

Developing a Healthy Board of Directors

In order to develop a healthy board of directors, you need to know what that means. It begins with a group that knows the organisation and is committed to its mission and vision. Areas in which board expertise is valuable---such as finances, investments, legal, and education---should have representation to the degree possible. The president must build trust and strong working relationships with all board members. Board members should engage in social gatherings that contribute to bonding and strong working relationships. A regular flow of pertinent information keeps board members more highly informed and engaged. Identifying, cultivating, recruiting and training new board members requires discipline and a vigorous regimen but is necessary to maintain a healthy board.

Luder Whitlock is the Executive Director of the CNL Charitable Foundation, the Seneff Family Foundation and President of Excelsis. He was a former pastor and is President Emeritus of Reformed Theological Seminary, a position he held for 23 years. For many years Dr. Whitlock has served various organisations related to theological education, through participation on boards and advisory boards, including eight years as President/Chairman of the Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents. His years of ministry have been marked by an effort to bring mutual understanding and cooperation within the worldwide evangelical community. That led him to serve on several mission-minded boards, including the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. He also helped establish Lifework Leadership, a highly successful model for training emerging leaders in a city. For several years, in a successful turnaround effort, Dr. Whitlock served as Executive Director of The Trinity Forum, an organisation that provides learning resources and experiences for thousands of business and professional executives. Dr. Whitlock is a graduate of the University of Florida, Westminster Theological Seminary, and Vanderbilt University. He and his wife, Mary Lou, have 3 children and 11 grandchildren.

- I. A healthy board of directors understands the organisation and is unequivocally committed to the support of its mission and vision.**
 - A. There must be a plan for identifying, cultivating and recruiting new board members. The president should lead this effort.
 - B. Suggestions or nominations may come from any part of the constituency, but other board members may be the best source.
 1. Criteria for selection must begin with an understanding of and commitment to the mission and vision of the organisation.
 2. Competence or expertise in certain categories may be desired and needed such as finance, legal, investments and education.
 - C. An orientation for new board members is essential to providing them with that basic knowledge of the organisation. What should be included in the orientation? When should it occur? Who should participate?

1. Following up on initial board meetings and committee assignments.
2. Connecting new members to staff and other board members.

D. The importance of written policy manuals and regular board reports.

1. The board needs regular reports that are brief and that provide important, necessary information. Don't inundate them with irrelevant data. The reports need to be in a standard format.
2. A regular flow of information keeps the board engaged.
3. The reports must be reviewed by the CEO before distribution.

E. The board should be involved in the strategic planning process and in regular reviews of the plan.

F. The board should have opportunities for professional development as board members.

II. The president has a key role in developing and maintaining board health.

- A. He should develop close ties to all board members, spending time socially as well as time regarding the function of the board. If it is not possible to be supportive of a board member then that should be discussed with the chair, and if it cannot be resolved satisfactorily then the board member should resign or not be reelected.
- B. He should plan and organize social gatherings for the board and spouses that lead to strong social bonding.
- C. He must always immediately inform the chair of any negative development of any kind. There should be no surprises, if humanly possible.
- D. Good relationships, timely communications, and good performance will build trust---the bedrock of a healthy board.
- E. He should, with the chair, arrange for periodic board reviews of his performance as president.