at the founding stage of board development.

# Heavy Lifters

- ❑ Boards are about heavy lifting, yet many board members can be characterized as the opposite.
- ❑ At its core, the heavy lift of governance is about crafting the future—meeting the fiduciary duty, the strategic oversight, legal compliance, and stakeholder alignment are fundamental, but they're only heavy lifts when there's dysfunction, or unethical or illegal conduct.
- ❑ We often talk about the nonprofit's mission, vision, and values, but the vision, working on where the organization is headed and how it will get there, is the responsibility of the board—especially within the powers conferred in its executive committee, in sync with the CEO.

# Anatomy of Heavy Lifters

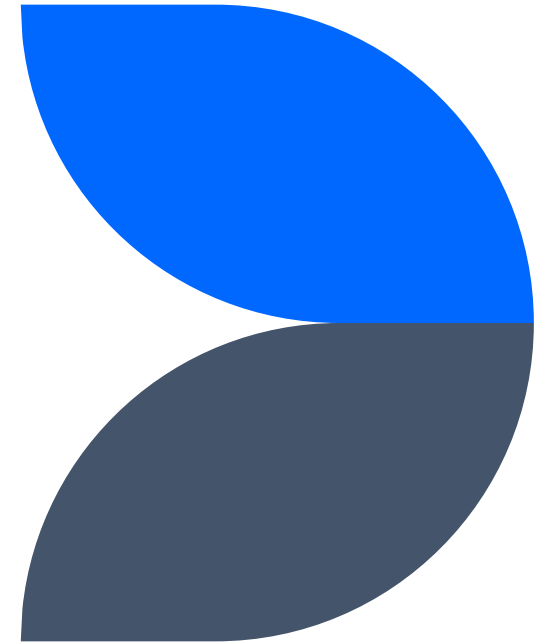
- ❑ Heavy-lifters are engaged—fully engaged—with the life and growth of the organization regardless of its stage. They readily apply their skills, talents and connections, and wealth to contribute to the nonprofit’s advancement. Ideally, a board of directors is thinking about what the nonprofit will look like and accomplish in five to ten years.
- ❑ A heavy-lifting board grapples with questions like, “How do we define success? What do we want to be remembered for? What will our work ultimately accomplish, how will we measure that impact, and how do we prepare for getting there?”
- ❑ The most compelling studies of board satisfaction show that the happiest trustees are engaged with planning for the nonprofit’s future growth and success. That’s what they truly want!

# Questions

- How can we tell who's indispensable in the moment? Isn't that an assessment made after the fact?
- What do we do about cleaning-out the light-lifters from our board?
- What role can an Honorary Council play in these transitions?
- What are you doing to support the heavy-lifters you already have?

# Primary Charism

What is Your Board's Primary Charism?  
Is Charism the same as Character?



# What is Your Board's Charism?

- ❑ When I look back at the boards I associated with, either as their fundraising counsel or executive director, boards that spurred the organization forward—there's one essential characteristic that defined those heavy-lifting board members. In different ways and for various reasons, they were each indispensable.
- ❑ Further, each of those boards had a singular charism. For example, Harlem United Community AIDS Center located in Upper Manhattan and the Bronx where I served as the CEO in the early to mid-1990s sought to define a new dimension on performance based on Peter Drucker's definition of innovation. And they in fact accomplished real innovation.

# Why It Matters

- ❑ Knowing the Board's charism allows you to mirror back to them their group/team strength
- ❑ Knowing their strength allows you to build on it
- ❑ They usually don't realize their strength, and instead are distracted by their weaknesses
- ❑ It aligns with your role as coach and mentor, instead of playing the subordinate

# It Also Matters Because...

The BoardSource report “*Leading with Intent: 2021 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices*,” a survey of board chairs and executives from 1,200+ nonprofits, showed that 78% of board members were white and 83% of nonprofit board chairs are white. While the data shows improvement in nonprofit board diversity, progress has been glaringly slow.

The latest report also shows ...

- ✓ 53% of board members are white
- ✓ 6% of board members are gay, lesbian, or bisexual
- ✓ 1% of board members are transgender
- ✓ 73% of board members are aged 35-64
- ✓ 5% of board members have disabilities



# It Also Matters Because...

Nearly half of board directors believe their boards don't have the right demographics to “establish trust with the communities they serve.”

The recent BoardSource study showed that 32% of boards felt their board members place a high priority on “knowledge of the community they serve,” and 28% of board members place a high priority on “membership within the community they serve.”

We can deduce from these statistics that board members need to be more connected to the people they serve.

# How to Determine Their Charism

Ideally you will want to use a person/consultant skilled in organizational development; but if you're DIY, ask what positive challenges and opportunities they faced and how did they move forward in addressing them. Ask, what specific skills, expertise, and perspectives they showed to address these challenges?

Consider drafting a board profile of your current board, and then a second profile of the board you're seeking. This is a Skills Gap Analysis whereby you compare your current board composition with the ideal board profile. Identify any gaps in skills, expertise, or diversity. This analysis will help you determine what specific qualities and characteristics you need to add to your board.

Consider sharing your perspectives and written assessments privately with another stakeholder.

*Please share in the chat what you think is your Board's Charism. Just one word or a short sentence please if possible.*

# Persuade a New Generation to Join Your Nonprofit's Board

Offer pleasurable aspects of being a board member, not meeting requirements. These five suggestions come from Matt Lynch, chair of the Board of the Todmorden Foundation in Delaware:

- They will become a subject matter expert
- Serving is learning
- A network is waiting to welcome you
- Join an exceptional club
- Scratch the altruistic itch

Source:

<https://blueavocado.org/board-of-directors/board-new-generation/>

# An Essential Tool

# The Consent Agenda

To allow more time for the Board to discuss crucial issues, I urge you to adopt the consent agenda style. *How many of you on today's webinar already use consent agendas?*

Consent board agenda meetings are a common practice among governing bodies. A consent agenda is used to streamline the decision-making process by grouping routine or non-controversial items together on an agenda. The purpose is to save time and resources by handling these items with a single vote, allowing the board to focus on more critical matters.

The agenda is distributed to board members well in advance of the meeting to allow them time to review the items.

During the meeting, the board members briefly review the consent agenda items. If any board member has questions or concerns about an item, they can request that it be moved to the regular discussion portion of the meeting.

See <https://boardsource.org/resources/consent-agendas/>

# What Happened to Steve?

Steve retired.

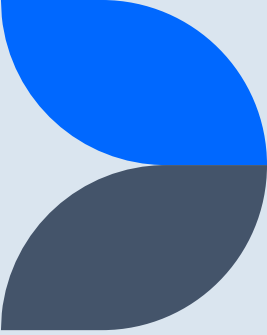
The organization folded.

Steve got the board he deserved.

What will you get?

Will you be a Swiftie too?

# Plan for the change you seek



“

*“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”*

”

Mahatma Gandhi

# Thank you

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