5 BOARD TYPES:
AND WHAT EACH MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

Does your Executive Director/Board relationship feel confusing, clunky, or downright contentious? The issue might not be a personality conflict. In fact, many times, the problem is a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. This means with a little work the relationship can be rectified.

If you were to take a quick survey of non-profit boards, you'd find that there are five basic types. Each type spends the majority of its time focused on different functions. Below is a breakdown of the work by type. Notice how the board's work moves from doing to overseeing. (See the corresponding chart on page 3.)

#1 Board as Staff: This board type **DOES** the work of the organization. The type is most often seen during the start-up phase of an organization's lifecycle when the non-profit has either limited or no staff. The work for this board type is intense. Often the organization will stay small to preserve the sanity of the board or they will hire staff. Once staff are hired, the board usually moves to another type, as it should.

#2 Board as Managers: We see this type most often in small non-profits that have an Executive Director (that is not the founder) or other staff person who has been given limited responsibilities due to time or skill restraints. The board then **SUPERVISES** the operations while leaving the day-to-day tasks with the staff person.

#3 Board as Directors: With this type, the board **DIRECTS**. The staff has the skill base and numbers to manage operations and meet organizational goals set by the board. It is generally accepted in types 3-5 that the board "keeps its fingers" out of the day-to-day operations of the organization. However, the board continues to measure program and Executive Director success by setting goals that are <u>S</u>pecific, <u>M</u>easurable, <u>A</u>ttainable, <u>R</u>elevant, and <u>T</u>ime-Bound.

#4 Board as Governors: A board of directors **GOVERNS** the work of the organization. This most often looks like providing counsel to the Executive Director. The Executive Director takes on all long term goal setting, strategizing, and manages the day-to-day operations.

#5 Board as Advisors: These board members **AFFIRM** the work of the organization through endorsement. One could call it the "rubber stamp" board. **It is easy for an organization to fall into this unhealthy pattern when** the founder is the Executive Director or the organization is large, and established. Boards of this type typically lack the feedback and involvement that help keep the Executive Director accountable, causing the organization to be run as a "one-man show."**Another easy pattern to fall into is** for the Executive Director (or any paid staff person) to be a voting member of the board. If your organization is in either of these situations, we'd encourage your board to begin transitioning away from these practices.

What should you do with this information? Keep reading for tips.

Tip #1: IDENTIFY YOUR BOARD TYPE

Why is it important to identify your organization's board type? Clarity. An abundance of clarity is key to rectifying or maintaining the relationship between the CEO and the Board.

When there is a lack of clarity regarding board type, members of the team might be working under a different set of assumptions. For example: the Executive Director may assume the board has authority in long-term goal setting, and the board may likewise be waiting on the Director to establish these strategic goals. This leads to the "personality conflict" mentioned earlier.

Once you've identified your type, either live it out or question if it should be changed.

Tip #1.5: WHICH TYPE IS MOST EFFECTIVE?

That depends, in part, on the life-cycle and size of the organization. "Board as Staff" or "Board as Managers" are often the "go-to" types for a new organization. As the non-profit grows or if growth is planned, "Board as Directors" or "Board as Governors" are the best types for long-term organizational health.

Remember, we don't recommend an organization adopt a "Board as Advisors" structure.

Tip #2: DECIDE IF YOUR BOARD TYPE SHOULD BE CHANGED

"One does not simply walk into Mordor" or change the board type of an organization. This decision must be made as a board. Additionally, it is possible that the bylaws, board member job descriptions, Executive Director job description, and policies and procedures will need to be re-written and then board approved, if the type is changed.

Another consideration before changing the board type is the current skill set of the Executive Director and/or staff. As the board relinquishes responsibilities, the need for a strong Executive leader will increase and vice versa.

Tip #3: LIVE IT OUT

Living out a board type requires a continuous, never ending commitment to clarity. Make sure your board type is reflected in job descriptions and policies. Integrate questions into your board meeting: "Whose role is this?" and "Does everyone agree?" If you need more help living it out, check out these resources:

- [Three Hats](), article by John Pearson
- [Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards](), book by Richard Ingram

Board as Staff	Board as Managers	Board as Directors	Board as Governors	Board as Advisors
Legal responsibility resides with the board	Legal responsibility resides with the board	Legal responsibility resides with the board	Legal responsibility resides with the board	Legal responsibility resides with the board
Reasons for organization to exist are determined by the board	Reasons for organization to exist are determined by the board	Reasons for organization to exist are determined by the board	Reasons for organization to exist are determined by the board	Reasons for organization to exist are determined by the CEO
Organizational long-term goals are set by the board	Organizational long-term goals are set by the board	Organizational long-term goals are set by the board	Organizational long-term goals are set by the CEO	Organizational long-term goals are set by the CEO
Strategies to achieve organizational long-term goals are developed by the board	Strategies to achieve organizational long-term goals are developed by the board	Strategies to achieve organizational long-term goals are developed by the CEO	Strategies to achieve organizational long-term goals are developed by the CEO	Strategies to achieve organizational long-term goals are developed by the CEO
Day-to-day operational authority rests with the board	Day-to-day operational authority rests with the CEO/Staff	Day-to-day operational authority rests with the CEO	Day-to-day operational authority rests with the CEO	Day-to-day operational authority rests with the CEO
The board spends most of its time **DOING** the work of the organization	The board spends most of its time **SUPERVISING** the work of the organization	The board spends most of its time **DIRECTING** the work of the organization	The board spends most of its time **GOVERNING** the organization	The board spends most of its time **AFFIRMING** the work of the organization
Primary board output is **LABOR**	Primary board output is **COORDINATION**	Primary board output is **DIRECTION**	Primary board output is **COUNSEL**	Primary board output is **ENDORSEMENT**

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Most common in new nonprofits with no staff or limited staff with no CEO	Most common in small nonprofits with a CEO/Staff person that is not the founder and has limited responsibilities.	Most common across all boards no matter size or age		Most common in large, established nonprofits or nonprofits of any size where the founder holds a CEO role

Gray Squares = Board Roles by Type / Blue Squares = CEO Roles by Type